



UNIVERSIDADE  
CATÓLICA  
PORTUGUESA

DOES PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY  
INFLUENCE JOB ENGAGEMENT OF GEN Y?

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to  
obtain a Master's Degree Communication,  
Organisation & Leadership

By

Moritz Vetter

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

March 2023



# UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

DOES PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY  
INFLUENCE JOB ENGAGEMENT OF GEN Y?

DISSERTATION

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to  
obtain a Master's Degree in Communication,  
Organisation & Leadership

Moritz Vetter

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas  
Under the supervision of João Simão

March 2023

## **Abstract**

Sustainable development is one of the predominant issues of our time. Providing a liveable and prosperous environment for all generations is becoming one of the main concerns of humankind. Research findings point out that social sustainability, the social dimension of this objective, requires more attention and prioritisation.

To date, economic considerations appear to be the predominant driver for decision-making and percipience. Research reflects that the emphasis on ethical aspects is not effectual.

Existing studies indicate that social sustainability is a viable tool to improve job engagement of employees. Job engagement is a significant lever to improve business KPIs such as productivity, customer satisfaction, turnover, and financial success. Furthermore, data shows that employees in general and Generation Y in particular include social considerations into their career choices. Thus, corporate social sustainability can benefit companies on multiple levels.

This dissertation utilised a quantitative approach to examine if the level of perception of social sustainability influences job engagement of Generation Y. An online survey with 233 participants was conducted to investigate the impact of corporate social actions on the behaviour of employees on an individual level. Participants were Germans between 20 and 40 years. Internal communication was included in the questionnaire as well to identify its significance for perceived social sustainability and job engagement. To enrich the quantitative data and allow a real-life perspective, an exploratory interview with the CEO of a German company was held to gain practical insights of a socially committed company and its ethical efforts in a competitive market.

The collected data shows that there is a strong correlation between job engagement and perceived social sustainability. Data implies that if employees perceive ethical efforts of their company, they tend to be more engaged. Internal communication is also correlated positively. This means that social sustainability holds enormous potential for companies as it can enable a more engaged workforce and therefore a more profitable business. This dissertation holds evidence for the strategic advantages of investing in social sustainability to improve profitability and succeed in the emerging war for talent.

**Key words:** social sustainability, perceived social sustainability, job engagement, engagement, internal communication, employees.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>I. Literature review</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>1. Concepts of sustainability and keystones</b> .....	<b>15</b>
1.1 Classification of different approaches and characteristics.....	23
1.2 Perceived Social Sustainability .....	30
1.2.1 Individual Perspective.....	32
1.2.2 Internal Communication of Social Sustainability .....	32
<b>2. Concepts of Employee Commitment and Keystones</b> .....	<b>36</b>
2.1 Classification of different types and characteristics.....	36
2.2 Economic implication of job engagement.....	43
<b>3. Generation Y</b> .....	<b>47</b>
3.1 Classification and characteristics of Generation Y .....	47
3.2 Generation Y and social sustainability.....	48
3.3 Generation Y and job engagement.....	53
<b>4. Exploratory Interview</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>II. Methodology</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>5. Research Question</b> .....	<b>62</b>
5.1 Purpose and Relevance of the Research .....	64
5.2 Goals of the Thesis .....	65
<b>6. The Field of Research</b> .....	<b>67</b>
6.1 Gallup Institution and Engagement Framework .....	67
6.2 Perceived Social Sustainability Framework.....	71
6.3 Internal Communication Survey.....	75
<b>7. Explaining the Approach</b> .....	<b>81</b>
<b>8. Application and Execution</b> .....	<b>84</b>
8.1 Sample Description .....	84
<b>III. Results</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>9. Frameworks</b> .....	<b>89</b>
9.1 Gallup’s Q12 Engagement Framework.....	89
9.2 Perceived Social Sustainability Framework.....	91
9.3 Internal Communication Segment .....	95

<b>10. Correlation &amp; Hypotheses Testing</b> .....	<b>96</b>
10.1 Gallup’s Engagement Framework & Perceived Social Sustainability .....	96
10.2 Gallup’s Engagement Framework & Internal Communication .....	97
10.3 Perceived Social Sustainability Network & Internal Communication.....	98
<b><i>IV. Discussion</i></b> .....	<b>100</b>
<b>11. Analysing the Data</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>12. Evaluating the Initial Objectives</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b><i>V. Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>13. Recommended Course of Action</b> .....	<b>112</b>
<b>14. Limitation</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b> .....	<b>115</b>
<b><i>Appendix</i></b> .....	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix A: Exploratory Interview with Stefan Messerknecht, CEO of hmmh</b> .....	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix B: Informal Background Interview with Ebru-Genisel</b> .....	<b>201</b>
<b>Appendix C: Online Questionnaire</b> .....	<b>202</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Three pillars of sustainability .....	16
Figure 2: Three pillars of sustainability including concrete examples .....	16
Figure 3: Nested visualisation of sustainability including governance (Kocmanová & Dočekalová, 2012) .....	17
Figure 4: Categorisation of the 17 SDG goals (Kostoska & Kocarev, 2019).....	19
Figure 5: Social sustainability as the foundation of the other two dimensions (Boyer, 2016) .....	22
Figure 6: Global engagement based on Gallup (2021) .....	44
Figure 7: News coverage on climate change 2004 to 2020 ((MeCCO, 2020).....	50
Figure 8: Natural disasters worldwide over time (Buchholz, 2020).....	51
Figure 9: Conceptual map of the scientific question .....	63
Figure 10: Hierarchy of Gallup's Q12 (Gallup Inc., 2021).....	69
Figure 11: Comparison of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (left) and Gallup's Q12 hierarchy (right) .....	70

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the studied sample .....	85
Table 2: Characteristics of the working context of the studied sample .....	86
Table 3: Results of the segment based on Gallup’s Engagement Framework.....	90
Table 4: Results of the segment based on the Perceived Social Sustainability Framework	93
Table 5: Results of the segment on Internal Communication.....	95
Table 6: Correlations between Subscales from Gallup’s Engagement scale and subscales from Perceived Social Sustainability framework .....	96
Table 7: Correlations between subscales from Gallup’s Engagement framework and Internal Communications segment.....	97
Table 8: Correlations between subscales from Perceived Social Sustainability framework and Internal Communications segment.....	98

# Introduction

A potential correlation of perceived social sustainability and job engagement is the research focus of the survey in this dissertation. The survey addresses Generation Y to analyse their perception of social sustainability, job engagement, and the supporting role of internal communication. Social sustainability aims for the well-being of all individuals. Engagement is one of the most important factors in the business world and therefore highly relevant for economic, capitalistic success. The internal communication segment may highlight an additional aspect of an adapted recommended course of action. The exploratory interview of this study amplifies the research findings through practical insights of the business world.

To me personally, sustainability is a highly relevant and interesting topic as it firstly incorporates the well-being of humankind in connection with our nature and secondly it can potentially become a key differentiator for prosperity and cohabitation in our future economy as recent research indicates (D. D'Amato et al., 2019; Matthies et al., 2020; Sternfels et al., 2021).

It is my firm belief that humankind necessitates a new approach to a functioning economy that benefits all people. The current unbalanced equilibrium, a consequence of a business-driven world, has led to an insufficient allocation of resources (Johnston et al., 2021). However, I am also certain that our current capitalistic system is too stable, a disruptive solution of this global problem does not seem realistic (Hay, 2020; Russo, 2020). Therefore, I advocate for a structural change within the capitalist world. This dissertation attempts to contribute to a new perspective of social sustainability from a business point of view. The evolution of society has led to a more conscious and value-driven generation, Generation Y, which will take a crucial position in the economy in the next two decades (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019).

Disruptive events have carried weight: Multiple challenges such as globalisation, dissipation of resources, global hot spots and new emerging flow of refugees has led to a point where the simple mantra of quantitative economic growth is no longer a valid option; a revised approach to reach a more qualitative modus operandi of business is needed (Frech, 2022; Kruja, 2013). Therefore, sustainable development is one of the predominant topics of the

last decades and is perceived as a viable alternative to neoliberal economics (Lozano & Huisingh, 2011).

*Sustainable development* is defined as a way of operation that fulfils the needs of the present without sacrificing future generations (*Brundtland Commission Report*, 1987). The three dimensions of sustainability are economy, ecology, and society (further explanation below). It is widely acknowledged by politics, researchers, and the public that sustainability has not been achieved yet ("Paris Agreement," 2016).

The dimension of ecology has gained enormous awareness over the past decades – political parties have been founded, global and local conferences have been originated, and public awareness has been created. It is in the centre of attention of media and research coverage when talking about sustainability. Furthermore, economy already incorporates a predominant position as it depicts the persistence in our competitive capitalistic economy (McKenzie, 2004). If a company wants to survive, it must fulfil an economic necessity to be competitive on the market. Otherwise, it would not sustain in the long run (Porter, 1997).

Because nature does play an integral part as it is the foundation of our future on this planet, our doing and behaviour should implicate prosperity and advancement of this world. However, we also must be aware that the economic and ecological actions – the other two pillars – impact our society and cohabitation. This realisation has manifested over time in media coverage and research: Aguinis and Glavas (2012) discovered that 181 publications of Corporate Social Responsibility have appeared in prestigious management journals, with almost half of those appearing since 2005 (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

As research has proven, the third pillar of society is not reflected with the same relevance and focus in research and media to date. The dimension of society is rather treated as something with secondary importance compared to the other two (Dao et al., 2011, p. 63).

Corporate Social Sustainability (CSR) is often used as a supplementary term of corporate sustainability as in the above mentioned research of Arguinis and Glavas (2012). The yet missing clear and distinct delimitation manifests itself in the field of research (Idowu, 2015) and conceptualisation of key concepts and terms (Windsor, 2006). However, recent publications try to distinguish the different concepts in this area. Although this has not been

fully scientifically accepted and adopted, I will explore the differences at a later stage. Corporate Citizenship is another term that has often been used as a synonym for social sustainability or CSR in particular. It is defined as the corporate goal to present the company as a good citizen. Classical acts of Corporate Citizenship would be donations, sponsoring, pro-bono activities or corporate volunteering which describes the release of employees for charitable purposes (Schrader, 2022). Many authors connect these actions to the corporate objective to present a company or organisation more sustainable or social than it realistically is. This PR or marketing scheme is limited by the indented appearance, not the factual underlying beliefs. Thus, Greenwashing, which describes this phenomenon, is often linked to the concept of Corporate Citizenship (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

The exceptional increase of research and studies that shed light on the social pillar of sustainability in the last decades are a reflection of a growing social sustainability awareness in general and the need to further investigate its impact. However, many aspects are still uncovered and especially the implications of CSR, and hence social sustainability, on the personnel have not been investigated to an adequate extent (Ferreira & Real de Oliveira, 2014).

The lack of a socially and responsibly minded economy is apparent and contrastive to the idea to sustainable development: recent studies show that even though the world income has constantly increased over the past decades (2.53 billion 1950 to 7.43 billion in 2016, inflation respected) inequality has also augmented, meaning that fewer people benefit from the growing treasuries of our ecology and economy (Farhat, 2020; Roser, 2013). This is mainly considering economic factors like income or living standards while other relevant parameters have not been examined. Soft factors like ethical behaviour or psychological well-being are often overseen but play an important role for social sustainability (Schönborn et al., 2019). The disconnect simply shows the necessity to take an overarching look into the topic of social sustainability. This provides opportunities to gain insight for our society when it comes to social sustainability in a modern, sustainable world.

The goal of sustainability has been inaugurated by the United Nations, (UN General Assembly, 2012), scientific research has indicated the path and explained the implications and interconnections. Zeitgeist has emerged and has shown media, governments, and private companies that the upcoming generations do overly appraise an ethical economy and

emphasise the re-evaluation of modern business. Buzzwords like work-life-balance, flexible work models or self-actualisation are just an emblem of a changed perception of work and the new position of economy in our society (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). What does this mean? People's priorities have changed and have a direct impact on consumption, labour, and business. Especially if considering the emerging "war for talent" (meaning that companies do have to fight hard to acquire and retain highly educated and top-trained talent for their business while they can no longer rely on simple factors like reputation or salary) (Michaels et al., 2001). The Generation Y (Gen Y) currently represents the presence and future of employees: People between 20 to 40 years old will dominate the labour market making up 75% of all employees by 2025 (Waljee et al., 2020). Even though this exact percentage that has been widely spread by media might be wrong, it is safe to say that Gen Y will have substantial influence (Lettink, 2019). People from Gen Y have a different life and work ethic and have been exposed to educational, economic, social, and political contexts that are unique from previous generations such as Baby Boomers and Generation X (Gen X) (Thompson & Gregory, 2012; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).

Baby Boomers were heavily influenced by the optimism of their parents, instigated by the economic wonder, and the size of their generation, resulting in a rather competitive, patriotic social group ("cohort") (Leschinsky & Michael, 2004; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). The relative prosperity of Gen X resulted in a more materialistic generation with the financial power to invest in their leisure and possession (Gaidhani et al., 2019; Kupperschmidt, 1998). Gen Y seems to be more focused on their personal well-being and has high demands for their job such as high flexibility and an improved work-life balance (Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). This stresses the requirement for companies to adapt to changed circumstances and modern expectations of their workforce (Domsch & Ladwig, 2015). Gen Y habits and values will inevitably become the new norm soon (abovementioned 75% of workforce in 2025). Only if companies acknowledge the change and incorporate the social pillar into their business strategy and show their commitment through concrete actions, will they stay attractive and relevant to the active population of top talents of this generation.

Sustainable development has three dimensions – economy, ecology, and society – that need to interact to accomplish sustainability. The economic dimension is also substantial and in the focus of our capitalistic world. Thus, it is crucial to emphasise that social sustainability also has a capitalistic, economic facet. Studies show that employees that value their

employer, their work, and the conditions of it tend to be more productive, have less sick leave, and are more loyal to their company (Badura et al., 2022; Sajjad & Shahbaz, 2020). Research indicates that sustainable companies are more attractive to employees (App et al., 2012; Huffman & Klein, 2013). An IBM survey from 2021 states that nearly 50% of people are even willing to accept lower pay if working for a socially committed company (*IBM Study*, 2021). This underlines the tremendous influence and potential this topic holds for the economic success of a business next to the beneficial social aspects.

Therefore, this thesis aims to further investigate the impact the third sustainability pillar *Social* has on employees of Gen Y in the context of work. By taking the individual point of view, I aim to enhance existing research on perceived social sustainability for today's most relevant work population. This will bring valuable additions to the social sustainability research field and its potential impacts on employee engagement. Therefore, it can help to discover the economic potential of sustainability and unfold its social opportunities. The objective is to examine if the perceived social sustainability of Gen Y has a positive impact on their engagement at work.

This dissertation consists of six parts in total that are divided into 14 chapters. The first part, the literature review, will provide an overview of the topic and explain the underlying concepts and research. Here, this paper will present and define the relevant studies and theories, contextualise, and evaluate existing research, and lay the scientific groundwork for the scientific question of this paper.

The literature review comprises the three main keystones of this paper in terms of content: the concept of sustainability, the concept of engagement, and the phenomenon of Generation Y. Each of these segments will present different theories of each scientific field, then explain and characterise each one and then connect it to the other two adjoining fields of content of the scientific question (sustainability, engagement, and Generation Y). The goal of this part is to present the recent and most relevant research and link it to the field of research of the scientific question. The part will end with the summary of the exploratory interview that was held with Stefan Messerknecht, the CEO of the German company hmmm that went through

a transformational process towards a more socially sustainable company. This facilitates a more practical approach to the field of social sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

Part two will concentrate on the scientific question and the methodology. The scientific question will be stated, defined, and explained. Additionally, I will discuss the purpose of the research and its limitation within the scientific field. Goals of the dissertation will also be stated in this segment. Furthermore, it will integrate the scientific question and its underlying principles in the literature review of part one. Thus, I will explain the value that the dissertation adds to the scientific discourse. Moreover, I will introduce the two pre-established frameworks that are implemented in this research.

In the second segment of part two, chapter six, I will discuss the field of research of my dissertation. First, it will outline the scientific approach and then connect it to recent research with regards to the used frameworks. Additionally, the self-developed internal communication segment will be inaugurated and described. The two frameworks build the foundation of the methodology of this research. Finally, I will explain how the frameworks were used and compiled, how the quantitative approach of this dissertation was set up, and how the sourcing of data was generated. All of this will happen with a constant consideration of the gained insights from the exploratory interview with Mr. Messerknecht.

Part three will state the results of the survey that represents the quantitative approach of this dissertation. I will elaborate how the data was handled after the collection and will present the submissions of the participants. I will elaborate on the results of my research and the outcome of my survey in a detailed and profound manner.

In part four I will develop the discussion of the data. Thus, I will give statistical insights, interpret the results, and connect the findings with the presented literature and ideas. These findings will be aligned with the objectives of this research stated in part three.

The last part, part five, will be the conclusion of this dissertation. I will discuss the most important insights that were gained through my research. Furthermore, I will connect it to

---

<sup>1</sup> The exploratory interview will also be referenced throughout the literature review. Whenever the insights and statements of Mr. Messerknecht were assumed to be beneficial for a practical perspective this dissertation presents a summary of the interview regarding the specific subsegment.

the existing research and evaluate accordingly. Based on this consideration I will argue about the recommended course of action for my field of research. The appendix with further information, the bibliography, and the transcription of the exploratory interview will complete this dissertation.

# I. Literature review

In the following chapters I will introduce and present the most relevant and established concepts and research. Thereby, I will cover each dimension that is significant for the field of research and in particular for the scientific question of this dissertation. A connection with the exploratory interview of this dissertation will be carried out whenever it facilitates a practical and meaningful reference to the business world.

## 1. Concepts of sustainability and keystones

The field of sustainability has been established and explored since the 1980s with growing depth and intensity (*Brundtland Commission Report*, 1987). The general concept has been set up, through time and a changing society more aspects have been named and defined. In 2012, the United Nations transformed the various approaches into 17 main sustainable development goals, incorporating the three main pillars of sustainability. These 17 objectives have been set up to communicate clear and distinct goals and depict the maxim of sustainability in the most holistic way possible (UN General Assembly, 2012). This groundwork is still used as a base to explain, encompass, and assess this sphere.

Even though several concepts of sustainability with different definitions have emerged from this groundwork, most of them are unified by a substantial congruence and are mostly based on the foundation of the UN General Assembly (Hansmann et al., 2012; Juma, 2002; Leal Filho et al., 2019; Magis & Shinn, 2008; Purvis et al., 2019). Sustainability or corporate sustainability encompasses three main pillars: ecology, economy, and society (Basiago, 1998). The three pillar model of sustainable development is based on the idea that sustainability can only be achieved through the simultaneous and equal implementation of environmental, economic, and social goals. Only in this way the performance in all three dimensions of our world can be ensured and improved. This triangular description is often presented in the form of three intersecting circles with sustainability being placed at the intersection, as shown in Fig. 1. The visualisation is found in different forms as a descriptor of 'sustainability' within scientific literature, policy documentation, business readings, and online. The three aspects are interdependent (Bartol & Herkommer, 2004). This three pillar model (also called "Venn diagram") has been widely used and accepted as a viable tool to depict the different elements of sustainability.

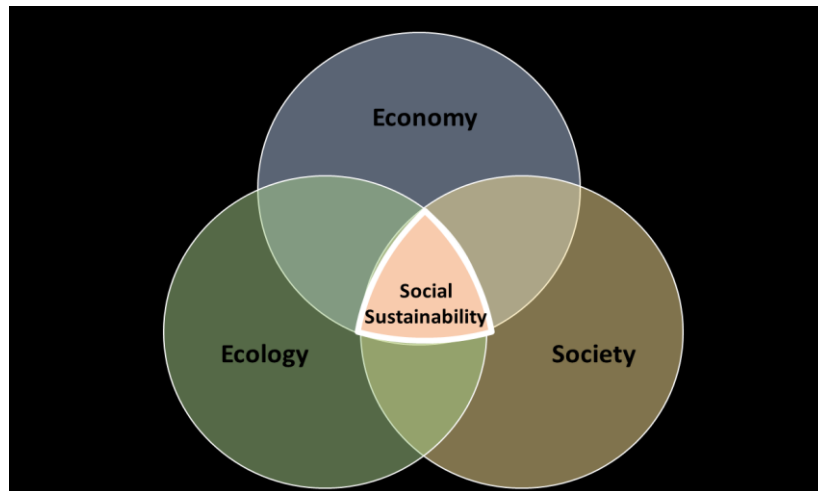


Figure 1: Three pillars of sustainability

The Venn diagram (figure 1) shows the general interconnection and interaction of the pillars. Even though sustainable development is a hot topic that receives growing awareness and publicity often there is missing understanding of what the pillars precisely mean and stand for (Murphy, 2012). One reason for this is the ambiguous delimitation towards other concepts, which will be further explained at a later stage ([1.a.i](#)). Figure 2 shows the same visualisation of the Venn diagram with supplementary examples for all three pillars. This is just a fraction of scope that each of the pillars embraces for a more tangible comprehension of the topic.

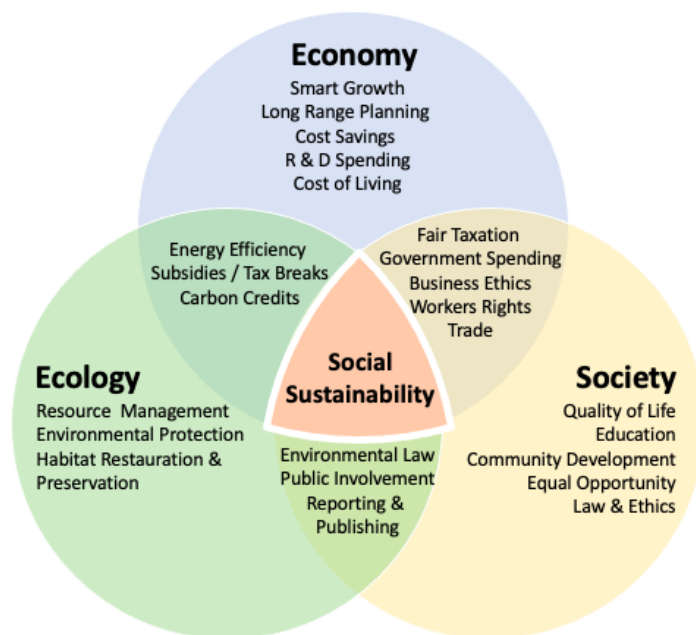


Figure 2: Three pillars of sustainability including concrete examples

Furthermore, this equal ranking and evaluation of the three pillars as shown in the visualisations above depict one of the main goals of sustainability: achieving a balance and functioning cooperation of the three dimensions (McAteer, 2020)

However, in the meantime other concepts were introduced that use four aspects to describe sustainability. Robert Goodland's framework introduces four dimensions: human, social, economic, and environmental. This understanding sheds light on a more distinct differentiation of the society pillar. However, he admits "some overlap to a certain extent" (Goodland & Bank, 2002). Simplified speaking, in his concept the social pillar is split into two: *human sustainability* aims to sustain human capital (on an individual level) and *social sustainability* protects social capital (on a societal level).

Other models include another fourth, altered dimension: governance. This element is not equally ranking with the others but rather understood as a basis for all three or a necessary guidance and support mechanism (J. Gupta, 2002). Governance embraces elements such as government, associations, organisations, corporations, and corporal structures. It can be described as the groundwork for the aspirational targets of the three sustainability pillars (Hawkins & Wang, 2012). Fig. 3 illustrates this interlink of the *governance* dimension (Kocmanová & Dočekalová, 2012).

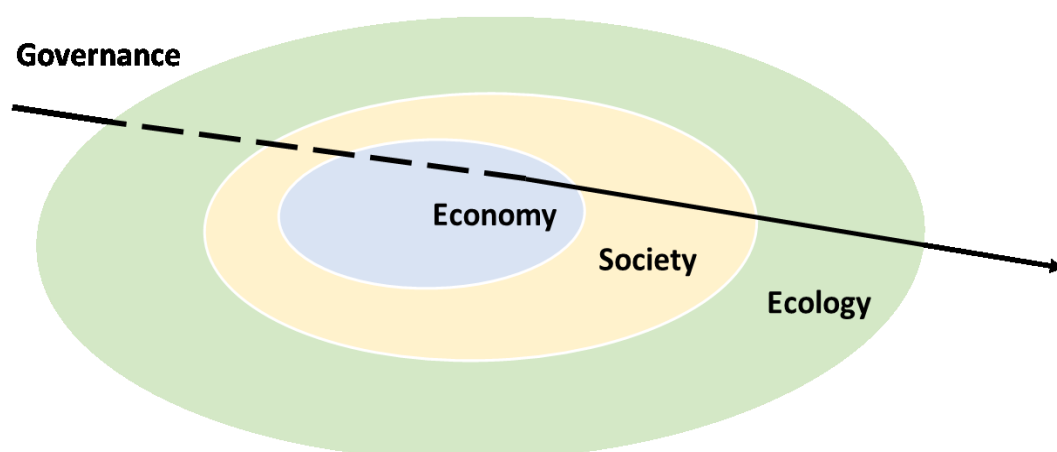


Figure 3: Nested visualisation of sustainability including governance (Kocmanová & Dočekalová, 2012)

However, this illustration depicts another facet of this sustainability representation. The three pillars are represented as spheres with different scopes and volume, showing a vertical

hierarchy: economy is limited by society, society is limited by environment (Dragicevic, 2018). Governance as defined in this approach can partially regulate and influence the others (Todorov & Marinova, 2009). This visualisation of the three spheres is also often used without the 4<sup>th</sup> element governance, using the same mechanism of hierarchy (Giddings et al., 2002). The hierarchical model is an obvious but striking difference compared to the Venn diagram with the three equated pillars as shown above (please compare figure 1 & 2).

The hierarchy illustrated in this chart is commonly used in scientific research which is particularly remarkable if we consider the historical background of sustainability: the construct of social sustainability has its roots in the climate and environmental movement. It is a direct descendant and initially subordinate to the ecological dimension (Landorf, 2011). Additionally, the hierarchy this model implies seems to be more accurate: an economy is always a product that society produced. It can be interpreted as a subsidiary outcome. Thus, a society cannot exist without being directly dependent of the circumstances and conditions of the environment. This ranking or order of precedence implies a distinct system of dependence (Moir & Carter, 2012). Modern researchers emphasise this line of thinking as they derive a needed prioritisation of the ecological dimension as it represents the limits and conditions for the subordinated dimensions in this line of thinking.<sup>2</sup> Kotzé et al. criticises the abovementioned 17 sustainable development goals (SDG), which also comprise coequal goals out of the three dimensions and remarks that "sustainability on a planetary scale is only achievable under an overarching Planetary Integrity Goal that recognises the biophysical limits of the planet" (Kotzé et al., 2022, p. 161). While the UN did not prioritise or classify the 17 goals into the three dimension, other researchers carried out the allocation to facilitate a better understanding of the interconnections and possible dependencies. Figure 4 categorises the 17 goals into the three dimensions (Kostoska & Kocarev, 2019). This classification augments the unranked list of the UN in terms of the alignment.

---

<sup>2</sup> Further hierarchy models will be introduced later in this chapter.



Figure 4: Categorisation of the 17 SDG goals (Kostoska & Kocarev, 2019)

Taking into consideration that the ecology of our world is already in a bad state (Carlin, 2022), Hickel (2019) calls out the contradiction within the SDGs. He remarks that there are several goals specified that call for immediate actions (such as goals 6, 12, 12, 14, and 15) while the continued economic growth is also mentioned as an equated subjective (goal 8) (Hickel, 2019). Other authors even claim "trade-offs in favour of economic growth over social well-being and ecological viability" (J. Gupta & Vegelin, 2016, p. 433). Interestingly enough, in their research Gupta & Vegelin also conclude that the social sphere has a prioritised standing in the SDG's compared to the ecological goals which results in a ranking with the economic above the social above the ecological pillar (J. Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Thus, this interpretation is not exceptional.

Another research analysed the indicator framework that the UN published in accordance with the 17 SDGs. The framework conveyed the 17 superordinate goals into 169 more tangible targets (such as "by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day" or "by 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status" (*THE 17 GOALS – Sustainable Development*, 2022)). The 169 targets are connected and qualified by 231 unique indicators that are set up by the UN to enable a transparent and feasible assessment of the 169 targets and respective the 17 goals (Our World in Data, 2018; United Nations, 2022).

The researchers state that "based on an analysis of targets and indicators, we identify a prioritisation of economic growth over ecological integrity" and "ascertain that a focus on resource efficiency alone will not be enough for bringing resource use down to sustainable levels in industrialised countries" (Eisenmenger et al., 2020, p. 1108). This depicts another problem of the SDGs. The UN intended their approach as a comprehensive, holistic, and global effort. This expansive and inclusive concept aims to unite every country of the world under one diagrammatic action plan. However, the diverse circumstances and state of development of the individual countries may impede the universal approach of the UN (Salvia et al., 2019; Tseklevs et al., 2021).

Bali Swain and Yang-Wallentin use this differentiation for a recommended course of actions and argue "that the developed countries benefit most by focusing on social and environmental factors, whereas the developing countries benefit most by retaining their focus on the economic and the social factors" in order to be most effective in achieving sustainable development (Bali Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020, p. 96). Considering the overall criticism and discourse regarding the 17 SDGs it can be concluded that the three dimensions of sustainability might not only be interdependent, but also hierarchical to some extent (Akbulut et al., 2019; Bartol & Herkommer, 2004)

If we take a closer look at the specific interdependence of social sustainability and economy, this area of conflict has been further developed since the 1980s. Therefore, it is interesting to consider the contemporary changes that the field has gone through. Multiple factors have led to a growing awareness and emerging subtopics. One example is the recent boost of the Big Five tech companies: Microsoft, Alphabet, Meta, Apple and Amazon (Johnson, 2020). Their special way of doing business and the volatility of financial flows has been used by the companies for tax evasion and forcing political power to increase their political influence and competence. While the resources and condition of countries had facilitated the economic uprise of the business, profits and payable taxes had been redirected to third party countries with more opportune fiscal law. Therefore, a public discourse has arisen regarding aspects like entrepreneur pledge and ethical economy. Companies are interpreted as a substantial element of society accompanying the associated duties and responsibilities (Alcantara, 2021). The constituted claim on businesses and their adapted role in society highlights that contemporary events and public opinion have direct impacts on the prioritisation and perception of social sustainability.

One recent example of a new acknowledgement of corporate accountability is the discourse on an excess profits tax: The Russian aggression and the ongoing war in the Ukraine has led to a worldwide energy crisis. Russia was one of the most important energy suppliers to the European Union and other countries worldwide. Many nations, including the EU, responded by imposing numerous economic sanctions, including a significant reduction in the amount of Russian gas and oil purchased. This resulted in fewer energy supply options and turbulences on the energy markets, causing widespread concern about the impact on consumers and businesses (Heim, 2022; Hosp, 2022; Stratmann, 2023; Tagesschau.de, 2022b).

As a result, European people and most of the economy had to manage with skyrocketing energy prices (increase of up to 318%) and an emerging inflation (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und, 2022; Stratmann, 2023; Tagesschau.de, 2022a). European people had and still have to manage depreciation and the effective loss of wealth. However, the escalating prices on the energy market and peculiarities of the energy markets ultimately did not represent the energy productivity that maintained relatively stable. This disequilibrium of high prices for consumer and relatively constant costs for suppliers led to the realisations of billions in profit for the big energy companies in Europe, especially for the ones that do business in the sector of renewable and nuclear energy. Temporarily, company profits have been five times higher as before the energy crisis. The stress relationship between financially suffering citizens (and companies) on the one hand and the profit maximising energy companies on the other hand substantiated in arising debate on the implementation of an excess profit tax. The idea is to utilise the tax to skim a certain percentage of company profit and directly invest it in financial relief for the energy-intensive manufacturing industry and people (Abnett & Käckenhoff, 2022; Ainger, 2022; Cooban, 2022).

In the context of the energy supply crisis, the discourse on excess profit tax highlights the need for companies (in the energy sector) to be accountable for the social impacts of their operations. Companies that are directly profiting from the crisis may be seen as neglecting their responsibility to act in a socially sustainable manner. The imposition of an excess profit tax can be seen as a way to hold these companies accountable and ensure that they contribute to the societal well-being. The extensive coverage in media and the fierce tonality depicts the widespread belief of corporate accountability and the requirement of ethical and social behaviour of companies (European Environment Agency, 2023; Meynen, 2022)

This emerging prioritisation of the social aspect of sustainability has led to a growing media coverage but also a new understanding of the sustainability concept. As shown before, sustainability can be understood as coexistent and interdependent. Other authors suppose a hierarchical order with the ecological dimension as the regulatory aspect. However, other authors suggest that social sustainability acts as requirement or enabling factor that facilitates the consideration of ecological and economic sustainability (Boyer et al., 2016) as shown in figure 5 below. This concept interprets the social dimension as enabling and required foundation of the economic and environmental dimension.



Figure 5: Social sustainability as the foundation of the other two dimensions (Boyer, 2016)

It is important to mention that this more uncommon theory of sustainability also includes the idea of dependable dimensions as it claims that the underlying social power is able to mitigate and compensate shortcomings in the other two sectors (Vallance et al., 2011). Nonetheless, I value this visualisation of sustainability and the dependencies. In my opinion, it sheds light on the fact that we as humans are responsible for reaching sustainability goals. Even if we are limited by nature as well. To a certain extent, we have tremendous influence on our circumstances and the general well-being. Thus, I think it is important to acknowledge and accept the human responsibility for the other dimensions. This cognition also builds the foundation for the research question of this thesis. By accepting the human role as the driver in the world, it empowers us to take decisions actively, lets us apprehend that we are able to change things for the better, and be responsible for our actions and its implications. This

may apply for global, political decision-making but also on an everyday life setting (Schneider & Clauß, 2020). This scientific question engages on that and tries to unfold the potential of change and transformation in little, in a conventional business setting. The human being can be influenced by small actions and may adapt its behaviour and attitude accordingly (Fogg, 2019).

This interdependency is the essence of this research.

The underlying principle of this pyramid approach to sustainability is that all actions considering sustainability, ecological and economic, are based on the human social relationship towards these two. This means that every act is considered to be a human act based on the social attitude towards the other dimensions. It puts the human in the centre of the interplay (James, 2014). Even though this concept of sustainability does not have the same scientific acknowledgement as the other two (three pillar model and Venn diagram), I think this adapted understanding of obedience and especially responsibility can provide additional value when considering the human role and accountability. Nevertheless, there are also authors who argue that social sustainability is only the vehicle to reach the superordinate goal of ecological sustainability, tending towards the interpretation of a hierarchical order (Assefa & Frostell, 2007; Colantonio, 2009).

### **1.1 Classification of different approaches and characteristics**

Like sustainability, the sub-dimension social sustainability and its delimitation has undergone a fluctuating definition. The term social sustainability is often used as a synonym or a segment of CSR. However, CSR has gained substantial awareness on an international stage. Bevan et al even call it a "managerial buzzword" meaning that the term has been overused as a marketing and communication tool without proper realisation (Bevan et al., 2011). Historically speaking, CSR was initially seen as a subordinate factor of business which could be used to advertise and influence the public discourse, or to appease governance (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016).

Corporate Citizenship (CC) is another term that had gained awareness in the past two decades (Beschoner, 2005). However, it is heavily underrepresented in comparison to CSR. In April 2020, over 5.500 publications regarding CSR were available whereas only 144 on corporate citizenship had been published (Kruggel et al., 2020). The term that has its origin

in the civic tradition of liberal civic duties and republican civil rights (Matten & Crane, 2005). Simplified speaking, corporate citizenship describes societal efforts of company to present themselves as good citizens (Suchanek, 2021). Interestingly, corporate citizenship lacks a globally accepted definition which reflect the ambiguity of the entire field of sustainability once again. In Germany, corporate citizenship is understood just as a part of corporate responsibility. Only activities that go beyond the conventional area of activity of a company are considered to be corporate citizenship. This encompasses activities such as sponsoring, donations, and foundations and it is the reason why the term is often directly linked to greenwashing (Loew et al., 2004; Suchanek, 2021).

However, in Anglo-America CC and CSR are often used as synonyms in the business world and seem to have only a few distinctions in literature (Kruggel et al., 2020; Valor, 2005). This overlapping is clear when examining Ashrafi et al. definition of CC. They describe it as "managing and meeting the needs of current and future generations through improving the quality of the environment and society's life" (Ashrafi et al., 2019, p. 394). The parallel to the Brundtland's definition of sustainable development is apparent (*Brundtland Commission Report*, 1987)<sup>3</sup>. However, Kruggel et al. state that the research on CC has stagnated after an increase in the beginning of the century. CSR seems to be the predominant term (Kruggel et al., 2020). Additionally, many authors connect CSR and CC mostly to economic purposes of companies for marketing, PR, acknowledgement, and potential business advantages (Ferrarini, 2021; Sachs et al., 2022; Sheehy, 2015; Valor, 2005).

Historically speaking, CSR was initially seen as a subordinate factor of business which could be used to advertise and influence the public discourse, or to appease governance (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016). Some researchers stress the argument that CSR concerns all elements that are directly connected to the business while social sustainability encompasses a more holistic approach, also covering segments that are only implicitly linked to a company (Rupp et al., 2006). In some literature the social dimension of CSR is not included at all (Waddock, 2004) and others state that CSR is the practical tool that is being used to apply values and ethics. Social sustainability however is also considered as the underlying principle and greater idea of sustainable development (Pohl, 2012) and therefore the more fitting term for my thesis.

---

<sup>3</sup> Compare subchapter "1.1 Classification of different approaches and characteristics"

There is more reasoning to why social sustainability is the chosen concept for my work. Social sustainability and CSR are both topics that are commonly known in our present time. However, due to different approaches, definitions, and knowledge, people often do not have a concurring understanding of what the concept actually means and which elements are embraced by these umbrella terms (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Especially in recent years more profound research has led to the belief that social sustainability is a bigger area that influences more aspects of business as usually expected; it covers more than the explicit actions of a company (Ghahramanpouri et al., 2013). Using this holistic theory of social sustainability enables me to adapt my research to the individual perspective of employees. Their personal understanding of social sustainability can appear in diverse shades. The all-embracing theory of social sustainability facilitates the individual perspective of employees that this study utilises.

Social sustainability is a holistic, but theoretical concept (Laszlo et al., 2009). Thus, it is important to grasp the entire scope and influential position. The stakeholder theory is one effective way to contemplate the social dimension of sustainability (Hörisch et al., 2014). The theory by Freeman defines stakeholder, which can be separated into internal and external, as "those groups and individuals who can affect or be affected" by the actions of a business (Parmar et al., 2010, p. 2). Therefore, it encompasses employees, management, local communities, society, customers, government, and many more. The idea is to apprehend every affected constituency, directly or indirectly, in order to integrate it in the decision-making of a company and its management, explicitly to grasp the ethical and moral aspects of an action (Lin, 2018). Therefore, the stakeholder theory is the counterpart to the shareholder theory, which argues that the main and predominant purpose of a company is to gain value for its owners, the shareholders (Blyth et al., 1986).

The stakeholder approach and social sustainability are sometimes understood as competing ideas (Schwartz & Carroll, 2008), some argue they are complementary fields (Jamali, 2008), or one a segment of the other (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Nonetheless, the combination of both seems to offer a profound perspective. The stakeholder approach incorporates every affected fragment to reach a decision that does not only value economically relevant determining factors, such as consumers and employees, but also the well-being of social groups, the environment, and the supply chain (Glavas & Kelley, 2014). Dyllick and Hockerts connect

the shareholder approach with the original definition of sustainability (*Brundtland Commission Report*, 1987) and defines social sustainability "as meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities etc), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well" (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002, p. 131). Therefore, I would consider them as supporting theories with substantial overlapping.

Some definitions of social sustainability tried to encompass the topic on a concrete, practical basis. The Agenda 21 is a United Nations treaty signed by 170 states and interprets social sustainability through four main strategies: *intergenerational equity*, *quality of life*, *social cohesion* and *international responsibility*. Examples are active participation in social groups, security of land, and small business development (Freestone, 1994; Selman & Parker, 1997). Others discern social sustainability as a social community with their needs of working and living, naming infrastructure, social amenities, cultural life, and space for people (Woodcraft et al., 2012). Additionally, it is important to mention the UN's 17 sustainable development goals another time which dedicated 99 measurable and feasible targets to the social dimension of sustainability (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2016). The UN specified these targets for two reasons: firstly, they wanted to facilitate a better understanding of each goal by providing a practical target (and therefore a better understanding of the social sphere). Secondly, it set the benchmark for the 193 countries that accepted the agreement (Sachs et al., 2022).

De Fine Licht and Folland (2019) encounter this in a constructive manner. They accept the scientific reality that there is no "blueprint definition of social sustainability" (Weingaertner & Moberg, 2014, p. 122) and convey that there cannot be a single definition of the concept that would cover all aspects and future developments. Therefore, they adopt social sustainability as something that "must be relative to the purposes we have for it" (Licht & Folland, 2019, p. 23), meaning that the concept always need to be contextualised and applied in regards to the specific circumstances and purpose. This approach succumbs their broad and extended definition with the superordinate goal "to produce good and fair results through good and fair processes" (Licht & Folland, 2019, p. 23).

Vallance et al. comment on social sustainability: "it is a concept in chaos, and we argue that this severely compromises its importance and utility" (Vallance et al., 2011, p. 342). This

depicts the complexity of social sustainability in an accurate manner. The unclear definition and missing delimitation do not only make it difficult to fully grasp the issue but also hinder its perception and relevance.

Summing up the various approaches, both theoretical and practical, I would define social sustainability as an aspirational, holistic target that incorporates every fragment of development and potential affected elements. It is the goal to provide the best possible life for every human, minority, and future generation. The concept needs to be understood as an integral part of the three pillar model with co-dependency among each other (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Naming practical, concrete examples of social sustainability helps to gain perspective and understand interdependencies (see figure 2).

However, it is crucial to realise that social sustainability is an agile theory and concept that transforms, adapts over time, especially considering that the field of research is rather recent (Galuppo et al., 2014; Rasouli & Kumarasuriyar, 2016). Only then we are able to apply social sustainability to future topics such as automation and Artificial Intelligence which hold enormous social challenges for our future (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020; Kent & Kopacek, 2021). Dempsey et al. incorporate evolving societies and conditions leading to changing necessities in their thinking and state "like the concept of sustainability, social sustainability is neither an absolute nor a constant. Social sustainability has to be considered as a dynamic concept, which will change over time" (Dempsey et al., 2011, p. 292). This is in alignment with the abovementioned concept from Licht and Folland and their purpose-orientated understanding. As there are new emerging fields of social sustainability and additionally our comprehension of it evolves, there is the need to apply it flexible and purposeful (Licht & Folland, 2019).

These definitions try to describe social sustainability on a theoretical and abstract level. The exploratory interview with hmmh CEO Stefan Messerknecht facilitated the opportunity to grasp a more practical and factual understanding of the term.<sup>4</sup> As further elaborated in the respective segment the company hmmh and its CEO have an inner and seemingly altruistic

---

<sup>4</sup> The exploratory interview facilitated a practical perspective on these theoretical concepts. Therefore, the theoretical part of this dissertation will be linked to the interview whenever it seems beneficial for a better understanding or opening up a business perspective.

approach to business.<sup>5</sup> The connection to hmmh has been initiated by a personal point of contact. However, neither did I know the company in beforehand nor did I know any of the personnel nor Mr. Messerknecht. Initially, I merely did some internet research through publicly accessible sources and information. However, through my personal connection I was aware that hmmh does try to implement a more philanthropical approach to business than usual. This first indication was affirmed by several news articles that covered hmmh efforts and activities (Connected City, 2018; LinkedIn, 2023; PR Report, 2013; Softgarden, 2016; Wegweiser, 2022).

In the interview Mr. Messerknecht has elaborated on his personal life story as well. As the son of an entrepreneur with a family business he was confronted with company related issues and decisions on a daily basis. He claims that one of his life lessons is that entrepreneurs need to treat all assets of a company with highest carefulness and appraisal. Due to the unbalanced economy, he was forced to put his family business out for bidding. As Mr. Messerknecht stressed, this has led to an increased awareness of not only tangible but also intangible goods such as reliance, valuation, gratitude, ownership, and courageousness. According to Mr. Messerknecht, he does not limit this mindset on the business related actions of his CEO position but rather determines it as a general attitude towards life. Even though this specific and rather individual representative depicts this highly personal entrepreneurial family background, it does deliver a potentially more adaptable understanding of social sustainability. Mr. Messerknecht claims that social sustainability or CSR is not something he newly adapted as the CEO of a company but that it is a set of values and principles that he developed throughout his lifetime. Without being aware about the terminology, some of the actions he implemented as the CEO of hmmh could be described as socially sustainable. In the interview he described the respectful form of use within the company, the appreciation of participation and beliefs, and the significance of his so called colleagues. From my personal point of view and considering the little time I was able to be present at the hmmh office in Bremen, I can assert that there was a discernible positive atmosphere in the office. Small interactions, such as in the elevator or at the water cooler, seemed to be conducted with mutual respect and an uplifting prevailing mood. However, this personal impression was limited to the four hours I spent in the office and the minor encounters with the employees. Nevertheless, in the interview Mr. Messerknecht elaborated

---

<sup>5</sup> Compare chapter “4. Exploratory Interview” in this dissertation.

on specific actions that would firstly fall under the concept of social sustainability, and secondly substantiate his statement regarding his modus operandi as the CEO. Many of these actions encompass the internal aspects of the company. A few examples would be the payment of fair wages, the inflation compensation paid in 2022, the creation of interest groups that implement operational actions such as gender equality or employment protection, paid professional development, paid voluntary work, internal loans for employees, hiring of apprentices, absorption of mobility costs, improved work equipment, or diligent significance of mental health to name a few of the things mentioned in the interview.

Additionally, hmmh does several things that impact the external stakeholder dimension of social sustainability. According to Mr. Messerknecht hmmh does several fundraisings every year, fosters the youth and knowledge transfer through their apprentice program with the local chamber of commerce, realises several pro-bono cases every year, advocates for a more responsible and sustainable leadership through his various associations (Rotary, Young Presidents' Organization, Industrie- und Handelskammer etc.), and a fair and transparent application process.

From my perspective, this list (and my personal impression) underlines the general aspiration of hmmh and Stefan Messerknecht that they want to pursue a different style of leadership. He does not specifically claim that they do follow the principle of corporate citizenship or a socially sustainable company. In fact, through the CEO Stefan Messerknecht, hmmh tries to implement a responsible and sustainable conduct towards their staff, their community, their network, and their society based on an altruistic mindset. Therefore, I would consider this behaviour as socially sustainable or at least I would assess it as indented social sustainability. Hmmh simply adapts the general concept, or in this case the mindset, based on their specific situation, business, and condition. Thus, I think this would qualify for the abovementioned agile and hands-on interpretation of the portfolio of hmmh (to my knowledge) such as childcare or a sustainable supply chain management, but they apply the general way of thinking and circumstances. Hence, I would consider their modus operandi as an agile and adaptive modification of social sustainability and an amplifying, practical example of use.

Hmmh's remarkable attitude seems to have perceivable implications. Kununu is a social online platform that mainly offers employees the opportunity to exchange information regarding past, current, and potentially future employers. Employees can share their opinion on a company and rate it based on different indicators such as wages, company culture, working conditions, and diversity. Hmmh holds the current rating of 4.5 (out of 5) with a referral rate of 94% (retrieved in January 2023) (*Kununu – hmmh*, 2023). This outstanding evaluation led to several awards for being one of Germany's best employers (*Das sind die familienfreundlichsten Arbeitgeber 2022 | freundin.de*, 2022; Strömsdörfer, 2022).

Kununu is mainly known in the German-speaking area and is the equivalent of the international company Glassdoor which has a similar concept (Cloos, 2021). Studies show that many employees use the platform for informing themselves about companies and even base their actions, and possible applications on rankings and evaluation that they read on kununu.de. Firstly, it seems to be a relevant tool for employer branding (employer branding is the goal of a company to be perceived as an attractive employer by using tools and mechanisms of marketing and branding (App et al., 2012; Schuhmacher & Geschwill, 2009)) and secondly, a realistic indicator for the assessment of employers (Popescu, 2020; Schiffbauer & Engelen, 2021). This means that these platforms are able to provide a certain level of insight of the company culture and the predominant attitude towards employees.

## **1.2 Perceived Social Sustainability**

As outlined above, social sustainability itself is not completely selective and has many interconnections and effects. However, nearly all the individual elements like fair wages (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2010), gender equality (Grosser, 2009), welfare economics (Gowdy, 2005), or the impact and relevance of education (Foster, 2001) have been well examined and researched. There are numerous studies that investigate a specific aspect of social sustainability, explain the principle, and work with this component applied to focus groups, social entities, or distinct conjunctions within a system.

The majority of measures of social sustainability have been conducted by individuals and organisations external to the companies. This leads to belief that ratings are heavily influenced by symbolic CSR that is seen externally (similar to the abovementioned criticism by Bevan et al.) rather than substantive activities that are connected to the mission of the organisation and implemented internally throughout the organisation (Glavas & Kelley,

2014). This addresses a top-down approach which examines indications from an outside or managerial perspective. The micro and individual level has been overlooked or less examined to date. The employee perspective is yet to be studied more in depth. Examining the employees and their perception facilitates an internal and locked point of view that enables comprehension of individual engagement and motivation. Therefore, this thesis addresses specifically the matter of "perceived social sustainability" in order to capture the employee perspective of social sustainability.

"Sustainability" remains an open concept with myriad interpretations and context-specific understanding. Research to date is lacking a theoretically rigorous description of the three pillars. One potential explanation for this is the historical discourse on social sustainability arising from broadly different schools of thought. Partially, this is believed to be a result of the historic debate on sustainability over time and the wide-ranging schools of thought. Within my study the "three pillar" conception of sustainability will serve as a foundation for my theoretical placement as it is a dominant interpretation within the literature (Purvis et al., 2019). It will allow a proper operationalisation of 'perceived social sustainability' as part of my research and study.

Measures at the individual level can more accurately capture the degree to which CSR is embedded and communicated, hence perceived by the individual employee. The employees' perspective on sustainability is compiled in a framework using six dimensions: employee participation, employee cooperation, equal opportunities, employee development, health and safety, and external partnership. These terms are used in a survey where employees indicate their perception of the social sustainability efforts of their company (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). This depicts the approach to gain an individual perspective of the employees and not the institutional top-down evaluation that is driven externally or by managerial declarations.

However, it is important to underline that the framework from Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė (2018) is in line with relevant sustainability frameworks that address the administration of a business. The Commission on Sustainable Development of the United Nations developed a paper that set up a framework to evaluate sustainable development through data such as energy consumption, use of materials, and weighed salaries (*Indicators of Sustainable Development*, 1996). Other models from the Global Reporting Initiative, an institution that provides guidelines principles for sustainability reports of companies, concentrates on the

evaluation of processes and workflows in general. Therefore, this can also be understood as a more institutional approach for the assessment of sustainability on a macro-level. The individual framework that is used in this paper allows us to examine individual engagement and perspective, something that contemporary research is lacking until now.

### **1.2.1 Individual Perspective**

CSR and social sustainability do play a relevant role in today's business world. Companies are in the transformation phase and changing towards more sustainable business models. The employees play an interesting role in this scheme. They are considered as the organization's greatest asset (Pfeffer, 2010). However, employees are mobile and can leave the organisation whenever it pleases them or if the company's actions are considered as aggravating in whatever way (Zaugg, 2009). The employer and its success is highly dependent on its employees (Lawson et al., 2009). Reasons for retention are diverse and complex. Main aspects of motivation or the lack of it are "achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, growth, and advancement; and extrinsic factors such as company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security" (Atchison & Lefferts, 1972; Gupta-Sunderji, 2004). If the individual motivation of an employee is on a negative level for a period of time, the employee is very likely to quit his/her job (Berry, 2010). This applies for extrinsic factors (such as salary) just as much as for intrinsic reasons.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that employee turnover is not the only relevant (negative) outcome of missing motivation. Based on the individual motivation employees are either driven to give their best and work productively or work absently and powerless (Hancock et al., 2013). The employees' perception of the company and its operation can have significant effects on the work attitude and motivation (C. P. Parker et al., 2003). This has direct implications for the financial success of a business (N. Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

### **1.2.2 Internal Communication of Social Sustainability**

Communication in a business is defined as "the specific type of communication, which employs means and tools for the performance of business" (Haase, 2013, p. 3). The task of communication about sustainability is described as "an understanding of the world, that is of the relationship between humans and their environment, into social discourse,

developing a critical awareness of the problems about this relationship and then relating them to social values and norms" (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011, p. 6).

Studies have shown that there is a diffuse communication by many companies about their social sustainability activities showing the lack of clear delimitation (Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Schönborn et al., 2019). Boström calls that "a weakness" as it requires a constant level of communication and explanation as there is no common ground, no shared knowledge or established definition that companies and other parties could build on (Boström, 2012, p. 4). This leads to additional complications when analysing company efforts in this area (Toussaint et al., 2021). As explained before, there are several different definitions of social sustainability and various interpretations of the term. Additionally, other concepts are competing for attention (Carroll & Brown, 2018).

This existing ambiguity does have practical implications. As Mr. Messerknecht mentioned in the exploratory interview, hmmh does use various channels (particularly LinkedIn, also website) for content marketing and employer branding. Especially the latter represents one of their strategic goals as they are in constant need of hiring. As presented, social activities and altruistic actions have the power to positively influence stakeholders (Raub & Blunsch, 2014). However, their underdeveloped (social sustainability) communication strategy hinders a constant and suitable content marketing approach which impedes a utilisation of their communicational potential. Thus, Mr. Messerknecht named this as one of their future communicational goals. It is important to stress that the social sustainability activities themselves are relevant and important to the greater idea of social sustainability. Nonetheless, a better and more visible communication regarding social sustainability leads to a better understanding, more awareness, an increased importance, and eventually a more sustainable set of actions (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011; Reilly & Hynan, 2014; Servaes et al., 2012).

Hmmh wants to use this primarily for an improved hiring strategy as Mr. Messerknecht called this one of his main concerns for his company. Moreover, a study from Schönborn et al. examined various factors of social sustainability and the financial success of companies. They state that communication "is highly related to company success" (Schönborn et al., 2019, p. 7), especially if being part of a profound strategy. Their findings are aligned with Boesso et al. (2015) who indicate that "companies whose CSR activities are prioritised have

superior financial performance" (Boesso et al., 2015, p. 439) and convey a direct recommended course of action for managers towards a more socially sustainable operation.

However, taking engaging on this business point of view, this tackles the top-down managerial approach to social sustainability and its functioning. In addition, it is crucial to better understand the bottom-up perception of social sustainability within their company: only if stakeholders such as applicants, customers, vendors, governance, and staff fully recognise, understand, and grasp any initiatives and contributions linked to social sustainability can it actively benefit the organisation (Gallego-Álvarez et al., 2010). As this research addresses employees through a survey, it seeks to gain insights on the micro-level focussing on the perception of interviewees towards any social sustainability initiatives within their organisation. Therefore, the questionnaire of this dissertation encompasses a segment of internal communication that examines the employee's evaluation of internal communication in particular.

Internal communication is vital to the success and operation of a business, it provides information, motivates, assures, and comforts (Mubarok & Darmawan, 2019). It runs through three paths: top-down management to employee, bottom-up employee to management, and coequal peer to peer (Genç, 2017). Research indicates that a prosperous and constructive communication flow through all channels contributes to the success of an operation (Poon Teng Fatt, 1998; Tarricone & Luca, 2002).

As discussed, before sustainability plays an important role in today's economy and the strategy of many businesses (Naidoo & Gasparatos, 2018). Often, the recognition of sustainability leads to the establishment of a discrete sustainability strategy with a substantial part about internal communication. The employees and the middle management as the addressees are responsible for the execution of the sustainable strategy, usually on an operational level and therefore crucial for the effective implementation (Bednárík, 2019). As sustainability is a social and value-based concept, creating ethics and social norms, communication is considered particularly important (Newig, 2011). Upper management is in charge to set up a profound and holistic strategy and incorporate social sustainability as a substantial element which is connected to the financial success, as studies show (Genç, 2017; Schönborn et al., 2019). In this dissertation, this approach is adopted through the exploratory

interview with CEO Mr. Messerknecht to better understand the top-down mechanism of social sustainability.

Nonetheless, one important commonality seems to be the appreciation and status within the entire company and internal communication. Employees must feel as an integral, coequal element of the company to feel valued and respected. By doing so they can develop as value creators – internal and external – and participate in the social sustainability activities of the company (Kataria et al., 2013). Therefore, this paper utilises the quantitative approach to examine the bottom-up perspective of employees and the ramifications of perception.

These general thoughts apply for the internal communication of sustainability. If we bring Gen Y into the picture, it is important to consider their status as *digital natives* which describes a high dedication to the digital world (Afonasova et al., 2019; Azzam, 2006). This will be further elaborated on in subchapter "3.1 classification and characteristics of Generation Y". Gen Y and their special commitment to technology holds great potential for the (digital) internal communication of social sustainability (Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Luo et al., 2022)

## **2. Concepts of Employee Commitment and Keystones**

The acknowledgment of employees in social sustainability is important to fulfil the purpose itself but also to reach it. They are the subject as well as the tool. This paper intends to focus on social sustainability but also address the economic benefits it has. The role of the employees is highly relevant for the operation and its financial success (Glavas & Kelley, 2014). Studies show that the well-being of employees has tremendous influence on a business. Therefore, this has been the focus of research for decades with multiple point of views and concepts (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Different concepts have been developed to describe and evaluate the relation of employees towards their company. Many theories are connected to the willingness of employees to contribute to the achievement of company goals. Furthermore, the employees' sentiment towards their company, work, and team play an integral role (Banihani et al., 2013). Some relevant theories are *job satisfaction* (Cook et al., 1981), *engagement* (Kahn, 1990), *organizational commitment* (Mowday et al., 1979), and *organizational citizenship behaviour* (Organ, 1988). Each of those concepts have different understanding and definition of what they are exactly describing. Job satisfaction is described as the individual perspective of employees about how they feel towards their job or "the extent to which people like their jobs" (Spector, 2021, p. 214). Therefore, this understanding is focusing on the happiness of people towards their work. Organisational commitment is a concept that concentrates on the bond and relationship of an employee and a company. It is supposed to indicate the level of identification of the person with the employer (Robertson & Cooper, 2015). Organizational citizenship behaviour was introduced by Organ in 1988 and defined as the "individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). Thus, the theory aims to depict not only the fundamental tasks of a certain job but rather the voluntary willingness to go above and beyond the basic duties for the achievement of company goals (Kernodle & Noble, 2013).

### **2.1 Classification of different types and characteristics**

In research there are multiple concepts that tackle the relationship of employees towards their work and employer. These theories differ in various things based on their individual focus and scope.

One keystone of all concepts depicts the Hierarchy of Needs theory by Maslow (Maslow, 1958) which is one of the most cited concept in the field of work motivation science (Denhardt et al., 2018). It describes human needs and motivation using a simplified pyramid with five stages that also provides a hierarchical order from the bottom to the top. The bottom is defined as *physiological needs* for sustaining life such as food, drinks, and sleep. The second stage is *safety needs* which represents physical security and shelter but also emotional and financial security. The first two elements are additionally called the basic needs of a human. The psychological needs also consist out of two segments. *Love and belongingness needs* represent social relationships such as friendship, trust and intimacy. Examples for the adjacent *esteem needs* would be acknowledgement or social status. The last segment of the pyramid depicts the highest level of satisfaction and is defined as *self-actualisation*. It describes the possibility for a human to use its full potential and reach desires and pursuing goals such as creative accomplishments, talents, or even parenting based on individual characteristics and interests (Maslow, 1958). Based on his theory, these stages build up on each other giving them an hierarchical order in which they can and need to be fulfilled (Deckers, 2018).

Even though the Hierarchy of Needs theory is rather old, I believe it is still relevant to this day. First of all, it is still used and a well-known theory in the field of social psychology that is part of recent research and theories (Dohlman et al., 2019; Ghatak & Singh, 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it builds the important foundation for following behaviour theories as it was the idea to identify motives and needs of people to find out what drives their attitude and behaviour in general but also within an organisation (Ćulibrk et al., 2018). Finally, I consider the last segment of the Hierarchy of needs, self-actualisation, as highly relevant for social sustainability in our times. What Maslow described as the need to fulfil a purpose and an intrinsic goal could be hypothesised as the contribution to society and activities for others (De Silva & De Silva Lokuwaduge, 2020; Hutchins et al., 2019; Janker et al., 2019).

The general concept of engagement – which is the concept that this thesis focusses on – was introduced and defined by Kahn in 1990 as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 634).

Kahn's initial definitions of engagement in the workplace – he also used the term *personal engagement* – has been adapted with different supplementary terms: *work and engagement* which is described as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 74), *employee engagement* (defined as "positive emotions are facilitated by actions within organisations that support clear outcome expectancies, give basic material support, and encourage individual contribution and fulfilment, a sense of belonging, and a chance to progress and learn continuously") (Harter et al., 2002, p. 272), or *job engagement* ("a multi-dimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance") (Rich et al., 2010, p. 619).

Kahn's definition is considered as the foundation of all terms and theories (Kular, 2008). His three dimensions of job engagement, vigor, dedication and absorption, build the commonly accepted foundation up to date for the concept of engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Dunlop & Scheepers, 2022). Vigor is considered to be the behavioural-energetic component and is defined as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 210). Dedication is described as the emotional component and the "sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Absorption completes the three dimension with a cognitive component and "refers to a state of high concentration and fulfilled engrossment in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulty detaching from the work" (P. I. Green et al., 2017, p. 5).

Interestingly, Kahn also mentions *meaningfulness* as one out of three psychological conditions that enable engagement. He described meaningfulness as "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" which could be contextualised in today's approach of sustainability and the social pillar (Kahn, 1990, p. 705), especially when considering the individual perspective of perceived social sustainability. The second enabler is considered *safety* which describes if the employee is able to bring his/her true self into work without fearing negative consequences. *Availability* is the last psychological condition that Kahn described. He defines it as "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performance" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Affecting

parameter may be work related as much as outside the job activities and the private life (May et al., 2004).

This interconnection of the private- and work-related life plays an important role in the concept of *job involvement*. It "refers to the degree to which employees relate to their jobs as comprising their lives in total, so that an employee who exhibits high job involvement identifies strongly with his or her job and thinks about the job even when outside of work" (Rich et al., 2010, p. 618) meaning that the business and private life tend to merge which is connected to psychological issues (Chauhan, 2009). Influence factors of job involvement are job characteristics, behaviour of management, and individual mindset (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Furthermore, a high level of job involvement is also considered to be an antecedent for job performance, comparable to job engagement, as people tend to invest more brain power in their work, care more for challenges, and are emotionally invested (Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007).

Job satisfaction is one of the most researched topics in the field as it is one of the oldest concepts (Aziri, 2011). Hoppock examined job satisfaction through a questionnaire in 1935 and described it as the status that enabled people to say truthfully that they genuinely like their job based on circumstances such as psychological, physiological, and environmental, a general comprehension that is meaningful to date. Hoppock's concept and the established scale is still considered to be significant due to its validity, internal consistency, and ease of administration (Ansong et al., 2022; Inoyatova, 2021). However, Hoppock hypothesises that job satisfaction is something completely internal, just under the influence of external factors (Hoppock, 1935). This comprehension is scientifically outdated (Zhu, 2012).

A well-known and established definition of job satisfaction was stated by Spector who said: "it is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs" (Spector, 1997, p. 2). Blegen and Mueller define it as "the extent of positive affective orientation to the job" (Blegen & Mueller, 1987, p. 227). Research indicated that job satisfaction is a big influence for the employees behaviour and therefore an important factor for productivity, attendance, turnover, and participation (Huey Yiing & Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009). Interestingly, job satisfaction is not just linked to contributions of the employer towards work but also the other way around. A high level of job satisfaction facilitates a higher salary, promotions, and approval (Kaliski, 2007).

Job satisfaction encompasses many relevant factors and aspects of work and an employee's attitude. One thing seems to be relevant to mention. The concept understands job satisfaction as a more rigid concept with factors that influence individuals. On the other hand, job engagement understands the relationship between work and workers more agile and as an interdependent construct. Furthermore, it is striking that most of the underlying literature dates back from the last century.

Thus, this dissertation utilises the concept of engagement. It contains the mutual relation between the employee and the company incorporating the sphere of co-dependencies and agitation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Chauhan, 2009). Thereby, it depicts the reality of social sustainability as the company has the responsibility of deploying a social sustainability strategy for the employees but also needs them in order to implement it (Bednárík, 2019; Rich et al., 2010).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it includes the individual view of the employee which cooperates with the aspect of perceived social sustainability of this paper.

Many studies that tackle motivation use the differentiation of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivational factors (Reiss, 2012). Applied to job motivation a classical example for extrinsic motivation would be the salary, for intrinsic motivation it would be the convincement with company goals and activities (Gerhart & Fang, 2015). This distinction is not essential for this thesis for two reasons: firstly, most topics of social sustainability can affect both dimensions (abovementioned examples would both qualify for social sustainable goals while this paper takes the individual, subjective perspective without a differentiation; secondly, the concept of engagement is taking more relevant factors into account.

It is important to mention that some studies indicate that engagement can have negative effects as well (Bakker et al., 2014). One research hypothesises that positive energy related to engagement can turn into exhaustion and ultimately burnout (Du & Roodt, 2010). This would be in accordance with the abovementioned scientific but theoretical construct calling job engagement the antipode of burnout or the exact opposite (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, Du and Roodt state that more research is needed to affirm the hypothesis and further examine the topic. Researchers are not unified by their theories regarding the

---

<sup>6</sup> Further explanation in chapter "2. Concepts of Employee Commitment and Keystones".

interdependency of burnout and job engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker state that "positive and negative effects are independent states, rather than two opposite poles of the same bipolar dimension" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 294). Generally speaking there is a lack of employee perspective of engagement and its implications for individuals (Brad Shuck et al., 2011). This also reinforces the individual perspective of perceived sustainability of this thesis.

The effort to achieve the goals of a good company culture and happy employees is also a big concern for hmmh. As Mr. Messerknecht told me in the interview multiple times, the hiring of good personnel is one of the main struggles and concerns for their future thriving. Thus, their employer branding plays an important role for their hiring objectives. However, he also stated that the management of the company is highly content with the present staff. Additionally, he as the CEO is aware that the hiring of new employees is a big cost factor for the company with many additional issues for the company's success and level of performance (Elliott, 2018). Therefore, one of hmmh's biggest concerns is to maintain his capable workforce as complete as possible.

Hmmh has a holistic approach to their business, meaning that they want to be a good employer, make contributions to society, nurture personal developments and projects and ultimately be a more successful organisation. They are aware that happy and fulfilled employees are more productive and contribute on a higher level to the company goals (Rich et al., 2010; Schönborn et al., 2019). Mr. Messerknecht personally claims that he nurtures a very open communication culture and tries to be in direct contact with all of his employees (or as he calls them colleagues), not focusing on management. However, this is not their only tool how hmmh wants to maintain a positive company culture and satisfied employees.

In 2014 the company hmmh was acquisitioned by the Serviceplan Group (Weber, 2014). Serviceplan is one of Europe's biggest owner-managed agencies with its headquarter in Munich, Germany. Currently 4.200 employees work for Serviceplan or an affiliated company generating 623 million in revenue (2022) (Statista, 2022). The group embraces over 40 agencies all over the world that often specialised in a certain field of business (Amirkhizi, 2022).

Mr. Messerknecht told me that in 2013 hmmh was in a difficult position for various reasons. He knew that due to strategical rebuilding three of their key customers would internalise a big share of their project-related revenue at hmmh.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, projects and the general performance suffered from a slight but constant loss of quality which ultimately led to unsatisfied clients and unsatisfied employees. The acquisition from Serviceplan gave them the initiative to modify the operation. The company executed substantial change and implemented a completely new strategy and organisational structure. This strategy and action plan was developed by mid-level employees, not the management. The CEO stated that that this was substantial to the following thriving of the company.

However, these structural changes were initiated from within the company itself. Serviceplan however implemented something that was addressed directly to the individual employee: a satisfaction survey. The parent company Serviceplan developed a simple survey to monitor the satisfaction rates of the employees for each of the 40 agencies. They use a simple and uniform questionnaire that directly tackled multiple relevant topics such as satisfaction, improvements, teamwork, projects, communication, or personal development.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Messerknecht told me that this survey, conducted anonymously on a yearly basis, plays a crucial role for Serviceplan in the evaluation of hmmh, but also for hmmh itself. They attach importance to this survey and prepare an elaborated report based on their organisational structure, teams, yearly comparisons, and further feedback. He claims that managerial decision making is often heavily influenced by this survey. In his perception, it plays a significant role to supervise the whole company, engage on potential shortcomings, and improve their employee satisfaction rate. Mr. Messerknecht stated that he regards this as one of the most important tools for his company to retain the valued talents of the company. Thus, it depicts a part of the strategical goals for hmmh.

In my opinion, this practical example is relevant for the research of employees and their relation towards their company. It shows that the acknowledgement and apprehension of human attitude earn a very sizable and decisive position in the leadership of a company.

---

<sup>7</sup> "2011 we knew over the next two years we would probably lose more than half of our business. [...] it meant €4 million less revenue for us. Otto at that time, our second biggest client, decided to insource most of its software development. So we lost half of the Otto business we had. Unfortunately, our third biggest client, Praktiker Baumärkte went bankrupt."

<sup>8</sup> More information in the chapter „Appendix A“ of this dissertation.

Hmmh is aware that their personnel play the crucial role for fulfilling projects, happy clients, and ultimately a successful operation. Therefore, they grant their employees and their wellbeing a significant position within their company. Mr. Messerknecht even said to me that his only mission is to keep the people happy. I think this example at hand perfectly underlines the meaningfulness of the relationship of employees and employers.

## **2.2 Economic implication of job engagement**

This thesis aims to connect the value-driven social sustainability approach to a positive outcome for involved companies. Job engagement is described as the employees' connection towards the company and its operation (Brad Shuck et al., 2011). Bakker et al. state that "engaged employees put a great deal of effort into their work because they identify with it. [...] Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and they look upon their work as challenging, as opposed to stressful and demanding" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 391). Thus, engagement has been the subject of HR operation of many companies as they were trying to gain a competitive advantages over their competition (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Studies support the thesis that a high level of engagement does implicate operational and financial success for the company in question (Harter et al., 2002).

Additionally to the impacted companies, research has been conducted to learn more about engagement of employees in the workplace. Several studies have shown that the general level of engagement is considered to be below 30%, which is a big loss of operational potential (Saks, 2006; Wagner & Harter, 2006).

The Gallup Institution – more information will be provided at a later stage – is a world-known organisation that deploys big data collections and surveys on market, competition, and opinion (Lomas et al., 2022; Newport, 2019). One of their main assets is the Gallup World Poll that also tackles the parameter engagement, compiled through their own framework (Janes et al., 2021). The graph shown in figure 6 shows the global level of engagement based on and collected by Gallup Institution (Gallup Inc., 2022a). The data also supports the research of Saks (2006) and Wagner & Harter (2006), that estimates the overall engagement below 30%.

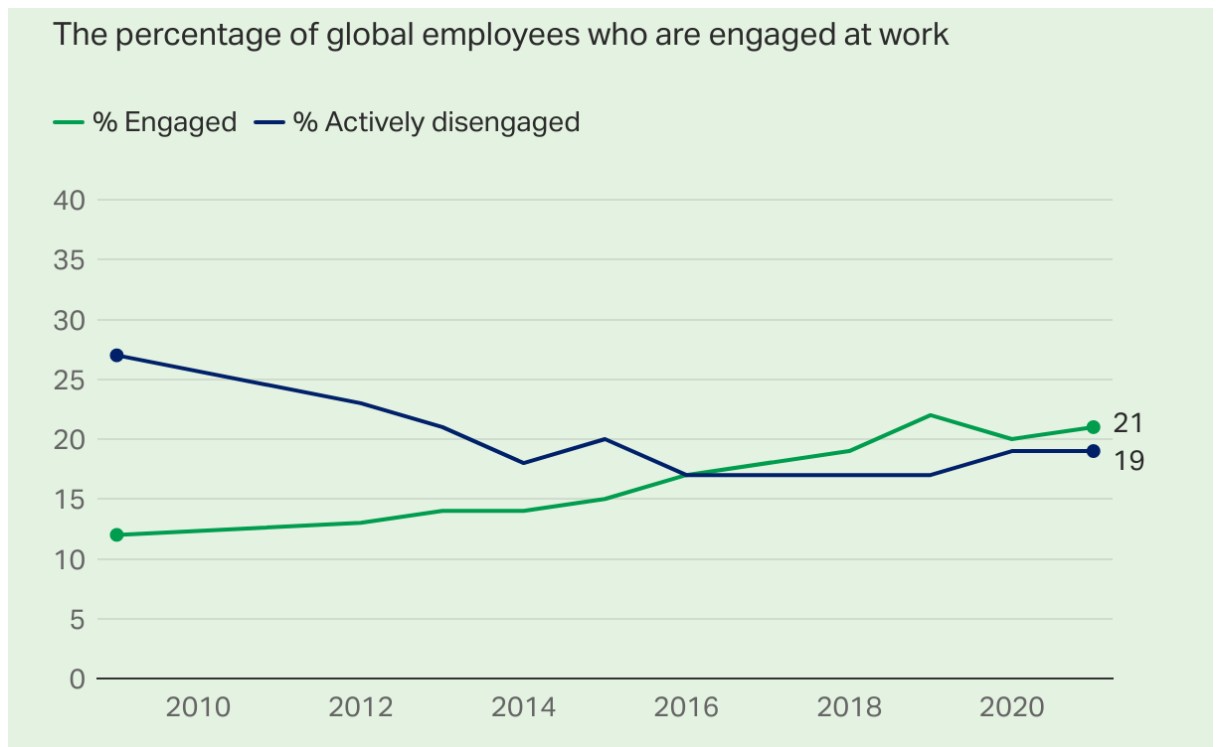


Figure 6: Global engagement based on Gallup (2021)

Figure 6 additionally shows the graph for actively disengaged employees, which even has been higher than the level of engaged people until 2015 during the specified measuring range. Gallup defines *actively disengaged* employees as "resentful that their needs aren't being met and are acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers potentially undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish" (Gallup Inc, 2021). Thus, a disengaged employee actively interferes with the company goals. Gallup estimates that the 19% of actively disengaged employees worldwide cost \$7.8 trillion in lost productivity, which equals to 11% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Gallup Inc., 2022b). Several studies have been conducted to further examine the multifaceted impact job engagement has for the company and the individual worker. Employees with a higher level of job engagement tend to have less sick days and a better health, a lower retention rate (Halbesleben, 2010), a higher level of organisational commitment and therefore a higher personal initiative and efficiency, and ultimately an improved performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Taking these strong effects into account, it is not surprising that a high level of job engagement has been linked to overall financial success of companies (Choi et al., 2015; Strom et al., 2014). Furthermore, it shows that the well-being of employees can go hand in hand with the economic success of a business (Saks, 2006).

In conclusion, it can be stated that research shows that engagement is linked to the financial success of a company and that the level of engagement has enormous potential for growth. For a comparison and subsumption, it is required to look at regional Gallup data. For 2021 Gallup indicates the percentage of 34% of engaged and 16% of disengaged employees in the US (Gallup Inc, 2022). Therefore, many companies already tackle the problem and are actively working on a more engaged workforce (Brad Shuck et al., 2011). However, the global level of engagement is on a constant low level. Recent obstacles, such as the Corona crisis, hinder an enduring improvement of the situation (Gallup Inc., 2022b). More research is needed to further explore the link of employee engagement and economic implications for companies.

At the company hmmh job engagement is not a specifically addressed topic within the yearly survey. Mr. Messerknecht however, assured me that he as the CEO has a vigilant eye on his colleagues, not for supervision but rather for acknowledgement and apprehension. Their survey uses the term job satisfaction to raise data from the employees. As discussed, this does play an important role in the management decision making process. Furthermore, he stated that hmmh tries its best to provide a nurturing company culture where people can actively participate, express themselves and their needs, enjoy the trust and acknowledgement of their managers, and where people care for each other on a philanthropic level. In my opinion, this does depict the more practical handling of hmmh as it depicts the daily challenges of an operating business. For himself he claims the concept of *agile leadership* which is described as adaptive, fluid, trusting, problem-solving orientated, with a strong focus on the ability to react, manage and the acknowledgement of personal limitations and limits. (D. W. Parker et al., 2015). From an outside perspective, this appears to be a matching approach when considering my personal impression of the company and Mr. Messerknecht, their social aspiration and the agile evolvement of social sustainability, and the variable requirements of the sphere of work of hmmh as a digital agency.

The survey that Serviceplan as the parent company introduced was merely intended to keep track of the workforce and assess the situation of each company. However, this is not the only tool hmmh uses to evaluate their HR situation. Mr. Messerknecht highlighted multiple times that a low retention rate is one of the main strategic goals of the company. Their self-set limit lies at 10 % per year which would implicate that every tenth employee would leave the company within one year. This does depict the upper limit and normally the turnover

rate is between five and seven percent, based on the statement of Mr. Messerknecht. He also discussed their experience that the retention rate and job engagement are connected. Even though engagement is not a dedicated concept that hmmh deploys, he did elaborate on the general work culture that he as the CEO tries to implement. The yearly survey is one tool to evaluate this, next to the retention rate, and his cognition as a leader of the company and people.

Furthermore, he emphasised that the retention rate is an important key performance indicator (KPI) for hmmh as a high turnover rate leads to more costs, difficulties in planning, loss of quality in work, problems for re-hiring qualified personnel, and ultimately their financial success (Gabčanová, 2012). These considerations can be summarised with the statement that hmmh is fully aware of the strong economic implications of turnover and job engagement and incorporates this acknowledgement in their strategic planning.

### 3. Generation Y

Interestingly the topic of sustainability has particularly emerged in the past few decades. Reasons for the popularity of the topic are manifold but originate e.g. in increasing media coverage, the aggravated climate crisis (S. Cohen, 2022) and likely to be even further accelerated during the pandemic. However, Generation Y and Generation X seem to be influenced in particular by the topic of sustainability (Dwidienawati et al., 2021).

It is important to stress that there is no universal understanding of the term Generation Y resulting in different interpretations. Generations are defined by a span of year of birth. Howell et al., suggest the span 1982 to 2005 to refer to Gen Y (Howell et al., 2009). In this paper however, "Generation Y", "Gen Y" or "Millennials" are defined as persons that are born from the early 1980s until the late 1990s following the segmentation of Brosdahl and Carpenter (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2011). Therefore, Gen Y humans, from a 2022 perspective, are roughly between 20 and 40 years old. At this specific time this comprehension overlaps with the concept of "Young Professionals". In most definitions Young Professionals are described as persons that are between 20 and 40 years old, have a university degree and / or first experience on the white-collar job market (Taylor, 1987; Zhong, 1987). The term "white-collar" is originally inspired by the required work clothes of classical office jobs and management: a shirt and a tie (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

#### 3.1 Classification and characteristics of Generation Y

Gen Y has already been subject to a multifaceted amount of research due to one remarkable characteristic: it has been identified as the first fully digital generation. In contrast to *digital nomads*, *digital natives* did not have to adapt to the new digital part of life but were in contact with this new development from the very beginning of their life. "Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives" (Prensky, 2001, pp. 1 & 2). Thus, Prensky argued that digital technology was not something that was used as a temporary tool but rather something integral and omnipresent in their cosmos and therefore treated with a high level of confidence. Corresponding terms like *generation M* (media), *generation V* (virtual) or *generation C* (click or connected) underline the symbiosis of Gen Y and the digital technology (Azzam, 2006; Veen & Vrakking, 2006). All of these terms are picking up and implying a specific set of characteristics that are unique to Gen Y. For one digital technology has a drastic impact on their lives. They are connected on a

constant level, communicate continuously, and the technology that has disrupted our contemporary world (Afonasova et al., 2019) is an ordinary thing for them (Selwyn, 2009). This fact has led to a disbalance in some areas. While the internet and the digitalised environment had and has ground-breaking impact on basically every aspect of life the education and knowledge transfer area has not been able to keep up with this development. Often the people in charge of mentoring and educating (such as teachers, professors, or management) Gen Y were not able to meet their expectations as they were not fit to meet the new set standards for our digital world. This also has implications on the economy as knowledge transfer is especially important for new hires and the generational handover of jobs (Selwyn, 2009).

Another term for Gen Y is the "multitasking generation" highlighting the necessary juggling of multiple information channels and activities, which applies for their professional as much as for their private life (Wallis, 2006, p. 48). Furthermore, Gen Y humans are described to have a larger share of managerial behaviour for their surrounding and connections, less a status as a recipient only. They are considered to be more in charge of their own activities of life, surrounding, and education ("personalisation") (H. Green et al., 2005, p. 3).

The connected world offers new ways to network, now in digital social networks which is regarded as an important characteristic for Gen Y. As such, Tapscott and Williams (2008) defined them as the "collaboration generation" (Tapscott & Williams, 2006, p. 36) which are not only connected through the internet but also willing to cooperate and pursue a common goal based on their shared beliefs and attitude (Leadbeater, 2010). Thus, teamwork is a label that is often used (DeVaney, 2015). Selwyn (2009) even identifies it as the "increased empowerment of the individual" (Selwyn, 2009, p. 367). This depiction of Gen Y holds a potential connection towards social sustainability that will be further explained in **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** with the concept of *the global village* (McLuhan & Powers, 1992).

### 3.2 Generation Y and social sustainability

The internet as the most disruptive and influential element of the digital world had and has a substantial influence on Gen Y (Windisch & Medman, 2008). This means that characteristics and implications of the internet are highly relevant for Gen Y at the same

time (Issa & Isaias, 2016). One of the keystones of the internet is the built of a global network and the exchange of information within seconds (Roser et al., 2015). This means that information is no longer a scarce resource that has to be compiled through various analogue channels but something that is available at all times in an abundant manner (Carlson, 2003). Thus, the internet enables us to have a constant stream of information and news. Furthermore, information and news are no longer bound to regional limitations and borders. In the 1960s McLuhan launched the concept of "the global village" which describes the vanishing distances and obstacles through technology and digital communication (McLuhan & Powers, 1992). The concept of a global village supposes that through this new era of media a new society would emerge that would be unified by a supranational and universal conscience (Antecol, 1997). As noted before in "*Classification and characteristics of Generation Y*", this conscience is in line with the presumed characteristics of Gen Y and their "collaboration generation" (Tapscott & Williams, 2006, p. 47).

Although McLuhan's theory was initially focused on the newly invented television he was also talking about the new technological world of communication and foreshadowing future events and developments. From a modern perspective, many of the assumptions can now be applied to the phenomenon of the internet (Logan, 2010). Combining McLuhan's theory of "the global village" with the internet leads to fully digital, connected, and overarching social awareness (Mohr & Mohn, 2015).

As above mentioned, the emerging climate crisis is one of the most consistent topics of our time: "At the global level, across the full year 2021 media attention increased 55% from 2020" (Pearman et al., 2022). The supplemental figure 7 below shows that the media coverage on climate change / global warming was constantly present throughout the past two decades which leads to a continuous realisation of the digital natives / Gen Y (MeCCO, 2020).

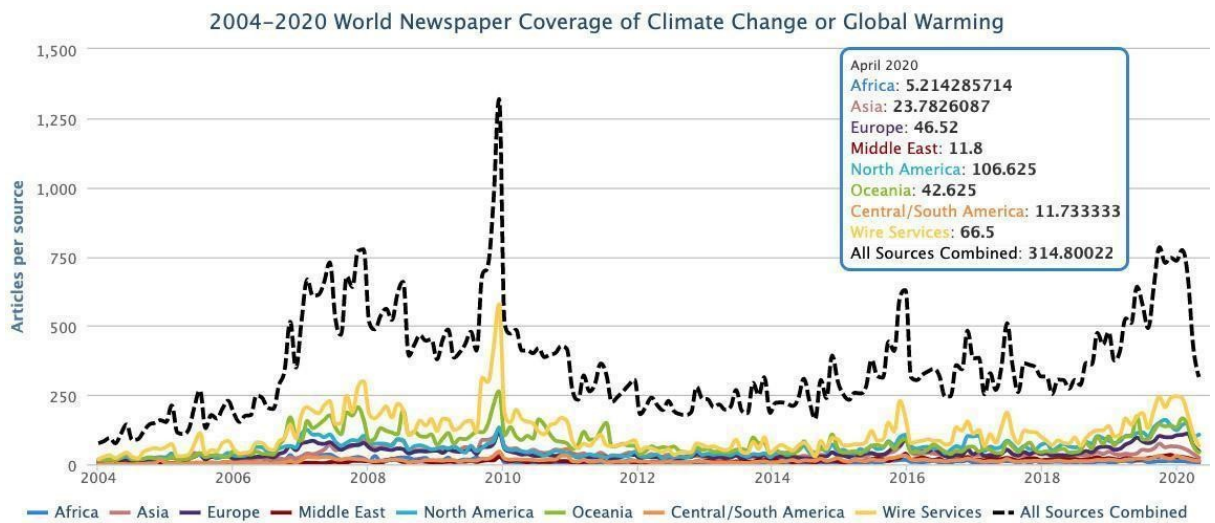


Figure 7: News coverage on climate change 2004 to 2020 ((MeCCO, 2020)

Research found out that "media attention is especially high in carbon dependent countries with commitment under the Kyoto Protocol" (Schmidt et al., 2013, p. 1). The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty initiated and executed by the United Nations in 1997, until today legally signed by 192 countries (Böhringer, 2003; United Nations, 1997).

McLuhan's concept of a connected society, "the global village", has a direct link to contemporary research results: sharing mutual characteristics such as the age or experiencing the same events causes young people to have similar work attitudes (A. D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). This research concludes that generations, such as Gen Y, and their attitude are especially impressed and influenced by "the economic, political and social events that took place during their formative years" (A. D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008, p. 931).

Generation Y, completely digital, living in a connected, borderless world with a shared consciousness and with full access to information was born and raised during a time of an emerging climate crisis. As figure 8 below shows in the past 40 years, overall speaking, there has been a constant rise of natural disasters. At least some of them can be directly linked to the climate crisis. The research of D'Amato & Herzfeldt points out that the sharing of a socio-cultural background leads to a similar mindset towards work and ethics. Through the connection of the world and "the digital village" these natural disasters become world events and influence the contemporary awareness of Gen Y (Hjarvard et al., 2001).

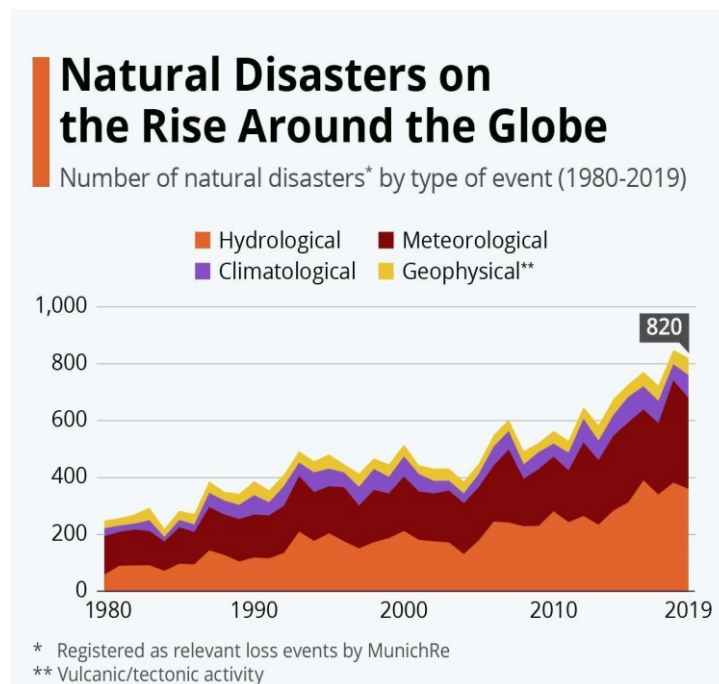


Figure 8: Natural disasters worldwide over time (Buchholz, 2020)

Many of these shared events are directly linked to climate change and thus with sustainable development. Sustainable development aims to secure a prospering and protected setting for generations to come (*Brundtland Commission Report, 1987*). The current climate crisis potentially compromises future generations and could lead to a hostile and catastrophic environment (Hansen et al., 2013). The climate change is often directly linked to the ecology pillar of sustainability. As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, the ecology pillar gets unparalleled media coverage compared to the rather underrepresented social dimension.

Nevertheless, the societal pillar is also inflected and requires amendment: "Certain social groups are particularly vulnerable to crises, for example, female-headed households, children, persons with disabilities, Indigenous People and ethnic minorities, landless tenants, migrant workers, displaced persons, sexual and gender minorities, older people, and other socially marginalised groups. [...] Climate change is more than an environmental crisis – it is a social crisis [...]" (The World Bank, 2016). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) report elaborates on the social aspects of climate change and sustainable development. The paper uses the above mentioned three dimensional model (economic, environmental, and social). The social needs are defined among others as "equity and social inclusion, inclusion, human rights, participation, governance, cooperation and

solidarity, and education (United Nations, 2011, p. 4). In conclusion, research shows that the climate crisis (and therefore sustainable development) is one of the predominant topics of our world, especially in the past 20 years. Additionally, studies indicate that people are influenced by media and discourse, leading to generational differences and separating characteristics among generations. Therefore, I find it highly interesting to question Gen Y and examine their individual mindset towards sustainability and foremost the social dimension of it.

Again, I would like to strike a connection with hmmh. As I was fully aware of my established scientific question, I did have four main dimensions that I wanted to cover in the semi-structured interview: social sustainability, job engagement, communication, and Gen Y. The generational aspects of hmmh were initially planned to be addressed at a later stage of the interview. However, Mr. Messerknecht brought the topic to the table very early on. We spoke about the application and hiring process and he mentioned generational differences hmmh observed comparing Boomer, Gen Y, and Gen Z. In his, and the company's, perception it is unambiguous that Gen Y is way more concerned about special things that are not directly connected to the job (such as salary, benefits, working hours etc.) but other aspects of the company and work (such as social work, the company's footprint, or the wellbeing of employees). He made the claim especially based on the conducted hiring interviews and the following behaviour as employees. Thus, he conveyed the insight that Gen Y is more concerned about social aspects of work. This however is not the same with Gen Z. In his belief, these things do matter generally speaking for Gen Z but they are considered to be a given at a modern company and no longer something that has to be claimed. Mr. Messerknecht stated that he observes a slight lack of caring, at least when comparing to Gen Y. Additionally, he labelled the enforcement of home office during the pandemic one of the main drivers for this development (Li et al., 2022).

It is important to mention that this only depicts the observation of Mr. Messerknecht personally and the in the hiring process integrated employees and teams at hmmh. However, his statements are in line with scientific findings and literature regarding Gen Y and Gen Z. Maioli states about Generation Z: "they present very high self-esteem, sometimes over-exaggerated" (Maioli, 2017, p. 4) and "its connection with a job opportunity is not equal to that of previous generations" (Maioli, 2017, p. 5). Thus, the practical anecdotic observation

within the hmmh dimension does seem to have general relevance and significance when examining generational differences.

### **3.3 Generation Y and job engagement**

In their research, Holland et al. propose that every company should implement a profound CSR strategy to be able to retain the top performers of their workforce (Holland et al., 2007). As elaborated, Gen Y is shaped by specific characteristics that differentiates them from former generations. Their appreciation of social norms and work ethics is distinct and further developed than with previous generations such as Gen X. Additionally, they like to work in teams, especially if a common goal is shared. Social sustainability could be an enabling topic that applies in particular for Gen Y as discussed in the previous paragraph. This collaboration based on a shared set of ethics could be interpreted as Kahn's concept of engagement. The enabler meaningfulness (compare subchapter "2.1 classification of different types and characteristics") can be applied on the characteristics of Gen Y and social sustainability. If we consider Kahn's meaningfulness – "the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards" (May et al., 2004, p. 14) – the shared moral and the awareness for sustainable development could enable a high level job engagement for Gen Y. Potentially, this does also apply for the presented Hierarchy of Needs by Maslow and the final stage of self-actualisation.<sup>9</sup> Social sustainability would qualify as an enabler for these concepts of motivation or behavioural psychology. Taking the interview with hmmh into account, this does depict Mr. Messerknecht's perception of Gen Y and its applicants. As he stated, the social activities and benefits are a constant topic at the interviews that hmmh conducts with applicants. He even commented that this subject is noticeable more relevant in interviews with Gen Y individuals which could reinforce the theory of a shared moral and awareness.

Building up on that idea, studies show that meaningfulness has a direct impact on motivation and engagement of Gen Y. Mishra & Mishra (2017) found out that social factors are viable leverage to ensure a higher identification and thus an increased seniority of Gen Y (Mishra & Mishra, 2017). This is particularly important as the generation is considered to be rather disloyal with a shorter retention compared to older generations as it shows that employers need to extent their proposal to keep employees happy and in their workforce (Puteh et al.,

---

<sup>9</sup> Compare subchapter "6.1 Gallup institution and engagement framework.

2015). However, they are also considered the most socially responsible generation compared to previous ones with a high reaction towards social and ethical companies (Zainee & Puteh, 2020).

Weyland describes the work attitude of Gen Y with "salary and status are not high on the priority list. [...] Generation Y's main concern is to do meaningful work in an environment that gives them stimulation, responsibility, fun and flexibility" (Weyland, 2011, p. 440). This affirms the theory that Gen Y seeks after more than the hard facts of a job like salary or benefits and additionally pursue other things in their work life. This insight facilitates potential opportunities for employers. Thus, Weyland remarks "Generation Y are particularly attracted to companies with strong values, social ethics, distinctive brands and non-hierarchical environments" and "an altruistic approach will go a long way to keeping Generation Y engaged" which directly appeals to the social activities of companies and its potential to engage Gen Y (Weyland, 2011, p. 442). Connecting this with the hands-on experience of Mr. Messerknecht, this shows that there are factors to increase job engagement of Gen Y. Companies however, do have to adapt based on the new expectations and pretence of this specific generation. It seems that this discernment has already started as more research concentrates on the internal effects of social activities such as employees (Leng et al., 2015; Zainee & Puteh, 2020). Rank and Contreras also emphasise on the internal effects of CSR and the peculiarities of Gen Y. Furthermore, they stress that this might require an adapted style of leadership and stating: "Generation Y, their specific pattern of leadership motivation needs to be recognised" mentioning the internal influences of social activities (Rank & Contreras, 2021).

## 4. Exploratory Interview

This segment aims to summarise the most important statements and insights Mr. Messerknecht shared, particularly in connection to the field of research of this dissertation. The extensive interview enables a holistic and profound understanding of hmmh's company culture and Mr. Messerknecht's approach to leadership. The gained practical insight enables a connection of theoretical findings with hands-on experience.

This dissertation utilises a quantitative scientific approach to gain insights of the employee. The intention is to engage on the employee perspective to better understand the effects of a company's action. How do employees feel, how does that influence them and ultimately, how does that potentially change their modus operandi at work? As shown in the literature review, job engagement is a crucial KPI of a company that can have decisive impulse over the success of a company. Therefore, the quantitative approach facilitates on the employee perspective to identify possible starting points for a progressive company with the ambition for structural change.

However, this incorporated study is limited to this bottom-up perspective from the employees. This approach lacks the top-down perspective from a manager or CEO with hands-on practice and business experience. Why do companies perform social sustainability actions? Does it have an actual impact in the organisation? What are challenges, what are future chances? What works, what does not?

The quantitative approach of this research is complemented by a second element. An exploratory interview was conducted to enable a practical perspective of the research field. Throughout the dissertation the concepts and theories are linked to the findings of the conducted interview with Mr. Messerknecht, the CEO of hmmh. Therefore, this paper connected relevant statements of the conversation wherever it seemed beneficial. The interview addressed several relevant topics and business insights of hmmh.<sup>10</sup> In the following passage, the four most relevant aspects will be summed up.

---

<sup>10</sup> Please see the full transcript of the interview in the chapter "Appendix A" of this dissertation.

### **-Acquisition by Serviceplan and the Annual Survey**

In 2013, hmmh was in a bad financial state. Three of their biggest clients took their budget away from hmmh leaving the company in a highly vulnerable position. Through a personal connection of Mr. Messerknecht to a member of the managing board of Serviceplan he was able to initiate the acquisition.<sup>11</sup> The connection arose through his personal engagement at the organisation YPO (formerly Young Presidents' Organization), a global community of CEOs with approximately 30.000 members in over 130 countries (Berger, 2022).

Serviceplan is a network group with over 40 companies. The according structures and processes incorporate the deployment of an employee survey. This tool enables Serviceplan to raise data on employee satisfaction, their well-being, ambitions & goals, and suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, the results are the calculation basis for potential bonuses for upper management of each company. Hmmh however, utilises the results for a more profound and intensive feedback loop: After they receive the data from Serviceplan, hmmh conducts their own analysis of the results. The responses of the employees are used as performance reviews and strategic planning for the different units and the respective management. The survey, introduced by Serviceplan, was adopted and nurtured by hmmh as the management realised the potential insights and input from their employees.

### **-Entrepreneurship and Social Leadership**

Mr. Messerknecht did not implement a dedicated sustainability strategy at hmmh. Moreover, he apprehends his modus operandi as a holistic and altruistic approach to leadership and even life. This reflects in the void of a dedicated name or definition within hmmh. The leadership team implemented a general culture of appreciation, consideration, cognition, and encouragement. This set of values is the foundation for their managerial decision making and course of action. At the sharp end, this does apply for his employees and the societal impact of the company. Their product portfolio is directly affected by this mindset as their services are only digital and therefore linked to a smaller footprint compared to supply chain, usage of resources, or waste management (Bican & Brem, 2020). However, hmmh invests their services and knowledge for pro-bono work.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Compare subchapter "2.1 Classification of different types and characteristics"

<sup>12</sup> "So we're doing a new website for this organisation pro-bono. So, Dr. Tatyana, she's so happy with that. So that is "Herz für die Ukraine."

### **-Bremer Merchants and Mr. Messerknecht's Personal Background**

The interview indicated a special way of business that goes beyond conventional determination. Two factors might be the key reasons for that. Firstly, Bremen (and Hamburg) are known for a special trustworthy and responsible corporate code of conduct that is directly linked to the cities' history with the Hanse, a commercial and defensive confederation with huge impact in the North and Baltic sea area and the integrated communities (Buse, 1993; Pichierri, 2013). Up to this day, the old cities of the Hanse in Germany are famous for their rich history of commerce and entrepreneurship. Part of their code of conduct is a diligent and clear-sighted acquaintance that build the foundation for sustainable and reliable partnerships (Häberlein, 2011; MacFarlane & Mitchell, 2019; Maischak, 2005).

The second big factor seems to be the personal background of Mr. Messerknecht that is directly connected to the addressed history of his hometown Bremen. His father was the CEO of messerknecht informationssysteme GmbH, a company with over 120 employees that was founded by his ancestors three generations ago (Datagroup Presse, 2006; ICT Channel, 2006). Stefan Messerknecht took over the firm and eventually had to sell it due to financial problems.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, he states that the entrepreneurial background of his family with the constant presence of the company and the aching sale of the business has led to his realisation what kind of company he wants to manage and what kind of a leader he wants to be. This may be one key reason for the lack of an imposed social strategy but the genuine holistic mindset.

This cognition is reflected in his personal engagement in various organisations such as YPO, Rotary, or IHK. As Mr. Messerknecht elaborated, he does use these associations and forums to advocate for his credo and mindset. This can also be considered a substantial asset to social sustainability as it aims to amplify cause.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> "So, I failed. I can write a huge book on how hard it is to sell a family business two years before the family business becomes 100 years old. "

<sup>14</sup> "Not for my company but for their companies. I meet all the other CEOs and owners of big German companies. [...] And this is probably what I do next when I stop here, is somehow consulting or an accompanying entrepreneurs and owners who do not know how to do this transition. [...] I'm talking to my YPO friends all the time, they ask me, they call me. [...] Organisational structural, questions of how did you do it? How did you get to trust your people so much? What made you so brave to risk asking your people to develop the strategy? You are the CEO, your job is the development of the strategy. And I say no. This is pretty strange for most of the people.

## **-Generational Shift and Employer Branding**

One important topic of the interview was the issue of application. Without being asked directly, Mr. Messerknecht brought the attention to the changed hierarchy in the application process. He has been the CEO of a company constantly since 1992 and therefore has over three decades of experience in leading people (*Stefan Messerknecht | XING, 2023*). He told me that he does perceive a change in the application process and in particular in the hierarchy that occurs during the interview. According to Mr. Messerknecht, in the past there was a structure of power, giving the company the upper hand. Nowadays, companies would be in the applicant's position offering the position to the person rather than putting the applicant to the test.<sup>15</sup> This subjective perception of Mr. Messerknecht does reflect contemporary scientific findings and seems to be representative to some extent (Koster, 2018; Maioli, 2017; O'Shea, 2022).

The interview process was an important topic of conversation in the interview. Hiring new talents is one of the main challenges and strategic goals of hmmh. Based on Mr. Messerknecht, hmmh does struggle to attract the needed talents and therefore heavily invests in recruitment tools, resources, and perceives their social actions as a viable tool to address new hires.

One major important tool for hmmh is employer branding as Mr. Messerknecht stressed: hmmh is not able to compete with the highest paying companies in the business. Companies such as Accenture are able to top the salary range of hmmh. However, hmmh is still interested to attract the best talents and also retain them. Thus, they perceive the tool of employer branding as a viable strategy to compete with other and potentially more potent employers. The management is fully aware that many of the social activities and additional efforts contribute to the awareness and attractiveness of hmmh as an employer. Taking the relevance of staffing and talents into account, this underlines the meaningfulness of these actions even though they are not directly connected to the products and services of the

---

<sup>15</sup> "The person we want interviews us. In former times we interviewed the people. And in best case scenario, it's on eye level that works both ways. [...] And we talk about that (social sustainability) in interviews. But interestingly enough, maybe for you interesting, there is a difference in generation Y and Z because the Gen Y ask more than Gen Z. Why is that? The younger people interestingly enough, talk about money. [...] We talk about social responsibility, perks and whatever, they just say: I expected that anyways. That is nothing we need to talk about. If you don't have that, you are out anyway. [...] That is a difference between Z and Y. The Gen Yers are more open and openly interested in these things.

company and only depict a small percentage of hmmh's overall operation.<sup>16</sup> This insight strengthens the idea of social sustainability as an integral competitive advantage for employees and staffing, in this notion from a different angle as the examined aspect of job engagement of this dissertation (App et al., 2012).

---

<sup>16</sup> "It is a relevant part of the business. [...] To show attitude towards gender, towards diversity. It's a part of employer branding and image. [...] Very serious. How could we gain people? Certainly not with the highest wages when they go to Accenture or when they go somewhere else. They can always find the same job with more money.

## II. Methodology

In this part the methodology of this dissertation will be elaborated. It will be explained why this specific scientific approach was chosen, how it was adapted and implemented to fit the research question. The literature review showed that there is a lack of research on the individual employee perspective. Often studies on social sustainability topics focus on top-down implementation and activities. However, the implications for employees are not covered and examined. Therefore, a quantitative approach, a survey, was chosen to better understand the perception of employees and the repercussions on their behaviour. This bottom-up perspective can facilitate our knowledge of social sustainability and conjoined work engagement and also enable economically relevant aspects and implications for a business-driven top-down perspective. To enhance and complement the quantitative research an exploratory interview with the CEO of the German company hmmh was conducted. This allows to grasp the two relevant streams of influence, top-down and bottom-up. Furthermore, it enables to link findings from the employee perspective and justify it with the managerial point of view and vice versa.

As mentioned before, I did not know Mr. Messerknecht nor the company hmmh.<sup>17</sup> Initially, I merely did some internet research through publicly accessible sources and information. However, through my personal connection I was aware that hmmh does try to implement a more philanthropical approach to business than usual. This first indication was affirmed by several news articles that covered hmmh efforts and activities (Connected City, 2018; LinkedIn, 2023; PR Report, 2013; Softgarden, 2016; Wegweiser, 2022). This was the level of knowledge before I contacted Mr. Messerknecht personally. In preparation for the meeting with Mr. Messerknecht, I designed a semi-structured interview, which I shared in advance. The approach was chosen to allow Mr. Messerknecht to lay the focus on topics most relevant to his business and social sustainability objectives. It also allowed me to gain insights all related topics, including internal communication. Semi-structured interviews encourage a bi-directional communication and. Questions In summary, Mr. Messerknecht confirmed that he tries to tackle business and leadership with a more social and sustainable approach and mentioned the concept of corporate citizenship as an intriguing aspiration. As explained before, this can be understood as an adjacent concept to sustainable development which was the fundament for my further research with hmmh. Thus, he invited me over to

---

<sup>17</sup> Compare subchapter "1.1 Classification of different approaches and characteristics".

the hmmh's offices in Bremen. On the sixth of November 2022, we met in the Wesertower where hmmh has its headquarters on twelve levels of a newly built modern facility.

In the beginning of the meeting Mr. Messerknecht showed me around in his office. On the hallways little interactions with his colleagues took place. This was partly considering business and a possibility for him to chat about specific tasks but also an opportunity for him to introduce me to Björn Portillo, managing partner at hmmh (*Management Board | Hmmh*, 2016) and other employees. Thus, it provided me a chance to get a first subjective impression on company culture, communication, and interaction. The interview itself took place in his office, was fully recorded and took around three hours.<sup>18</sup> After the profound interview, Mr. Messerknecht and I had a quick lunch to recap the interview. Additionally, that enabled a more personal understanding of Mr. Messerknecht's motives and personality off the record. In the aftermath of the interview, Mr. Messerknecht provided some additional information off the record for my better understanding and answered to further inquiries that arose in the research and the transcription process.

---

<sup>18</sup> The full transcript of the interview can be found in the chapter "Appendix A" of this dissertation.

## 5. Research Question

The literature review showed a general lack of research on social sustainability (Govindan et al., 2021). Mostly, internal implications were not covered to a sufficient extent and the focus laid on the external sphere as social activities of companies are often utilised for marketing or presentation reasons (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Frankental, 2001). The potential effect on costumers played an extensive role. This limitation neglects the internal implications and benefits. The activities of a company do influence the employees, even if they are not directly affected by the actions themselves. Moreover, social sustainability might impact the satisfaction of staff members which directly leads to a more efficient and profitable business (Schönborn et al., 2019). This possible dependency shows the necessity for modern companies to adapt and additionally the massive potential of this topic.

Therefore, this dissertation chose to take the employee perspective. Employees are highly interested in the activities of their company and the outcome of their work (Cunha et al., 2022). This has a relevant economic aspect as it can affect the work engagement and therefore the productivity of employed individuals. Additionally, the war for talent is an emerging problem in our time and research show that a growing group of individuals base their job choice on social aspects. Young Professionals seem to have a different morale code and adjust their behaviour to it (Domsch & Ladwig, 2015). Conventional companies might have a substantial competitive disadvantage if they do not transform and adapt accordingly. By this means, economic insight can be a gamechanger argument when it comes to the structural change our economy requires (App et al., 2012). The exploratory interview can offer additional benefits for this valuation.

As this dissertation focusses on the individual level, the concept of *perceived* social sustainability was identified as fitting best. In order to comprehend the real impact on employees, the theoretical act may not be the critical part but the practical perception of it. The literature indicated that Gen Y is the predominant generation of the next two decades (Waljee et al., 2020). Additionally, they seem to be highly interested in a value-driven economy and seem to be characterised by their high level of desires for their work that exceed conventional aspects. Thus, this research targets the Generation Y in Germany to examine to what extent they perceive social sustainability within their company and how that level of perceived social sustainability affects their job engagement. These considerations culminate in the research question.

***"Does perceived social sustainability influence job engagement of Gen Y?"***

It is the set goal to investigate perceived social sustainability to further comprehend the impact that this objective has on this particular generation as employees. The socially sustainable approach to business has profound consequences for an organisation and this thesis aims to further investigate the role of staff. This approach may contribute to further itemise social sustainability and use it as a powerful tool, not only from a social perspective but also for economic power.

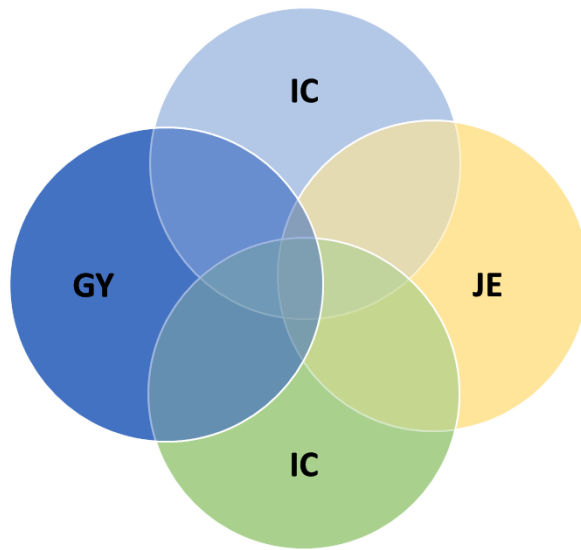
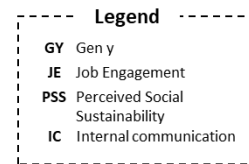


Figure 9: Conceptual map of the scientific question

Figure 9 shows the assumed interconnection of components of the scientific approach. Gen Y is the examined group that may be effected by perceived social sustainability. Job engagement is the variable that is expected to be influenced by perceived social sustainability. Internal communication may be a supportive and enhancing factor for the dependence of the components.

## 5.1 Purpose and Relevance of the Research

To enhance existing research by incorporating the social dimension of sustainability, this thesis aims to start closing the research gap. The dimension of ecology is predominant in this area, resulting mainly in studies that focus on internal communication of ecological sustainability (Barendsen et al., 2021). Even though there are several studies that focus on behavioural psychology and concepts like job involvement or CSR (Al Amri et al., 2019; Cunha et al., 2022), there is a lack of studies on the individual employee perspective and engagement (Ferreira & Real de Oliveira, 2014; Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). Thus, this paper aims to examine the dependencies of job engagement and perceived sustainability and assess the implications on Gen Y. Often, social sustainability and CSR are perceived as cursory phenomena that are not incorporated on a strategical level. Even though many companies have discovered the growing awareness for marketing purposes and use as promotion (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Gatti et al., 2019), a substantial transformation has not yet fully begun (Mikryukov et al., 2022). By connecting social sustainability with job engagement, a crucial factor for financial success (Raub & Blunski, 2014), this dissertation aims to emphasise the beneficial economic implications that this topic holds. Thus, this research adds economic perspective to the profound topic of social sustainability.

In the further research of this dissertation, internal communication is also embedded. The questionnaire contains a supplementary set of six questions that focus on the internal communication experience of the participants. In this way, the supplementary dimension of internal communication is added to this paper by examining a possible connection with perceived social sustainability and job engagement. This may also have practical implications as it may depict an adapted course of action for companies.

To fully connect this to the real business environment, this paper includes an interview with the CEO of the German company hmmh which set itself various goals in the field of social sustainability. This additional element is deployed in order to gain insights of how social sustainability is embedded and internal communication is put in place under actual business circumstances.

## 5.2 Goals of the Thesis

The literature review opened up the general area of the study and presented the most relevant and recent research. The scientific question was introduced and linked to the literature. At this point the research goals of the thesis will be set up and the scientific objectives will be explained.

The scientific question leads to the main goal of the thesis: an examination of a possible correlation of perceived social sustainability and job engagement. If the research approach shows that there is a positive correlation of perceived social sustainability and job engagement it would offer a new dimension to the topic. This would mean that social sustainability actions are not just relevant to a company for external reasons such as media attention, PR, or marketing but it would facilitate the intrinsic dimension that companies should be interested in social sustainability for their own self-serving economic interest. Given that the goal of this research is to predicate a universal statement, the survey addressed Gen Y individuals in general without any limitation of an industry, region, job level, or seniority.

The survey of this dissertation is based on two existing frameworks: perceived social sustainability and job engagement. The latter offers one great advantage: Gallup's Q12 is one of the most well-known and most used frameworks in this field of research. Firstly, it has been approved for its relevance, reliability, validity, and meaningfulness (Haekal & Ginting, 2019). Secondly, due to its enormous distribution and global utilisation, it is possible to compare collected data to the published data of other countries. Every year, Gallup issues a highly respected and elaborate report, the *State of the Global Workplace*, which specifies the engagement data for the total of 96 countries involved. The used research design enables two relevant aspects: by limiting the participants of the survey to Germany it is possible to draw inter-country comparisons and assess the worldwide situation of engagement. Additionally, this study only included individuals of Gen Y, a limitation that does not apply to the Gallup survey. Thus, it is possible to review the German data and examine the potential generational differences in the country when it comes to job engagement. These are substantial upsides of the Gallup Q12 framework for the scientific objectives and meaningfulness of this research.

Furthermore, the aspect of internal communication is part of the research. It is intended to examine the role of internal communication on perceived sustainability and job engagement and investigate if there is a positive correlation with any of the two variables. This could amplify the cognisance on internal communication and amplify its role in the field of social sustainability and engagement. A number of internal communication questions were co-developed with communication experts to investigate this topic.

Finally, this dissertation aims to verify the theoretical findings in the literature and the quantitative insights from the survey with the practical assessment of Mr. Messerknecht and hmmh. Thus, it will be possible to identify overlapping, differences, and further elements that are linked to one another. This aims to give the research are more factual exemplification and depth.

## **6. The Field of Research**

The literature review was conducted to depict the field of research and assess recent studies. Hereby, relevant concepts and frameworks were noticed and evaluated. The following subchapters introduce underlying frameworks that have been utilised for this research. The last segment covers the co-designed set of questions regarding internal communication. Thus, the conceptual map of this dissertation will be set up.

### **6.1 Gallup Institution and Engagement Framework**

The job engagement of employees is a known and substantial factor for the productivity of a company. Therefore, this area of research does already exist and offers a variety of studies. The Gallup Incorporation is an American analytics and advisory company and conducts several surveys and opinion research. The institution is especially acknowledged and known for their annual survey: the Gallup World Poll which tackles various topics such as infrastructure, governmental affairs, and shelter. Furthermore, the survey addresses the general well-being of people and their job situation. The extensive survey collects profound data of the individual welfare of people and their job-related perception (Nink, 2018; Tortora et al., 2010).

The survey is conducted on a yearly basis since 2005 in 160 countries. These countries reflect 98% of the world's population. The survey has widely gained reputation and is accepted for one of the most elaborate and relevant canvasses for human affairs worldwide (Deaton, 2008). Due to its outstanding relevance, major governmental institutions and governments such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) rely on it and use it as their primary source of research on quality of life (Boarini et al., 2012). Considering its coverage, relevance, and scientific acceptance, the Gallup World Poll is a well-established and proven research concept. The survey contains of several sub-segments such as life evaluation, environmental, social, engagement, and governance (Gallup Inc., 2022b).

The segment *Work and Workplace* is the relevant segment for the research question. This part consists out of 25 questions in total. Based on Gallup's decades of worldwide experience, they condensed it in the 1990s into the *Gallup's Q12 Employee Engagement Survey* which consists out of twelve unique questions. The intention was to provide a

universal questionnaire that would evaluate the level of job engagement accurately and reliably with a minimal number of items to make it as actionable for the real business environment as possible (Gallup Inc., 2021). This is one of the reasons for the success of the questionnaire (Forbringer, 2002). After the initial process of identifying the exact questions with the highest correlation to the parameter job engagement, they validated it in 2.500 business with over 105.000 employees to investigate if the survey was in fact measuring engagement.

The results showed that individuals who had a higher score for the twelve questions tended to work at companies with a higher level of customer satisfaction rating, better performance, higher profit, and a smaller turnover. Furthermore, the statistical evaluation revealed that people would respond differently based on their business unit alignment rather than overall company alignment. This indicates that the responses were heavily influenced by their direct working environment and conditions rather than by the actions and policies of the superordinate company in general (Forbringer, 2002). The finding stresses the relevance of the direct working environment and gains recognition in questions like five or ten (see below).

The questionnaire has been published and utilised for over 25 million people in 70 languages as of 2022 (Russell, 2022).

The twelve questions are (Gallup Inc., 2021):

### **Gallup's Q12 Engagement Framework**

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?

11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?

12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

A Likert scale offers statements and the participants of the survey have to respond to that based on their level of agreement. Gallup's Q12 utilises a 5-point scale, (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *neutral*, (4) *agree* and five, *strongly agree* without the possibility to skip the question. This 5-point Likert scale is the most established version in science, other adaptations work with seven or ten responses (Joshi et al., 2015).

Additionally, Gallup found out that some of the twelve questions correlate significantly higher with the variable of job engagement than others. Items have been prioritised, starting with the most powerful items as a foundation. This does have a practical implication. It is important to state that Gallup is a profit-driven company that offers analytics, polls, and consulting (Spiro, 2003). Thus, they do provide supplementary analysis, information, and consulting recommendations that are directed at managers and CEO that want to evaluate and increase the level of job engagement of their employees. For this reason, the questions are prioritised or ranked, meaning that there is an ascending order in which leaders are advised to improve job engagement. (Forbringer, 2002; Gallup Inc, 2021). This hierarchy is depicted by Gallup in a pyramid that is displayed below.

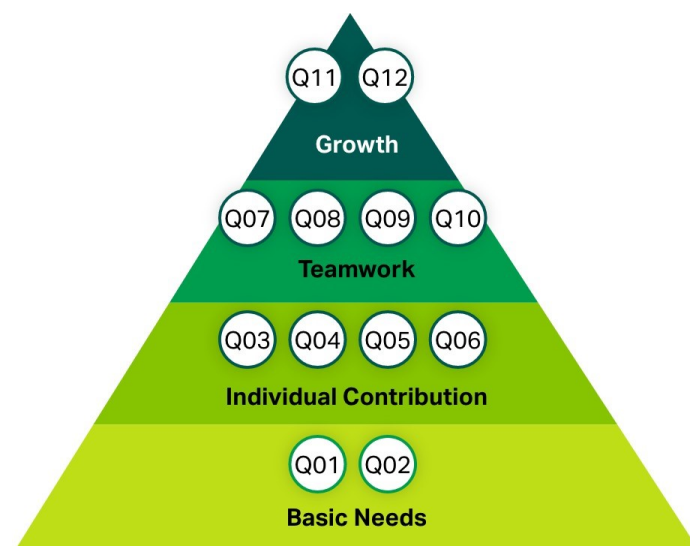


Figure 10: Hierarchy of Gallup's Q12 (Gallup Inc., 2021)

Regarding the pyramid and the four levels, Gallup states "managers do not "finish" level one and then move on to level two. They must ensure that employees' needs are met on level one

first, then continue to deliver on the prior level while meeting their needs on the second, third and fourth levels (Gallup Inc., 2021). Using Gallup’s illustrated classification, it would mean that managers are required to take care of the basic needs of their employees, then adding the levels of individual contribution and teamwork while the prior level(s) still necessitate effort. The final level is growth and can only be achieved through constant maintenance and care of the other four levels.

The hierarchy of Gallup’s Q12 describes the necessity that the objective of job engagement is a constant aspiration with full attention on all employee’s needs (Gallup Inc, 2021; Russell, 2022).

Interestingly, this illustration builds up on one of the origins of employee behaviour theory, the Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Putri & Welly, 2014).<sup>19</sup> Like Maslow, who used five groups of human needs, Gallup groups the Q12 questions (Q 1-12) into groups as well, four in total. As shown in figure 10, Q1 and Q2 build the foundation with the group of *Basic Needs* or the topic *What do I get*. Q3, Q4, Q5, and Q6 are considered *individual contribution* or *what do I give*. Level three is labelled *teamwork* with the questions Q7, Q8, Q9, & Q10 and the term *do I belong*. The pinnacle of the pyramid is named *growth* with the questions Q11 & Q12 and the issue *how can we all grow*. As mentioned before, all questions appear in chronological order due to its significance for the level of engagement.

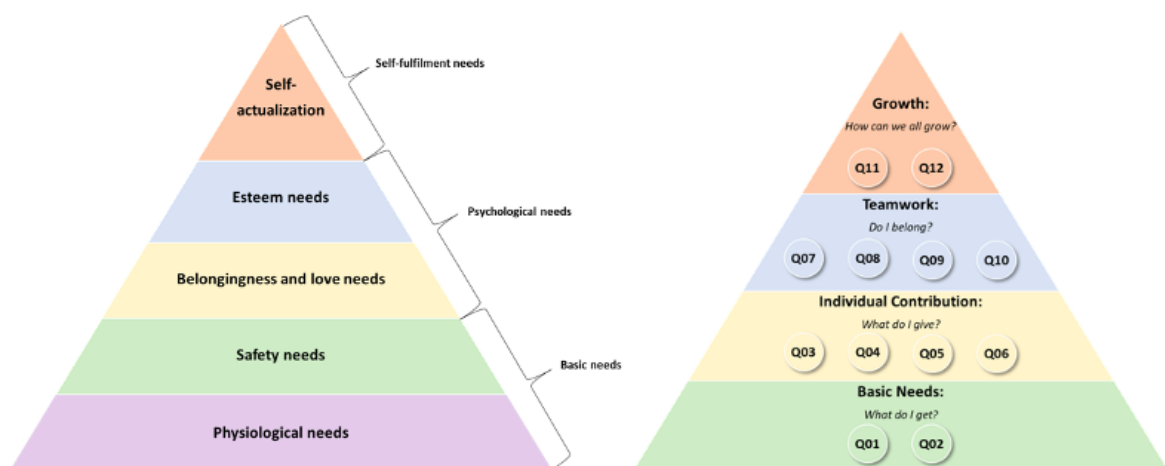


Figure 11: Comparison of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (left) and Gallup’s Q12 hierarchy (right)

<sup>19</sup> Further explanation in subchapter "2.1 Classification of different types and characteristics".

Alike the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, each of the levels of the Q12 pyramid build up and supplement each other. That means that if one level of needs gets fulfilled it is not possible to close and neglect it. It still requires constant awareness and caring for reaching a higher level of needs or in the case of Gallup's Q12 an increased level of job engagement (Forbringer, 2002). Figure 11 shows which Q12 questions can be related to which of the levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's level of physiological needs that encompass needs such as shelter, warmth, and clothing, are not represented in Gallup's Q12 as they are considered to be as absolute implicitness of a workplace (Forbringer, 2002). All of the other level do find a corresponding match in Gallup's Q12.

In my opinion, the clear parallel of the hierarchy of needs and Gallup's Q12 underlines the general relevance of Maslow's theory and shows its significance to date. Gallup's Q12 can be understood as a modern interpretation of Maslow as it adapted the general proposition towards a modern and practical concept. The elaborate research and validation of the Gallup Institute affirms the explanatory power and value of the framework. Thus, Gallup's Q12 is a substantial element of many publications on behavioural science to date (Brightenburg et al., 2020; Khanna, 2020; Nagori, 2019; Ramachandran et al., 2022).

Through extensive research over decades, Gallup has set up a framework for job engagement that has been the outcome of both practical and theoretical work utilising Maslow's initial ideas and giving them a modern and business-linked approach. His concept is depicted by Gallup's Q12 job engagement framework to date.

## **6.2 Perceived Social Sustainability Framework**

As elaborated in the literature review of this dissertation, tackling the topic of sustainability discloses several issues. Firstly, it is not sufficiently defined and delimited (Idowu, 2015). Secondly, the lack of research consequently leads to a lack of conceptual frameworks that cover social sustainability (Govindan et al., 2021). Up to date there is no social sustainability framework that has been scientifically established (Gould et al., 2017).

In 2018, Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė introduced a framework for perceived social sustainability (PSS). This means that they did not focus on the activities of a company, which would lead to problems regarding the delimitation of activities again, but rather on the employee perspective and the perception of the individual. Their framework put the

employee in the centre, zooming in on the factual percipience. This embraces the significance of employees within an organisation (Paauwe, 2004; Pfeffer, 2010) and its influence on economic success (Schönborn et al., 2019). Furthermore, it stays abreast of changes with the emerging war for talents and the need of companies to adapt to this shifted dependency (Busold, 2019). This connections gains further relevance when taking into account that social aspects of companies and work have more and more influence on job decisions of employees (Schönborn et al., 2019). Thus, it provides a framework that connects social sustainability with decision-making processes. The framework's approach to address factual perception and utilise an individual perspective of employees were the two main reasons why the concept of perceived social sustainability is the chosen framework of this dissertation.

The questionnaire contains out of 32 questions that are additionally grouped into six groups which will be further explained below.

The questions are as followed (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018):

### **Perceived Social Sustainability Framework**

#### **Employee participation** (five items)

1. Employees share their personal problems with line managers.
2. Employees share the work-related problems with line managers.
3. Employees provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.
4. Organisation encourages the employees to take responsibility for decisions.
5. Organisation encourages the employees to provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.

#### **Employee cooperation** (six items)

6. Organisation encourages the employees to cooperate by solving work-related problems.
7. Organisation encourages the employees to share work-related experience.
8. Organisation encourages team-working.
9. Organisation rewards the employees for cooperation activities.
10. Employees provide support for each other by solving work-related problems.
11. More experienced employees share their working experience with colleagues.

#### **Equal opportunities** (six items)

12. The compensation system is understandable to employees.

13. The compensation system is fair.
14. The employees are paid the same for the same work.
15. Organisation ensures equal personal development opportunities for employees.
16. Organisation ensures equal opportunities for all candidates during the selection process.
17. Organisation ensures equal opportunities for males and females to further their careers.

**Employee development** (five items)

18. Organisation ensures possibilities for employees to develop general and professional competences.
19. Employee competence development is oriented to the future requirements.
20. Organisation ensures possibilities for employees to participate in fairs, internships.
21. Organisation applies different forms for employee development.
22. Organisation constantly encourages the employees to develop their competences.

**Health & Safety** (six items)

23. Organisation provides the necessary working equipment for the employees.
24. The workplaces fulfil safety requirements.
25. Organisation encourages the employees to give up bad habits.
26. Organisation provides good conditions for rest for its employees.
27. Organisation provides wellness opportunities for its employees.
28. Organisation provides good working conditions for its employees.

**External Partnership** (four items)

29. Organisation cooperates with other organisations for the purpose of employee development.
30. At request, the organisation provides recommendations for former employee.
31. Organisation accepts students for practice.
32. Organisation cooperates with other organisations for innovation projects.

As mentioned above the 32 questions are grouped into 6 segments or dimensions. A couple of things are important to mention here. The dimensions were picked based on elaborate research in the attempt to cover social sustainability in the most accurate way possible. Thus, the authors compared and compiled different studies and the few existing frameworks. Frameworks that were especially relevant for the development were the Global Reporting Initiative (Fernandez-Feijoo et al., 2014; Winters, 2021), the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development that is directly linked to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

by the UN that were mentioned above<sup>20</sup> (Bebbington & Unerman, 2018; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2014), the internal human and stakeholder participation framework (Labuschagne et al., 2005) and the core human resource management (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). All four frameworks were compared and assessed to extract the best fitting dimensions and questions for this specific approach.

The curation of the dimensions was done based on their utilised employee perspective. Therefore, segments were chosen that were able to cover the individual and perceived characteristic of their approach best. Nonetheless, the authors state that these dimensions still can just depict a partition of perceived social sustainability. Again, this represents one of the main problems of the field of research. They do suggest further research with adapted and/or augmented dimensions.

The six dimensions are (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018):

- Employee participation (Zaugg, 2009)  
Depicts the acknowledgement that individuals want to contribute and decide actively in their environment.
- Employee cooperation (Ehnert, 2009)  
Represents the need for teamwork, belongingness, and shared experience.
- Equal opportunities (Ter Haar & Copeland, 2010)  
Is defined by the existence of fairness and equal standards.
- Employee development (Harry, 2014)  
Describes the human aspiration to learn, grow, and develop skills and capabilities.
- Health and safety (Dawson & Zanko, 2011)  
This considers the disposal of a nurturing and healthy work environment.
- External partnership (Ehnert, 2009)  
Encompasses relations and exchange with external sources and knowledge transfer.

This questionnaire used again a Likert scale, providing statements for the participants that responded based on their level of agreement. In contrast to Gallup's Q12, using five, this framework uses a 4-point scale. Nonetheless, the same description for the poles is used, (1)

---

<sup>20</sup> Compare with chapter "1. Concepts of sustainability and keystones"

*strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *agree* and (4) *strongly agree* without the possibility to remain neutral as in Gallup's Q12 5-point scale.

The framework was part of a mixed-methods approach meaning that the dimensions were tested in conducted interviews in a social sustainability committed company first. Afterwards, a pre-test was executed to validate the dimensions and the linked questionnaire. Finally, the actual survey was executed in the same organisation. The validation of the survey (internal consistency and reliability) was carried out through Cronbach's alpha. A second part of the questionnaire covered the demographic information of the participants.

The developed framework bases on relevant literature and concepts. The statistical evaluation of the data showed that all six dimensions (employee participation, employee cooperation, equal opportunities, employee development, health and safety, and external partnership) established by Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė are significant for the level of perceived social sustainability (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). Therefore, the study extends the fragmentary research with an employee-perspective framework that was tested and validated accordingly.

The utilised individual approach facilitates two things. Firstly, it circumvents the definition problems of social sustainability actions on a corporate level. Secondly, it focusses on the individual perception which assesses the factual implications on the employees. This perception however, can be heavily influenced by communication and as this concept is taking the employee point of view, especially by internal communication of a socially committed company (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018)

### **6.3 Internal Communication Survey**

Framework one, Gallup's Q12 for job engagement, and framework two, perceived social sustainability by Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė, are both pre-established concepts. While Gallup has been subject of countless studies and implementations in the business world, the perceived social sustainability framework covers a blind spot in research and has not been further adopted in science up to date.

While both frameworks contain questions which can be related to (internal) communication, such as Q12 item four "in the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work" or in PSS item eight "organisation encourages team-working", there is no dedicated question that fully addresses internal communication or assesses it. As further elaborated at an earlier stage<sup>21</sup>, communication is vital for the acknowledgement but also the success of social sustainable activities (Gallego-Álvarez et al., 2010), hence the variable has been added to the internal communication segment of the questionnaire.

Internal communication is segmented into three paths (top-down management to employee, bottom-up employee to management, and coequal peer to peer (Genç, 2017)). As this research focusses on social sustainability activities of corporate organisations, the top-down stream is the main concern. Moreover, employees are considered to be the crucial asset of organisations on an operational level for a functioning sustainability strategy and therefore vital for its effective implementation. The employee's perception is decisive for a successful realisation (Bednárík, 2019).

These considerations led to the belief that a segment on internal communication in the questionnaire would be beneficial for the meaningfulness of this dissertation and the subsumption of the results of the other two frameworks.

Including the six demographic questions in the beginning, the survey already encompassed 50 items with framework one and two. Thus, the last segment on internal communication of the developed questionnaire was planned to be as dense and compact as possible. However, existing frameworks incorporated social sustainability related internal communication in specific industry or segment only (Ellerup Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Sasidharan Dhanesh, 2012). The narrowed approach to assess internal communication was not fitting this dissertation as it intended to address employees of all industries across a large variety of companies, not taking into account whether these companies are actively engaged in social sustainability efforts. Therefore, I chose a more generic approach that would include corporate internal communication in general and touch social aspect parenthetically, as in question two ("I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication").

---

<sup>21</sup> Compare subchapter "1.2.2 Internal Communication of Social Sustainability".

Thus, a self-established set of questions was required. For this reason, relevant research for the final composition of the questionnaire was compiled to incorporate the most important aspects while staying as lean as possible. The most important elements of internal communication is covered by recent research that address multiple topics such as stream of information, channels, development, and motivation (Tench & Yeomans, 2017; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2021; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Vermeir et al., 2018; Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2007).

This general foundation of research was compared and aligned with the exploratory interview and the statements of Mr. Messerknecht. In the interview, he emphasised that a large amount of internal communication happens unscheduled in the workaday life. Hence, the questions were designed to cover internal communication in general without a specific focus on channels or routines. However, he did elaborate on different internal events or corporate meetings that seemed to play an important role for the stickiness and collaboration of hmmh. The business insights of the interview were used to enhance the theoretical approach of the research.

Therefore, in statement one a variety of potentially relevant forms and channels of internal communication are listed to clarify that all of such activities are considered to be part of internal communication and hence should be evaluated by the participants of the survey ("my company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.>"). Another aspect that was implemented based on the interview was the knowledge transfer and different forms of personal development. Mr. Messerknecht spoke about several institutional structures that were set up for a better collaboration between people, units, and branches. He stressed the importance of these ties for the communication and exchange within hmmh (e.g., question five: "I learn through internal communication of my company.>").

Moreover, a direct consideration of hmmh materials or tools could have been relevant and useful. However, to my knowledge, hmmh does not utilise a survey that would specifically address internal communication. Their annual survey also does not incorporate a dedicated question regarding this topic. A direct reutilisation of the hmmh survey was not possible. Nevertheless, I considered it to be significant to connect the theoretical questions of my

research on internal communication and the general insights of hmmm with a real business case. Hence, I consulted another company that specialises on advising on internal communication and the evaluation of it on a daily and professional level. This aimed to give this segment further substance.

In this context, I was able to speak to a communication specialist, Ebru Ulu-Genisel. She is a Manager in the Human Capital team at the global player Deloitte (*Ebru Ulu-Genisel | LinkedIn*, 2023). Deloitte is a professional services network and is considered as one of the Big Four, a group of the four biggest accounting firms measured by revenue (Sikka, 2016; Ucoglu, 2020). As Deloitte is a service network, its operation subclasses into audit & assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax, legal, and Deloitte private (*Our Services | Deloitte*, 2023). With more than 410.000 employees globally, Deloitte is the biggest and the most revenue-generating company amongst the big four (*Statista - Big Four Employees*, 2023; *Statista - Big Four Revenue*, 2023).

Ms. Ulu-Genisel has specialised in advising on HR transformations and is an expert in organisational change and communication. Her focus on strategic communication includes communication strategy setting and leadership alignment, communication planning and execution, and communication effectiveness assessments. In this field of work many of her projects include transformational change, knowledge management, re-organisation, and communication of all kinds.

During our video call through zoom on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, she shared some key insights and facts based on her extended client project experience of leading various change and communication streams. Ms. Ulu-Genisel has broad experience in assessing and executing communication for all stakeholder groups, from the Executives to the employee base, of big players in the Swiss market.

The Human Capital team uses a variety of tools e.g., interviews, focus groups, assessments, and surveys throughout the project lifecycle to measure status quo, progress, and success. Examples of such tools are communication effectiveness, change readiness, skills and capabilities assessment, training needs analysis and many more.

Key benefits Ubru-Genisel highlighted when addressing any type of communication to all employees: a better understanding of the factual circumstances of the work environment, an augmented vision of company culture and status, the conjunction with managerial objectives and information, the acknowledgement of the employees, and data collection.

She was not able to provide me with an actual sample of a project or even a survey due to client confidentiality reasons. Furthermore, Ms. Ulu-Genisel stated that there is no universal approach that Deloitte would deploy for their internal communication projects. Nonetheless, she was willing to validate the internal communication questions that I prepared for the meeting. She did confirm that the presented survey would also be a viable tool for one of her projects as one segment in a bigger and more elaborate survey (which is the case in this questionnaire as well). Moreover, she affirmed that the utilisation of a Likert scale is standard use for Deloitte. The conversation with Ms. Ulu-Genisel was the perfect opportunity to get practical backing for the self-developed questions. Her high-level job and fitting job specification facilitates some level of validation for the questionnaire from a practical business perspective which was the set goal for this interview.

The literature research on internal communication, the interview with Mr. Messerknecht, and the consulting insights shared by Ulu-Genisel led to the aggregation of six questions.

### **Self-established internal communication segment**

1. My company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.).
2. I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication.
3. I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication.
4. My company's internal communication positively encourages me.
5. I learn through internal communication of my company.
6. I value my company's internal communication.

This segment utilises the same Likert scale as the Q12 questionnaire, (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *neutral*, (4) *agree* and five, *strongly agree* without the possibility to skip the question.

## 7. Explaining the Approach

When assessing the items of the two frameworks on job engagement and perceived social sustainability it became evident that both frameworks are closely linked and supportive of one another. This conclusion can be substantiated when examining the related items of these two frameworks. As the PSS framework is more detailed than Gallup's Q12 (32 / 12 questions) there are overlapping or related items. Example one shows how PSS and Q12 are both addressing the personal well-being of the participant (PSS: *"Employees share their personal problems with line managers."* and Gallup: *"My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."*). Example two shows how personal development is also relevant for both frameworks (PSS: *"Organisation applies different forms for employee development."* and Q12: *There is someone at work who encourages my development.*). These examples show the level of correlation of the two frameworks and hence the correlation of the concept of PPS and Job engagement. The differential focus of both frameworks was crucial as the two concepts appear to be connected but not generally overlapping.

After selecting and developing the most fitting two relevant frameworks and questions, it was crucial to set up a universal and easy-accessible form for the survey. In the questionnaire there was a total of 56 questions, composed of six demographic questions, 12 questions from Gallup's Q12, 32 questions from the perceived social sustainability framework and six self-established internal communication questions. A demographic segment was needed to be able to analyse potential peculiarities in the data. Question one (*"what is your age?"*), two (*"what gender do you identify as?"*), three (*"what is your total annual income?"*), four (*"how many employees work at your organisation?"*), five (*"what describes your current job level best?"*), and six (*"for how long have you been working at your current employer?"*) seemed to fitting pieces of information to shed light on the individualistic job situation and find peculiarities. This has multiple reasons: Research shows that larger companies are more likely to have sustainability embedded in their overall strategy (Hörisch et al., 2015). Moreover, the job level, job tenure, and age are potential influence factors for job engagement (Mazzetti et al., 2021), income is relevant for social sustainability (Cuesta et al., 2022).

As mentioned before, two different frameworks were used in the questionnaire. The job engagement framework operates with a 5-point Likert scale, the perceived social sustainability framework with a 4-point scale. It seemed important and adjuvant to find a

universal approach for all frameworks. This benefits an easier comparison among the frameworks, furthermore it simplified the handling of the questionnaire for all participants which would minimise incorrect statements and improve participation rate (Jenn, 2006; Rahi et al., 2019). Therefore, a universal rating scale seemed beneficial. Two options were utilised regarding the two frameworks: a 4-point and a 5-point scale. The 4-point scale had the important advantage that the central tendency would be prevented by a forced decision towards approval or refusal (forcing people to make a decision towards one direction) (Derrick & White, 2017; Pimentel, 2019).

However, the latter option, a 5-point scale, offered multiple benefits that outweighed this notion: Firstly, Gallup's Q12 is a well-established framework with a significant track record of significance. Secondly, and more importantly, due to its dispersion and implementation up to date, a comparison with published Gallup data would only be viable if the same scale would be utilised (Gallup Inc., 2022b). To allow the comparison of this research with former Gallup data, it was decided to utilise the 5-point scale.

This approach was adopted for the internal communication segment as well as for the demographic questions, opting in for a 5-point scale for the entire questionnaire. However, there are two exceptions in the demographic segment: For the gender item there are only four options ("*female*", "*male*", "*diverse*", and "*prefer not to answer*"). The same applies for the question on the job level ("*entry level*", "*mid-level*", "*manager level*", and "*executive level*"), as these indications offer an accurate range to cover all relevant job level (Herrity, 2023; Spacey, 2018). Furthermore, for some of the questions the option "*prefer not to answer*" was given. For the two scales and the internal communication segment it was decided against offering this response as the middle answer (choosing three out of the 5-point scale) already enabled a contained indication for the participant. Furthermore, a statistically significant indication (approval or refusal of a statement) was considered to be crucial for a consistent analysis of data (Krosnick, 2018). Nonetheless, this option ("*prefer not to answer*") was provided for questions that hold a certain level of intimacy and reservation. A pursued low level of discontinuation was another aspect of this approach (Faran & Zanbar, 2019; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2012). However, the utilised platform Google Forms does not offer an analysis of data for drop-out participants. These considerations were taken into account in the planning and conceptual design of the questionnaire.



## 8. Application and Execution

The 56 questions in total were distributed through the online service Google Forms. As this survey sought to examine the influence of perceived social sustainability on Gen Y without any specific limitation of industry, region, or social aspect a universally accessible and simple to use digital platform was selected to be the best fit (Vasantharaju & N.S., 2016). In order to prevent the predominance of specific social group alignment the survey was spread using a multi-channelled approach. The link to the questionnaire was distributed on as many possible platforms and sites as possible such as WhatsApp, Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, forums of universities, analogue notice boards, and many more. The generated link to the survey was complex and difficult to type in manually. For the ease of use, a short link was generated through the provider bit.ly. Bit.ly securely shortens links and enables link personalisation allowing participants to easily grasp the content of the survey on a high level to engage potential participants immediately. Two short links were created: bit.ly/socialsustainability and bit.ly/sozialenachhaltigkeit (German translation of the term social sustainability (Linguee.de, 2023)). This additional process facilitated the digital only participation starting from an analogue touchpoint such as a notice board (Fang et al., 2021).

The distribution of the link started on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 and lasted until the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2023. A total of 233 people participated in the survey with four completed survey responses being eliminated (2, 24, 69, and 99) due to conspicuous statements:

- 2: 100 % of the time with the same response
- 24: 100 % of the time with the same response in framework two
- 69: 100% with the same response in framework two
- 99: 100% with the same response in framework one and two

After data cleaning, 229 responses were prepared for further data analysis using SPSS. In the following segment, the cleaned data will be summarised and presented.

### 8.1 Sample Description

In the statistical analysis a sample size of  $N = 229$  participants was included. 131 (57%) of the participants were female, 96 (42%) were male, and 2 (1%) identified as diverse. The majority of the surveyed individuals were in the age range of 32 to 35 years ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD$

= 1.27). Over half of the surveyed individuals reported earning a gross annual income between 25.000 and 99.999 Euros ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) (see table 1).

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the studied sample

		Sample size	
		N = 229	
		%	n
<b>Gender</b>			
	Female	57.2	131
	Male	41.9	96
	Divers	0.9	2
<b>Age</b>			
	20 – 23	9.2	21
	24 – 27	18.8	43
	28 – 31	23.1	53
	32 – 35	26.2	60
	36 – 40	22.7	52
<b>Income<sup>1</sup></b>			
	< 24.999	19.7	44
	25.000 – 49.999	28.3	63
	50.000 – 74.999	26.0	58
	75.000 – 99.999	9.9	22
	> 100.000	16.1	36

<sup>1</sup> yearly income in Euro

The questions regarding work context (see table 2) showed that two-thirds of the surveyed individuals were employed in a company with more than 50 employees. Only 7% reported working in a company with less than 10 employees ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). Over 50% of the surveyed individuals reported holding positions at the mid- and manager level. Only approximately 5% of the surveyed individuals stated that they were employed at an executive level ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). The average years of employment of the studied sample was between "1 – 2" and "3 – 5" years ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ).

**Table 2:** Characteristics of the working context of the studied sample

	Sample size	
	%	<i>n</i>
<b>Employees</b>		
< 10	7.0	16
10 – 49	17.0	39
50 – 249	24.0	55
250 – 4999	27.5	63
> 5000	24.5	56
<b>Job Level</b>		
Entry Level	29.1	66
Mid-Level	42.7	97
Manager Level	23.2	53
Executive Level	4.8	11
<b>Experience</b>		
< 1 year	23.6	54
1 – 2 years	23.1	53
3 – 5 years	31.4	72
6 – 10 years	16.2	37
> 10 years	5.7	13

Using descriptive statistics to describe the studied sample, the strongest correlation was found between the job level and the reported income.<sup>2223</sup> This allows the conclusion that the higher the reported job level, the higher the reported gross salary ( $r_s = .609, p < .001, n = 221$ ). Additionally, it was found that the more experience the surveyed individuals indicated, the higher their reported job level was ( $r_s = .501, p < .001, n = 227$ ). Furthermore, a positive correlation (medium effect) was observed between the number of company members and the income ( $r_s = .378, p < .001, n = 223$ ) of the surveyed individuals, as well as between the reported experience and the gross salary ( $r_s = .366, p < .001, n = 223$ ).

One of the reasons for the six demographic question was the consideration that they could enable the analysis of peculiarities among certain groups such as age, gender, income, size of organisation, job level, or job tenure and, for example, a potential link of income and job engagement. Thus, the various data groups were analysed and validated according the three scales of perceived social sustainability, job engagement, and internal communication. The

<sup>22</sup> The assessment of correlation is conducted based on Cohen (J. Cohen, 1988, 1992):  $r = .1$  small,  $r = .3$  medium,  $r = .5$  large effect size.

<sup>23</sup> Evaluated based on Spearman's rank correlation with ordinal rank variables as they are not equally distributed. A comparison is carried out using ranks (Myers & Sirois, 2006; Prematunga, 2012; Prion & Haerling, 2014).

analysis did not reveal a specific correlation of any of the demographic questions and one of the three scales. The data showed an overall high level of approval without any peculiarities.

### **III. Results**

In this part the data of the quantitative survey will be presented. This will be done with descriptive and analytical statistics. Foundation for the structure will be the segmentation into the three main parts of the survey: job engagement, perceived social sustainability, and internal communication.

## **9. Frameworks**

The analysis will begin with a summary of the findings for each of the utilised scales. The internal communication segment will also be presented in a dedicated subchapter. Tables will display the data for a better visualisation and understanding.

### **9.1 Gallup's Q12 Engagement Framework**

The Gallup's Q12 was placed first in the survey after the demographic questions. In the framework ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .69$ ), the items "*I know what is expected of me at work*" (48.0%,  $n = 110$ ) and "*I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right*" (38.4%,  $n = 88$ ) received the highest approval ("*strongly agree*").

**Table 3:** Results of the segment based on Gallup’s Engagement Framework

				Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
<b><i>Basic Needs</i></b>		<b>4.21</b>	<b>.71</b>										
F1_01	I know what is expected of me at work.	4.33	.79	0.9	2	2.2	5	8.3	19	40.6	93	48.0	110
F1_02	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	4.08	.91	0.9	2	4.8	11	17.9	41	38.0	87	38.4	88
<b><i>Individual Contribution</i></b>		<b>3.58</b>	<b>.87</b>										
F1_03	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	3.54	.92	1.7	4	10.9	25	31.9	73	42.4	97	13.1	30
F1_04	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	3.20	1.31	14.0	32	16.6	38	24.0	55	26.6	61	18.8	43
F1_05	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	3.96	1.09	3.1	7	8.3	19	18.3	42	30.6	70	39.7	91
F1_06	There is someone at work who encourages my development.	3.62	1.18	5.7	13	14.4	33	18.3	42	35.4	81	26.3	60
<b><i>Teamwork</i></b>		<b>3.48</b>	<b>.78</b>										
F1_07	At work, my opinions seem to count.	3.78	1.09	3.9	9	9.6	22	20.5	47	36.7	84	29.3	67
F1_08	The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	3.60	1.15	6.1	14	11.4	26	22.7	52	36.2	83	23.6	54
F1_09	My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	3.81	0.90	2.2	5	5.2	12	22.3	51	49.8	114	20.5	47
F1_10	I have a best friend at work.	2.72	1.41	24.9	57	25.3	58	18.8	43	14.8	34	16.2	37
<b><i>Growth</i></b>		<b>3.63</b>	<b>1.09</b>										
F1_11	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	3.48	1.41	14.0	32	13.1	30	15.7	36	25.3	58	31.9	73
F1_12	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	3.79	1.10	3.1	7	10.9	25	21.0	48	33.6	77	31.4	72

The first statement shows an extremely high approval, the highest in the framework: 88% of the surveyed individuals agreed ("agree" or "strongly agree") with the statement *"I know what it expected of me at work"*. Moreover, over 70% of participants agreed with the statements *"I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right"* (76%,  $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), *"my supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person"* (70.3%,  $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ), and *"my associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work"* (70.3%,  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = .90$ ).

The statements *"I have a best friend at work"* (50.2%,  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), *"In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for good work"* (30.6%,  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ), and *"in the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress"* (27.1%,  $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) received far more refusal ("disagree" and "strongly disagree") by the participants. The complete overview of items can be seen in table 3.

Overall, the high level of approval for most of the statements is noteworthy and highly relevant for the evaluation of this framework and will be further elaborated in part IV, the discussion.

## **9.2 Perceived Social Sustainability Framework**

The framework of perceived social sustainability has been placed second in the questionnaire. In the framework ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) more than one third of the surveyed individuals showed very strong agreement with their evaluation of the statements *"my organization accepts students for practice"* (46.3%,  $n = 106$ ) and *"my organization ensures equal opportunities for males and females to further their careers"* (38.9%,  $n = 89$ ).

The items *"workplaces meet safety requirements"* (80.3%,  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), *"employees communicate with supervisors about work-related problems"* (73.4%,  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), *"my organization admits students for practice"* (72.9%,  $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), and *"my organization provides equal career opportunities for men and women"* (72.5%,  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) received the highest level of agreement ("agree" and "strongly agree") among respondents.

The studied sample agreed least ("strongly disagree" and "disagree") with the statements that their company creates wellness opportunities for employees (57.7%,  $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), the company collaborates with other organisations for employee development (43.3%,  $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), and employees share their personal problems with their supervisors (37.1%,  $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). The complete overview of items can be seen in table 4.

Again, it can be stated that the studied sample showed an overall high level of approval of the statements of this scale.

**Table 4:** Results of the segment based on the Perceived Social Sustainability Framework

				<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Neutral</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Strongly agree</b>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
<b><i>Employee Participation</i></b>		<b>3.57</b>	<b>.79</b>										
F2_01	Employees share their personal problems with line managers.	2.93	1.07	8.7	20	28.4	65	31.0	71	25.3	58	6.6	15
F2_02	Employees share the work-related problems with line managers.	3.93	1.00	1.7	4	9.2	21	15.7	36	40.6	93	32.8	75
F2_03	Employees provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.	3.67	1.01	3.1	7	8.7	20	28.4	65	37.6	86	22.3	51
F2_04	My organisation encourages the employees to take responsibility for decisions.	3.75	1.02	1.3	3	10.9	25	26.2	60	34.5	79	27.1	62
F2_05	My organisation encourages the employees to provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.	3.54	1.10	4.8	11	12.7	29	26.2	60	36.2	83	20.1	46
<b><i>Employee Cooperation</i></b>		<b>3.65</b>	<b>.78</b>										
F2_06	My organisation encourages the employees to cooperate by solving work-related problems.	3.73	1.01	2.6	6	9.6	22	23.6	54	40.6	93	23.6	54
F2_07	My organisation encourages the employees to share work-related experience.	3.63	1.12	3.9	9	14.0	32	21.8	50	35.8	82	24.5	56
F2_08	My organisation encourages team-working.	3.79	1.08	3.5	8	8.3	19	25.3	58	31.4	72	31.4	72
F2_09	My organisation rewards the employees for cooperation activities.	2.97	1.20	14.8	34	17.5	40	35.4	81	21.0	48	11.4	26
F2_10	Employees provide support for each other by solving work-related problems.	3.83	.95	2.6	6	4.4	10	26.2	60	40.6	93	26.2	60
F2_11	More experienced employees share their working experience with colleagues.	3.94	.97	1.3	3	7.0	16	21.0	48	38.0	87	32.8	75
<b><i>Equal Opportunities</i></b>		<b>3.42</b>	<b>.79</b>										
F2_12	The compensation system is understandable to employees.	3.32	1.12	7.0	16	16.2	37	28.8	66	34.1	78	14.0	32
F2_13	The compensation system is fair.	3.14	1.07	6.6	15	21.4	49	33.2	76	29.3	67	9.6	22
F2_14	The employees are paid the same for the same work.	3.16	1.30	12.7	29	21.8	50	19.7	45	28.8	66	17.0	39
F2_15	My organisation ensures equal personal development opportunities for employee.	3.35	1.12	4.8	11	20.5	47	24.9	57	34.1	78	15.7	36
F2_16	My organisation ensures equal opportunities for all candidates during the selection process.	3.60	1.01	2.2	5	13.1	30	26.2	60	39.3	90	19.2	44
F2_17	My organisation ensures equal opportunities for males and females to further their careers.	3.93	1.15	4.4	10	10.0	23	13.1	30	33.6	77	38.9	89
<b><i>Employee Development</i></b>		<b>3.29</b>	<b>.86</b>										

F2_18	My organisation ensures possibilities for employees to develop general and professional competences.	3.55	1.02	2.6	6	16.2	37	20.5	47	45.0	103	15.7	36
F2_19	Employee competence development is oriented to the future requirements.	3.36	.99	4.4	10	14.0	32	33.2	76	38.0	87	10.5	24
F2_20	My organisation ensures possibilities for employees to participate in fairs, internships.	3.10	1.17	10.9	25	19.7	45	28.8	66	29.7	68	10.9	25
F2_21	My organisation applies different forms for employee development.	3.15	1.08	6.6	15	21.0	48	34.5	79	27.1	62	10.9	25
F2_22	My organisation constantly encourages the employees to develop their competences.	3.31	1.11	5.7	13	19.7	45	27.1	62	33.2	76	14.4	33
	<b>Health and Safety</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>.77</b>										
F2_23	My organisation provides the necessary working equipment for the employees.	3.88	1.02	2.2	5	9.6	22	17.0	39	40.6	93	30.6	70
F2_24	The workplaces fulfil safety requirements.	4.21	1.03	3.1	7	4.8	11	11.8	27	28.8	66	51.5	118
F2_25	My organisation encourages the employees to give up bad habits.	2.86	1.08	11.8	27	23.6	54	37.6	86	20.5	47	6.6	15
F2_26	My organisation provides good conditions for rest for its employees.	3.09	1.23	11.4	26	23.1	53	24.0	55	27.9	64	13.5	31
F2_27	My organisation provides wellness opportunities for its employees.	2.29	1.31	40.2	92	17.5	40	23.1	53	11.4	26	7.9	18
F2_28	My organisation provides good working conditions for its employees.	3.59	1.05	4.4	10	8.3	19	32.8	75	33.6	77	21.0	48
	<b>External Partnerships</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>.87</b>										
F2_29	My organisation cooperates with other organisations for the purpose of employee development.	2.80	1.31	22.3	51	21.0	48	21.4	49	25.3	58	10.0	23
F2_30	At request, the organisation provides recommendations for former employee.	3.37	1.10	4.4	10	16.2	37	36.7	84	23.6	54	19.2	44
F2_31	My organisation accepts students for practice.	4.03	1.15	4.8	11	6.6	15	15.7	36	26.6	61	46.3	106
F2_32	My organisation cooperates with other organisations for innovation projects.	3.25	1.33	11.8	27	20.1	46	22.7	52	22.3	51	23.1	53

### 9.3 Internal Communication Segment

Regarding the last segment, internal communication, the data shows that over 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "my company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.)" (62.0%,  $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) and "I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication" (59.8%,  $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

In addition, the collected data highlights it can be highlighted that approximately 30% of the surveyed individuals responded that they disagree or strongly disagree to the statement "I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication" (29.3%,  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), "my company's internal communication positively encourages me" (29.7%,  $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), and "I learn through internal communication of my company" (31.0%,  $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) (see table 5). The complete overview of items can be seen in table 4.

**Table 5:** Results of the segment on Internal Communication

			Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
My company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, news-letter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands etc.	3.78	1.09	3.1	7	9.6	22	25.3	58	30.1	69	31.9	73
I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication.	3.64	1.10	3.5	8	13.5	31	23.1	53	34.9	80	24.9	57
I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication.	3.20	1.15	7.9	18	21.4	49	26.6	61	31.0	71	13.1	30
My company's internal communication positively encourages me.	3.09	1.13	9.6	22	20.1	46	33.6	77	25.3	58	11.4	26
I learn through internal communication of my company.	3.13	1.15	8.3	19	22.7	52	30.6	70	24.9	57	13.5	31
I value my company's internal communication.	3.31	1.16	7.4	17	17.5	40	28.8	66	29.7	68	16.6	38

## 10. Correlation & Hypotheses Testing

In this segment the raised data will be compared based on the two established frameworks and the self-established segment. Potential correlations will be examined and tested based on the hypotheses.

### 10.1 Gallup's Engagement Framework & Perceived Social Sustainability

Subsequently, the bivariate correlation between the mean scores from Gallup's engagement framework ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) and the perceived social sustainability Network ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) was assessed. The correlation of both frameworks was statistically significant with a  $r_s = .663$  with a p-value of  $< .001$ , making it statistically significant ( $N = 229$ ). Accordingly, higher engagement scores were also associated with higher perceived social sustainability.

**Table 6:** Correlations between Subscales from Gallup's Engagement scale and subscales from Perceived Social Sustainability framework

		Gallup's Engagement scale			
		Basic Needs	Individual Contribution	Teamwork	Growth
Perceived Social Sustainability	Employee Participation	.281**	.547**	.538**	.511**
	Employee Cooperation	.308**	.600**	.506**	.570**
	Equal Opportunities	.291**	.351**	.318**	.315**
	Employee Development	.280**	.462**	.415**	.436**
	Health Safety	.319**	.417**	.378**	.370**
	External Partnerships	.200**	.335**	.293**	.346**

\*\*  $p < .01$

Furthermore, all subscales of the two frameworks correlated significantly with each other. The lowest effect sizes were found between "*basic needs*" and the subscales "*external partnerships*" ( $r_s = .200$ ), "*employee development*" ( $r_s = .280$ ), and "*employee participation*" ( $r_s = .281$ ). According to Cohen (J. Cohen, 1988, 1992), these correlations can be classified as weak. The strongest effects however, were found between the subscales "*employee cooperation*" and the subscales "*individual contribution*" ( $r_s = .600$ ) and "*growth*" ( $r_s = .570$ ). Accordingly, a higher

evaluation of "employee cooperation" was also accompanied by higher values in the assessment of "individual contribution" and "growth". The complete overview of correlation of the scales perceived social sustainability and job engagement can be seen in table 6.

For the frameworks job engagement and perceived social sustainability a high level of correlation can be stated.

## 10.2 Gallup’s Engagement Framework & Internal Communication

Regarding the correlations between the mean values of the subscales of Gallup Engagement Framework and the mean values of the internal communication framework, there was a significant correlation with medium effect size ( $r_s = .448, p < .001, N = 229$ ). High values in the subscales of the Engagement Framework were accompanied by high values in the statements on the Internal Communication segment.

**Table 7:** Correlations between subscales from Gallup’s Engagement framework and Internal Communications segment

		Gallup’s Engagement Framework			
		Basic Needs	Individual Contribution	Teamwork	Growth
Internal Communications Segment	My company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.).	.230**	.164*	.148*	.246**
	I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication.	.258**	.358**	.276**	.389**
	I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication.	.193**	.401**	.324**	.363**
	My company's internal communication positively encourages me.	.161*	.363**	.347**	.323**
	I learn through internal communication of my company.	.139*	.259**	.268**	.248**
	I value my company's internal communication.	.166*	.317**	.315**	.319**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

No correlations with a strong effect ( $> .50$ ) were found between the items of the internal communication segment and the subscales of Gallup's engagement framework. Based on  $r_s$ , the highest level of correlation of the two frameworks with medium strength were found in the significant correlations between "individual contribution" and the item "I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication" ( $r_s = .401, p < .001, N = 229$ ), and

between *growth*" and the statement "*I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication*" ( $r_s = .389, p < .001, N = 229$ ).

The smallest effect sizes were found in the relationships between "*my company has a well-established internal communication*" and "*teamwork*" ( $r_s = .148, p = .025, N = 229$ ) and "*I learn through internal communication of my company*" and "*basic needs*" ( $r_s = .139, p = .038, N = 229$ ). The complete overview of correlation of the scales engagement and internal communication can be seen in table 7.

Overall, Gallup's Q12 and the internal communication showed a lower but still significant level of correlation than Q12 and PSS

### 10.3 Perceived Social Sustainability Network & Internal Communication

Analysis of the Perceived Social Sustainability Network subscales and the Internal Communication Network statements also showed a positive significant relationship with a strong effect ( $r_s = .631, p < .001, N = 229$ ).

**Table 8:** Correlations between subscales from Perceived Social Sustainability framework and Internal Communications segment

		Perceived Social Sustainability Scale					
		Employee participation	Employee cooperation	Equal opportunities	Employee development	Health and Safety	External Partnerships
Internal Communications Scale	My company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.).	.146*	.251**	.253**	.388*	.362**	.333**
	I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication.	.415**	.393**	.370**	.467**	.467**	.354**
	I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication.	.415**	.458**	.426**	.541**	.516**	.417**
	My company's internal communication positively encourages me.	.413**	.478**	.384**	.516**	.525**	.373**
	I learn through internal communication of My company.	.356**	.384**	.323**	.442**	.480**	.433**
	I value my company's internal communication.	.461**	.432**	.435**	.488**	.520**	.426**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

The correlations between the subscales of the perceived social sustainability segment and the items of the internal communication framework were mostly significant on a medium level. The smallest effects were found in the correlations between "*my company has a well-established internal communication*" and "*employee participation*" ( $r_s = .146, p = .027, N = 229$ ), as well as "*employee cooperation*" ( $r_s = .251, p < .001, N = 229$ ).

In contrast, particularly strong effect sizes were found in the relationships between "*I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication*" and "*employee development*" ( $r_s = .541, p < .001, N = 229$ ), "*My company's internal communication positively encourages me*" and "*health and safety*" ( $r_s = .525, p < .001, N = 229$ ), and "*I value my company's internal communication*" and "*health and safety*" ( $r_s = .520, p < .001, N = 229$ ).

The complete overview of correlation of the scales perceived social sustainability and internal communication can be seen in table 8.

## **IV. Discussion**

This part focusses on the examination and the analysis of data. The findings of the results are assessed, evaluated, and linked to the scientific insights of the literature review. The goal is to find peculiarities and statements that offer realisations regarding the scientific state of knowledge. The second part concerns the introduced hypotheses of this dissertation. This segment will try to provide statements for the established assumptions.

## 11. Analysing the Data

Cohen's rating is the basis for the assessment of data ( $r=.1$  small,  $r=.3$  medium,  $r=.5$  large effect size.). All of the three examined sections showed medium to high correlation with each other depicting a strong connection among the three scales. This is the essence of the evaluation of data. Thus, it means that a higher approval of one framework is linked to a higher approval of another framework. This applies for all three segments and the three correlations. Connecting this to the overall statements of each section, implies that participants with a higher level of job engagement tend to indicate a higher level of perceived social sustainability ( $r_s = .663$ ) and a stronger approval of internal communication ( $r_s = .448$ ). The same applies to the correlation of perceived social sustainability and internal communication (IC) ( $r_s = .631$ ). Subsequently, this means that all three sections are correlated. Based on Cohen's rating, two out of the three correlations are large (Q12/PSS: .663 and PSS/IC: .631), one is considered to be moderately correlated although it is important to mention the high value within the medium effect scope (.448 of .499). The overall high level of correlation is notable and the crucial piece of information regarding the analysis of data.

The fundamental considerations that built the foundation of this dissertation can be confirmed. A statistically significant correlation of the three scales was proven and this association indicates that the three scales, job engagement, perceived social sustainability, and internal communication, are interconnected with each other. This general insight shows the high impact that each one of the variables has on employees and therefore the potential it holds for companies. The results are a sign of opportunity for companies as it opens up potential growth and advancement for each one of the variables. However, the interconnection also depicts the meaningfulness of conjoined actions for all three of the variables to accomplish highest effectiveness.

## 12. Evaluating the Initial Objectives

The main research question of this dissertation is "does perceived social sustainability influence job engagement of Gen Y?". Taking into consideration the proven correlation of the two addressed frameworks, it can be stated that perceived social sustainability is connected to a higher job engagement of Gen Y. If Gen Y employees experience social sustainability of their employer, they tend to show a higher level of job engagement. The large correlation implicates a strong connection of the two concepts. This is a significant insight as it shows that Gen Y employees are affected by more than just their own work environment and the circumstances that affect them directly. The actions of a company have an intangible impact and factual repercussions that go beyond the conventional influence radius. The special cognition is the ramifications it has on relevant KPIs for economic success. This interconnection could indicate that socially sustainable behaviour of companies can not only contribute to societal processes and fulfil an ethical purpose but may nurture a business requirement. Ethical behaviour cannot only be used as a marketing tool (Gatti et al., 2019) but can be understood as a viable approach for companies to accomplish a happier, more productive, more loyal, more constructive workforce with less sick days and less retention rate. All of these aspects are important indicators for a successful business (Cunha et al., 2022; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Schönborn et al., 2019).

The analysis of data indicated a large effect size for the connection of job engagement and perceived social sustainability ( $r_s = .663$ ). This correlation shows the statistically significant link of the two scales. However, it is crucial to stress that this figure shows a correlation, not a causality of the two scales. This dissertation does not prove a causal connection. The data shows that a higher figure in one of the scales is correlated to a higher figure in the connected scale. The correlation does not demonstrate that a higher level of perceived social sustainability causes a higher level of job engagement. Nonetheless, correlation is an important hint that a causality could be in place. The large correlation is an important hint for causality but not a proof (Schild, 1995; Wiedermann & Eye, 2016).

Furthermore, the correlation shows a bilateral link of two scales meaning that a higher level of perceived social sustainability is linked to a higher level of job engagement. This association works vice versa, meaning that a higher level of job engagement is correlated to a higher level of perceived social sustainability. This is one limitation of correlation analysis as they are not able to show the direction of dependency (Ness et al., 2016; Wiedermann & Eye, 2016).

However, existing research suggest that social sustainability and CSR do impact the behaviour of employees positively and additionally that they have a positive effect on the financial success of a business (Cunha et al., 2022; Schönborn et al., 2019). Taking this into account, the large effect size of correlation of the raised data indicates that a higher level of social sustainability leads to a higher level of job engagement. Individuals who perceive social sustainability could be more engaged as they discern their work as meaningful and important (Caligiuri et al., 2013).

This assumed stream of influence and dependency is somewhat supported by the bottom-up approach of this dissertation: The concept of perceived social sustainability opens up the employee perspective on corporate behaviour: It indicates how the individual is emotionally and mentally affected by company behaviour. The employee is not necessarily in charge of the social sustainability actions or directly affected by it. However, humans descry it on an individual level. Corporate behaviour has significant impact on employees as it can influence the perception of work and the reputation of the company (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Cunha et al., 2022; May et al., 2004).

In most cases, a single employee is not responsible for the social sustainability strategy of a company, this is established on a higher, managerial level (Al Amri et al., 2019; Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). Hence, employees are not the initiator but mainly the addressee of social sustainability. The chosen bottom-up approach of perceived social sustainability on an individual level substantiates this hierarchy and effectiveness. These considerations imply the assumption that perceived social sustainability is the cause and job engagement is the outcome in this cycle, suggesting a dependency and a potential causality of the two variables.

Connecting this notion with the mentioned implications of job engagement, it may mean that companies can substantially benefit if they invest in social sustainability actions. It is plausible that it will lead to a more engaged workforce and therefore to a better product, better service, better company culture and ultimately to more financial success (Cunha et al., 2022; Raub & Blunski, 2014).

The studied sample focused on Gen Y, encompassing participants between 20 and 40 years. As mentioned before, the utilised 5-point scale of Gallup's Q12 enables the drawing of a

comparison with data published from Gallup. Gallup only provides the specific data on what percentage strongly agreed with each statement in the US in the year 2022. It is important to mention that Gallup does not restrict its sample meaning that individuals of all age participate in contrast to the Gen Y sample of this dissertation (Gallup Inc., 2022a). In the US, 46% strongly agreed with the statement "*I know what is expected of me at work*" comparing to 48% in the studied sample. 36% of the US participants strongly agreed to "*I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right*", in the studied sample 38.4% strongly agreed. Among other statements ("*my supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person*": US 42% to 39.7%; "*at work, my opinions seem to count*": US 29% to 29.3%; "*I have a best friend at work*": US 20% to 16.2%; "*in the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress*": US 32% to 31.9%; "*this last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow*": US 32% to 31.4%) these examples show coherent data (accepting a delta of up to 5%). However, it is noteworthy that the participants showed a higher approval ("*strongly agree*") for the statements "*at work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day*" (US 34% to 13.1%), "*in the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work*" (US 30% to 18.8%), "*there is someone at work who encourages my development*" (US 33% to 26.3%), "*the mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important*" (US 33% to 23.6%) and "*my associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work*" (US 20.5% to 33%) show a higher level of approval for the US sample. Including the tolerated 5% of delta, the studied sample did not show a higher approval ("*strongly agree*") for any of the statements. The US however, had a higher figure for five of the statements. Comparing the two samples overall, it can be stated that for a seven out of twelve statements they show a high coherence, for the other five, the US had a higher approval. This trend can also be seen in the general data provided by Gallup. Their publication shows that North America has the highest level of job engagement of all examined countries (96). Germany shows a lower level of engagement (Gallup Inc., 2022a). The comparison of Gallup's data with the studied sample of this dissertation affirms this discrepancy.

Another research goal was the assessment of internal communication in the field of research among social sustainability and job engagement. It was assumed that functioning internal communication can nurture and boost both perceived social sustainability and job engagement. Perceived social sustainability and internal communication show a correlation of .631, hence a correlation of large effect. With the scale job engagement, a medium effect size of .448 is revealed. Thus, this also means that a higher level of internal communication is

connected to a higher level of job engagement and perceived social sustainability and vice versa. In contrast to the dependence of job engagement and perceived social sustainability, for internal communication a further interpretation regarding the streams of influence is more complex. Several studies show that internal communication has an important meaning for the well-being of employees, their overall job performance, and motivation (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Mubarak & Darmawan, 2019; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). However, the distinct causality appears to be bilateral. Nonetheless, studies imply that a well-established and active internal communication can improve job engagement and especially support socially committed companies with their strategy (Bednárík, 2019; Mubarak & Darmawan, 2019; Singh, 2013). Analyses of the collected data support the assumption that internal communication can be a viable tool to positively influence employees in combination with a social sustainability strategy.

The general cognition and prioritisation of internal communication does overlap with the insights of Mr. Messerknecht and hmmh. The final objective of this dissertation was the alignment of the theoretical research and the raised data with the practical insights that Mr. Messerknecht shared in the exploratory interview.<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, he did emphasise the relevance of a social strategy for the survival and success of the company. One of hmmh's main concerns is the management and recruiting of talent. Hence, employer branding is an essential issue for the company. The social strategy that hmmh implemented was portrayed as a genuine effort that was initiated and developed by workgroups of normal employees, not managerial structures. Nonetheless, Mr. Messerknecht emphasised the enormous potential of these actions for their hiring strategy as further parameters such as wages were not competitive compared to some of the international competitors. He apprehended the social strategy as a potential unique selling point to retain skilled workers and attract new hires. Furthermore, hmmh's annual survey enabled a monitoring of the well-being of the employees on a yearly basis. Through extensive interviews and corporate communication, the management tries to stay in close contact to the staff and utilises the feedback for additional actions, social efforts, or constant improvement of the working conditions. Mr. Messerknecht's perception on social sustainability, internal communication, and job engagement appear to be matching with the scientific level of knowledge and the collected data. Furthermore, he experienced a generational shift, meaning that Gen Y shows a distinguishable level of awareness for topics

---

<sup>24</sup> Compare chapter "4. Exploratory Interview" in this dissertation.

such as social sustainability, ethical behaviour, creation of value, and extended aspirations for their work, reinforcing the existing research on Gen Y (Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Domsch & Ladwig, 2015; Dwidienawati et al., 2021). These insights from an actual business environment substantiate the relevance of social sustainability and the strong influence on employees and its potential for relevant economic KPIs.

Generally speaking, the existing research of the field of social sustainability and job engagement can be supported by the data of this dissertation. The theoretical concepts do have a factual pertinence for Gen Y in Germany. This acknowledgement receives more and more appraisal compared to decades before. The Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse (AOK), the biggest association of statutory health insurance in Germany with over 27 million members, recently published an extensive report about the data they raised of 15.6 million insureds. The report<sup>25</sup> showed that people who reported to work for a socially responsible company based on their individual perception, tend to have fewer sick days, be more productive at work, and are more likely to stay loyal to their employer. The numbers highlight the discrepancy: Insureds who work for a socially responsible company indicate a high level of willingness to work (96,7%), high loyalty to their employer (95,6%), and a high level of job satisfaction (96,5%). Comparing that to the numbers of people who work for a company with a low level of social responsibility, the numbers are significantly lower: willingness to work (76,4%), loyalty (60,6%) and job satisfaction (69,6) (AOK, 2022; Speck, 2023). These figures strengthen and support the data of this dissertation. The correlation of the variables (willingness to work, loyalty, and job satisfaction) to the variable of social responsibility underlines the proven correlation ( $r_s = .663$ ) and the supposed causality of perceived social sustainability and job engagement. Many studies connect a high level of job engagement positively to an improved turnover rate and a higher productivity which can be interpreted as matching representatives for the variables in the AOK study (willingness to work, loyalty, and job satisfaction). This association substantiates the hypothesis of a potential causality between the scales of perceived social sustainability and job engagement.

Furthermore, a recent report has been published by an NGO that analysed the data of companies in the UK that implemented the four-day week. In a pilot study, the working time of 2900

---

<sup>25</sup> AOK has an important position in Germany as they insure around one third of all Germans. Furthermore, their data shows a distinct and remarkable advantage for socially committed companies. It is scientific fact that the three mentioned variables (willingness, loyalty, satisfaction) are key factors for successful companies.

employees in 61 companies was reduced from a five-day week to a four-day week, resulting in significantly fewer working hours with same salary. The results show that the total outcome of work remained the same, resulting in an increased hourly productivity. The participants indicated an improved work-life balance, a better physical and psychological well-being and a more enjoyable life. Companies reported a revenue growth of 1.4% (comparing to similar periods of time in the past, a 35% increase of income has been reported), less sick days, and a dropping retention rate (dropped by 57%). Thus, 56 of the 61 companies continue with the four-day week and will not cease it with the end of the trial (Lewis et al., 2023; Timsit, 2023).

Interestingly, the decrease of working hours did not lead to a decrease of productivity in total. This phenomenon has implications and conjunction to the data of this dissertation. Apparently, the reduced invested time was used more efficiently, resulting in the same level of productivity in total or even a surplus. The responsible and diligent corporate behaviour was not punished or led to disadvantageous position for the company, but rather resulted in benefits for employees (more leisure, better health, better well-being) and consequently for the employer (decreased retention rate, decreased sick days, increased awareness of potential talents). Other beneficial cost factors were not even examined but might become more and more relevant (such as a potential reduction of energy consumption, office space, and overhead). The results of this study can be applied on the scientific approach of this dissertation. The reduction of working hours can be interpreted as an act of social sustainability as it enables a more social life with less obligations and more spare time to organise life as it pleases the individual person. This aspect of leisure has direct representation on the questionnaire of this dissertation ("my organisation provides good conditions for rest for its employees"). By lowering the required amount of working hours for the employees, a company might be perceived as more socially sustainable which is connected to a higher level of job engagement through the data of this dissertation. An increased level of job engagement leads a higher level of productivity and hence the data of the four-day study reinforces the assumption of a causality between perceived social sustainability and job engagement.

These are two examples with high relevance and extensive media coverage of recent time. Nonetheless, Steffen Kampeter, the CEO of the Bundesvereinigung der Arbeitgeberverbände or Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) that represents the employers' side of about 70 % of all employees in Germany, gave a much-noticed interview after the four-day

week publication in the UK and demanded more willingness to work, longer working hours, and more performance (Tagespiegel, 2023; ZDF, 2023).

These developments are relevant for multiple reasons. Firstly, all of the three publishers are well-respected and established institutions (especially German AOK and German BDA). Secondly, the three publications received extensive media coverage. Lastly, the AOK in Germany is an important institution with political and societal relevance. Nonetheless, ultimately it is an insurance association with no power over employers or employees. Kampeter and the BDA however, represent every private company in Germany. The BDA and ultimately the individual companies have full power and area of responsibility to effectively initiate change in the job market and working conditions. Even though scientific research and independent institutions report distinct and clear advantages of a more socially responsible approach to work with measurable positive impact on economic KPIs, influential key figures and corporations still advocate against it. The denegation of scientific findings is noteworthy.

Research on organisational change identifies various reasons for corporate resistance, such as established patterns of thought, outdated work values, and the interests of individuals (Nave & Ferreira, 2019; Sales, 2019; Thakhathi et al., 2019). This dissertation tries to contribute to a changed perception of social sustainability and factual assessment of impact. Conventional, outdated conventions and regulations should give way to a more ethical and rational approach to work. The social considerations do not facilitate transformational change to date. Thus, the exposure of economic considerations and benefits should be the centre of attention. Evidently, it is needed to overcome encrusted patterns of thought and fight for reasonable awareness and rational discernment. Elaborate research on the one hand and powerful, extensive science communication on the other hand appear to be required.

## V. Conclusion

Sustainability has the goal to enable a prosperous and secured life with equal opportunities for all people worldwide and for future generations. The current state of our capitalistic system and the global disequilibrium disadvantaging billions of people on planet earth does not permit this ambition (Farhat, 2020; Frech, 2022; Roser, 2013). The climate change is probably the overarching topic that will concern humankind for generations to come (Hansen et al., 2013). The unfair allocation of resources and the climate change that will first and foremost impact poorer developing countries are just two examples why sustainability has an enormous social dimension and can be considered a social effort (Dempsey et al., 2011; Dillard et al., 2012; The World Bank, 2016; United Nations, 2011).

The concept of sustainability is portrayed by various authors with different dependencies and interconnections. The theory that realises the social dimension as the foundation and the enabler for the other dimensions seems to be beneficial in order to grasp the human responsibility and power (Boyer et al., 2016; Schneider & Clauß, 2020; Vallance et al., 2011). A human centered understanding puts humankind in the driver seat but also holds it responsible to achieve sustainability and improve living circumstances for everyone (Colantonio, 2009; James, 2014). In this sense ideally, people are in charge and accountable for the implementation of sustainable and fair development. Therefore, the human-based understanding of sustainability of Boyer (as shown in figure 5) highlights the need of a changed acknowledgement of social sustainability and ultimately sustainable development in general. Only if humankind accepts and administrates its leading role a fair and prosperous approach for all human beings can be seized. Social sustainability could be the destination board for true sustainable development.

However, the predominant cognition of neo capitalism and its pervasion hinder a dramatic change of course. A modification from within the order appears to be beneficial and needed. Just focusing on social aspects of sustainability does not provide the needed pertinence and grip to affect this stable and resistant system (Hay, 2020; Russo, 2020). To pursue significant change, it appears to be unfavourable to work against capitalistic mechanisms and significantly more effective to utilise the given conditions. By not only addressing the social responsibility but rather highlighting the economic benefits, a more sustainable modus operandi may be feasible (Frech, 2022; Kruja, 2013).

By focusing on a variable with a high economic relevance such as job engagement, this research highlights the capitalistic power of social sustainability (D. D'Amato et al., 2019; Matthies et al., 2020; Sternfels et al., 2021). Social sustainability is not a value in itself but rather a potential key differentiator with high economic power. Generally, the staff of a company is considered the most important asset with multiple influences and spillover effects (Al Ahad & Rahat Khan, 2020; Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006). Furthermore, a high level of engagement is connected to many positive outcomes such as increased productivity, lowered retention rate, improved mental and physical health, increased quality of work, and financial success of companies (Berry, 2010; Choi et al., 2015; Du & Roodt, 2010; Gallup Inc, 2022; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Gallup states that disengaged employees cost the world economy \$7.8 trillion in lost productivity (11% of global GDP) which substantiates the economic potential of job engagement (Gallup Inc, 2022).

This dissertation and existing research indicate that social sustainability and corporate ethical behaviour are effective and powerful tools to positively influence job engagement of employees and therefore the economic success of a company. Corporate social sustainability leads to more engaged employees and consequently to a more successful business (Cunha et al., 2022; De Silva & De Silva Lokuwaduge, 2020; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Schönborn et al., 2019). Connecting the possible enabling power of Boyer's cognition of the social dimension in sustainable development and the economic gravity of job engagement, the acceptance of human responsibility could be a gamechanger. Highlighting the economic aspect of social sustainability can function as a door opener and facilitator for sustainable development.

This implication is significant for the workforce in general. However, the focus on Gen Y is reinforced for three reasons: Firstly, Gen Y is considered to be the predominant generation on the job market, representing up to 75% by 2025 (Waljee et al., 2020). Secondly, the generational characteristics implicate a stronger awareness, cognition, and appraisal of ethical considerations compared to other generations (Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Domsch & Ladwig, 2015; Dwidienawati et al., 2021; Zainee & Puteh, 2020). Another factor that adds up on this is the emerging war for talents. Skilled employees are considered to be the scarcest resource there is on the contemporary job market. Companies have to strive intensively to attract the much needed personnel and challenge other competitors (Busold, 2019, 2019; Leng et al., 2015).

Studies affirm the assumption that social sustainability is a relevant factor and potentially even the decisive motive for the job selection among Gen Y (App et al., 2012; Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Cunha et al., 2022). The described perception of Mr. Messerknecht and hmmh support this hypothesis in the real business context.

Some studies started to establish a positive relationship between job engagement and social sustainability or CSR. Caligiuri et al. showed that employees who perceive their job as meaningful and relevant tend to be more engaged for their job (Caligiuri et al., 2013). Another study indicates that the effect size of corporate social behaviour on personnel is directly dependent on the individual attitude of the employee. The higher a person values ethical considerations, the more he is affected by it psychologically (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). This finding strengthens the focus on Gen Y of this dissertation as this social group tends to react stronger regarding ethical considerations (Aruna & Anitha, 2015; D. D'Amato et al., 2019). Furthermore, Glavas and Piderit also concentrate on the individual level to examine the effect on employees as it depicts an essential factor.

### **13. Recommended Course of Action**

The subsumption and the recommended course of action for companies and managers is unambiguous: A higher prioritisation of social sustainability efforts is essential. Not strictly for ethical reasons but rather to retain and nurture the economic success of a company. Social sustainability should not be interpreted as a useful marketing or communication tool but rather as an attainable strategic goal to pursue more financial success and attract the workforce of the future. Thus, social sustainability is no longer an additional attempt but rather an essential requirement for modern companies.

The aspiration to become a more socially sustainable company has been a growing topic in modern business. Hmh is one example where the social actions are implemented in the process structures of the company. Through their hiring strategy, it holds an important position for the company. As elaborated, the ethical and social aspirations of the company seem to be at least partially motivated by the personal background of Mr. Messerknecht and his approach to life. Nonetheless, he emphasised the implications and benefits the social actions of the company had, foremost regarding the hiring strategy and the retention rate. He described it as a potential strategic upside compared to other competitors. The results of this dissertation indicate that companies can obtain a strategic advantage if they invest in social sustainability and achieve a higher level of job engagement and productivity. Primarily this affects the internal dimension of a company. Additionally, the further examination of the external aspect and implications of social sustainability could highlight additional economic value for companies. The war for talent requires companies to do their best to adapt to the changed job market and reach the highest possible level of attractiveness for potential new hires. Gen Y, its established appraisal of social sustainability and its relevance for the job market in the near future opens up the relevance of social sustainability and its ramifications for hiring. Further research on social sustainability and its relevance for hiring and the competition for skilled workers could expand the economic perception of social sustainability. The perceived experience of Mr. Messerknecht and existing research indicate an eligible field of research.

Nonetheless, the possibilities of hmh are limited. Due to its size, product, and B2B business, it mainly gets regional attention and acknowledgement.

However, there are several examples of multinational companies that obligated themselves to sustainable development goals and a more ethical understanding of business. One example that received high attention throughout the world was the announcement of Yvon Chouinard, the

founder and owner of Patagonia, an American outdoor clothing company with a yearly revenue of \$1.5 billion, that the ownership of the company had been transferred to two trusts (Rosenberger, 2022). The proclaimed function of the Patagonia Purpose Trust and the Holdfast Collective is to utilise profit of the company to strengthen climate protection and sustain nature. Chouinard claimed that every dollar of profit will be invested in that goal (Erskine, 2022; Fend, 2022; Lange, 2022). This final step has been the completion of several Patagonia actions for a more sustainable world: The company pushed their suppliers for ethical supply chains and labour conditions, instituted legal proceedings against the American Government for more climate protection, donated to several trusts and non-governmental organisation, and advertises for a more responsible lifestyle through restrained consumption (of their own products) to name a few (Alkuwari, 2021; Gelles, 2018; LaGiurato, 2011).

One interesting narration of these efforts is the entanglement to the brand and product that Chouinard elaborated on in several interviews. He states that Patagonia lives on freedom, our world, and the preservation of mother nature. However, through economic growth humankind slowly destroy it and therefore the very base of Patagonia. Chouinard added that sustainable development can only be achieved by full acknowledgement of societal and ecological implications, the underlying principle of sustainable development. (Confino, 2013; Mendoza et al., 2017).

Patagonia is just one example how ethical considerations have led to an adapted understanding of responsible entrepreneurship that actively contribute to a more sustainable capitalistic system.

## 14. Limitation

The concepts, frameworks, and variables of this dissertation were selected to depict the scientific approach to the best possible extent. However, the research does have limitations and leaves room for future studies.

Firstly, the significant correlation of the three scales is notable. Secondly, all of the subscales do correlate as well. When examining the framework of job engagement and perceived social sustainability, certain overlapping does attract attention. As mentioned before, some of the items illustrate similarities.<sup>26</sup> One potential weakness of the frameworks could be the likeness of items from Gallup's Q12 and perceived social sustainability. This could lead to a statistical coherence of scales and variables (Schippers & Koscholke, 2020).

A viable approach to examine potential coherence, would be the analysis of causality. This dissertation uses the evaluation of correlation to reveal connections among scales. However, the explicit verification of causality and thereby the dependency could be a promising approach for future research.

Another amplification of this research could be the further expansion to other countries than Germany. This would enable a direct comparison among countries. Gallup data could be used to classify and validate results. Generally, data from Gallup could be used more extensively to benchmark findings and identify regional peculiarities. The inclusion of other age groups would be another feasible angle for studies.

Lastly, the validation of the internal communication segment could be a potential amendment of this research. The self-established segment was developed based on literature, the exploratory interview, and insights from Deloitte. The overall tonality and the integral parts were adopted based on existing research. Thus, the explanatory power seemed to be sufficient to highlight the relevance of internal communication for social sustainability and job engagement. Nonetheless, a full statistical validation of the items and the segment would support the scientific meaningfulness.

---

<sup>26</sup> Compare chapter "7. Explaining the Approach"

## Bibliography

Acemoglu, D., & Restrepo, P. (2020). The wrong kind of AI? Artificial intelligence and the future of labour demand. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 13(1), 25–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsz022>

Afonasova, M. A., Panfilova, E. E., Galichkina, M. A., & Ślusarczyk, B. (2019). Digitalization in economy and innovation: The effect on social and economic processes. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2019.19.2.02>

Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012). *What We Know and Don't Know About Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review and Research Agenda*. 38(4).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311436079>

Akbulut, B., Demaria, F., Gerber, J.-F., & Martínez-Alier, J. (2019). Who promotes sustainability? Five theses on the relationships between the degrowth and the environmental justice movements. *Ecological Economics*, 165, 106418.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2019.106418>

Al Ahad, A., & Rahat Khan, M. (2020). Exploring the Mediating Effect of Demographic Attributes on the Relationship between Employee Engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. *International Journal of Management and Sustainability*, 9(1), 11–23.

<https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.11.2020.91.11.23>

Al Amri, F. H., Das, A., & Ben-Ayed, O. (2019). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on employee engagement: The case of Qatar. *Business Strategy & Development*, 2(3), 180–191. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsd2.52>

Alcantara, C. (2021). *America's biggest companies are flourishing during the pandemic and putting thousands of people out of work*. Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/business/50-biggest-companies-coronavirus-layoffs/>

Amirkhizi, M. (2022). *Bilanz: Serviceplan steigert den Umsatz auf über 620 Millionen Euro*. <https://www.horizont.net>. <https://www.horizont.net/agenturen/nachrichten/bilanz-serviceplan-steigert-den-umsatz-auf-ueber-620-milionen-euro-201561>

Antecol, M. (1997). UNDERSTANDING McLUHAN: Television and the Creation of the Global Village. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 54(4), 454–473.

App, S., Merk, J., & Büttgen, M. (2012). Employer Branding: Sustainable HRM as a Competitive Advantage in the Market for High-Quality Employees. *Management Revue*, 23(3), 262–278.

Armstrong, M., & Taylor, S. (2020). *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Aruna, M., & Anitha, J. (2015). Employee Retention Enablers: Generation Y Employees - ProQuest. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, 12(3), 94–103.

Ashrafi, M., Acciaro, M., Walker, T. R., Magnan, G. M., & Adams, M. (2019). Corporate sustainability in Canadian and US maritime ports. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 220, 386–397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.02.098>

Assefa, G., & Frostell, B. (2007). Social sustainability and social acceptance in technology assessment: A case study of energy technologies. *Technology in Society*, 29(1), 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2006.10.007>

Atchison, T. J., & Lefferts, E. A. (1972). THE PREDICTION OF TURNOVER USING HERZBERG'S JOB SATISFACTION TECHNIQUE. *Personnel Psychology*, 25(1), 53–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1972.tb01090.x>

Aziri, B. (2011). *JOB SATISFACTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW*. 3(4).

Azzam, A. M. (2006). A Generation Immersed in Media. *Educational Leadership*, 63(7), 92–93.

Badura, B., Ducki, A., Meyer, M., & Schröder, H. (Eds.). (2022). *Verantwortung und Gesundheit*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-65598-6>

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13(3), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810870476>

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and Work Engagement: The JD–R Approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 389–411. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235>

Bali Swain, R., & Yang-Wallentin, F. (2020). Achieving sustainable development goals: Predicaments and strategies. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 27(2), 96–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2019.1692316>

Banihani, M., Lewis, P., & Syed, J. (2013). Is work engagement gendered? *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 28(7), 400–423. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2013-0005>

Barendsen, W., Muß, A. C., & Silvius, G. (2021). Exploring team members' perceptions of internal sustainability communication in sustainable project management. *Project Leadership and Society*, 2, 100015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plas.2021.100015>

Bartol, A., & Herkommer, E. (2004, April 6). *DER AKTUELLE BEGRIFF - Bundestag*. <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/194082/f326b04552483bbb9efad8b0fb0696d2/nachhaltigkeit-data.pdf>

Basiago, A. D. (1998). Economic, social, and environmental sustainability in development theory and urban planning practice. *Environmentalist*, 19(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006697118620>

Bebbington, J., & Unerman, J. (2018). Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 31(1), 2–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-05-2017-2929>

Bednárík, J. (2019). CHANGE OF PARADIGM IN PERSONNEL STRATEGY – CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION. *Communication Today*, 10(2), 42–57.

Berger, R. (2022). *Global CEOs Convene In New York To Learn New Rules Of Engagement*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rodberger/2022/11/07/global-ceos-convene-in-new-york-to-learn-new-rules-of-engagement/>

Berry, M. (2010). Predicting Turnover Intent: Examining the Effects of Employee Engagement, Compensation Fairness, Job Satisfaction, and Age. *Doctoral Dissertations*. [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_graddiss/678](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/678)

Beschorner, T. (2005). Schillernde Begriffe und ihre Deutung. *Ökologisches Wirtschaften - Fachzeitschrift*, 20(3). <https://doi.org/10.14512/oew.v20i3.402>

Bevan, D., Corvellec, H., & Faÿ, E. (2011). Responsibility Beyond CSR. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1170-9>

Bican, P. M., & Brem, A. (2020). Digital Business Model, Digital Transformation, Digital Entrepreneurship: Is There A Sustainable “Digital”? *Sustainability*, 12(13), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12135239>

Blegen, M. A., & Mueller, C. W. (1987). Nurses’ job satisfaction: A longitudinal analysis. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 10(4), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770100405>

Blyth, M. L., Friskey, E. A., & Rappaport, A. (1986). IMPLEMENTING THE SHAREHOLDER VALUE APPROACH. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 6(3), 48–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb039119>

Boarini, R., Comola, M., Smith, C., Manchin, R., & Keulenaer, F. de. (2012). *What Makes for a Better Life?: The Determinants of Subjective Well-Being in OECD Countries – Evidence from the Gallup World Poll*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k9b9ltjm937-en>

- Boesso, G., Favotto, F., & Michelon, G. (2015). Stakeholder Prioritization, Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility and Company Performance: Further Evidence. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 22(6), 424–440. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1356>
- Böhringer, C. (2003). The Kyoto Protocol: A Review and Perspectives. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 19(3), 451–466. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/19.3.451>
- Boström, M. (2012). A missing pillar? Challenges in theorizing and practicing social sustainability: introduction to the special issue. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 8(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2012.11908080>
- Boyer, R. H. W., Peterson, N. D., Arora, P., & Caldwell, K. (2016). Five Approaches to Social Sustainability and an Integrated Way Forward. *Sustainability*, 8(9), Article 9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8090878>
- Brad Shuck, M., Rocco, T. S., & Albornoz, C. A. (2011). Exploring employee engagement from the employee perspective: Implications for HRD. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 35(4), 300–325. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591111128306>
- Brightenburg, M. E., Whittington, J. L., Meskelis, S., & Asare, E. (2020). *Job Engagement Levels Across the Generations at Work* [Chapter]. Global Applications of Multigenerational Management and Leadership in the Transcultural Era; IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9906-7.ch004>
- Brosdahl, D. J. C., & Carpenter, J. M. (2011). Shopping orientations of US males: A generational cohort comparison. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 18(6), 548–554. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2011.07.005>
- Brown, S., & Leigh, T. (1996). A New Look at Psychological Climate and Its Relationship to Job Involvement. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81, 358–368. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.81.4.358>

- Brundtland Commission Report.* (1987).  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>
- Buse, D. K. (1993). Urban and National Identity: Bremen, 1860-1920. *Journal of Social History*, 26(3), 521–537.
- Busold, M. (Ed.). (2019). *War for Talents: Erfolgsfaktoren im Kampf um die Besten* (2., aktualisierte und erweiterte Auflage). Springer Gabler. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57481-2>
- Carlin, D. (2022). *COP 27 Recap: The Good, The Bad, And What's Next After The Climate Conference*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidcarlin/2022/12/16/cop-27-recap-the-good-the-bad-and-whats-next-after-the-climate-conference/>
- Carlson, C. N. (2003). *Information overload, retrieval strategies and Internet user empowerment* (L. Haddon, Ed.; No. 1; Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 169–173). Media Lab UIAH. <http://eprints.rclis.org/5432/>
- Carroll, A. B., & Brown, J. A. (2018). Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review of Current Concepts, Research, and Issues. In *Corporate Social Responsibility* (Vol. 2, pp. 39–69). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2514-175920180000002002>
- Chauhan, D. (2009). Effect of Job Involvement on Burnout. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44(3), 441–453.
- Choi, S. B., Tran, T. B. H., & Park, B. I. (2015). Inclusive Leadership and Work Engagement: Mediating Roles of Affective Organizational Commitment and Creativity. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 43(6), 931–943. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.6.931>
- Cloos, J. (2021). Employer Review Platforms. *Management Revue*, 32(3), 152–181. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0935-9915-2021-3-152>
- Cohen, J. (1988). Set Correlation and Contingency Tables. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 12(4), 425–434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014662168801200410>

Cohen, J. (1992). Statistical Power Analysis. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 1(3), 98–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10768783>

Cohen, S. (2022, September 19). The Growing Awareness and Prominence of Environmental Sustainability. *State of the Planet*. <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2022/09/19/the-growing-awareness-and-prominence-of-environmental-sustainability/>

Colantonio, A. (2009, May 28). *Social sustainability: Linking research to policy and practice*. Sustainable development: a challenge for European research, BEL. [http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index_en.cfm)

Connected City. (2018). *Connected City – hmmh—PresseBox*. <https://www.pressebox.de/inaktiv/hmmh-multimediahaus-ag/Connected-City-hmmh-und-Studierende-weiter-auf-Potenzialsuche-der-Stadt-Bremen/boxid/889433>

Cook, A., Hepworth, J. D., Wall, T. D., & Warr, P. B. (1981). *Experience of Work: A Compendium and Review of 249 Measures and Their Use*. Academic Press.

*Covid-19 Pandemic Impacted 9 in 10 Surveyed Consumers' Views on Sustainability*. (2021). IBM Newsroom. <https://newsroom.ibm.com/2021-04-22-IBM-Study-COVID-19-Pandemic-Impacted-9-in-10-Surveyed-Consumers-Views-on-Sustainability>

Crane, A., & Glozer, S. (2016). Researching Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: Themes, Opportunities and Challenges. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(7), 1223–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12196>

Cuesta, J., Madrigal, L., & Pecorari, N. (2022). *Social Sustainability, Poverty, and Income: An Empirical Exploration*. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-10085>

Ćulibrk, J., Delić, M., Mitrović, S., & Ćulibrk, D. (2018). Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Job Involvement: The Mediating Role of Job Involvement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00132>

Cunha, S., Proença, T., & Ferreira, M. R. (2022). Employees Perceptions about Corporate Social Responsibility—Understanding CSR and Job Engagement through Meaningfulness, Bottom-Up Approach and Calling Orientation. *Sustainability*, 14(21), Article 21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114606>

D'Amato, A., & Herzfeldt, R. (2008). Learning orientation, organizational commitment and talent retention across generations: A study of European managers. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 929–953. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810904402>

D'Amato, D., Droste, N., Winkler, K. J., & Toppinen, A. (2019). Thinking green, circular or bio: Eliciting researchers' perspectives on a sustainable economy with Q method. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 230, 460–476. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.05.099>

Dao, V., Langella, I., & Carbo, J. (2011). From green to sustainability: Information Technology and an integrated sustainability framework. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 20(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2011.01.002>

*Das sind die familienfreundlichsten Arbeitgeber 2022* | *freundin.de*. (2022). Freundin. <https://www.freundin.de/lifestyle-kununu-familienfreundlichste-arbeitgeber-2022>

Datagroup Presse. (2006). *DATAGROUP Holding plant Übernahme der messerknecht informationssysteme GmbH*. DATAGROUP. <https://www.datagroup.de/news/datagroup-holding-plant-uebernahme-der-messerknecht-informationssysteme-gmbh/>

Dawson, P. M., & Zanko, M. (2011). Social innovation at work: Sustainable OHS in HRM. In *Readings in HRM and sustainability* (1. ed., 2. printing, pp. 83–100). Tilde Univ. Press.

de Freitas Netto, S. V., Sobral, M. F. F., Ribeiro, A. R. B., & Soares, G. R. da L. (2020). Concepts and forms of greenwashing: A systematic review. *Environmental Sciences Europe*, 32(1), 19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3>

De Silva, K. M., & De Silva Lokuwaduge, C. S. (2020). Impact of corporate social responsibility practices on employee commitment. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 17(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-01-2019-0027>

Deaton, A. (2008). Income, Health, and Well-Being around the World: Evidence from the Gallup World Poll. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 22(2), 53–72. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.22.2.53>

Deckers, L. (2018). *Motivation: Biological, psychological, and environmental* (Fifth edition). Routledge.

Dempsey, N., Bramley, G., Power, S., & Brown, C. (2011). The social dimension of sustainable development: Defining urban social sustainability. *Sustainable Development*, 19(5), 289–300. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.417>

Denhardt, R. B., Denhardt, J. V., Aristigueta, M. P., & Rawlings, K. C. (2018). *Managing Human Behavior in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. CQ Press.

Derrick, B., & White, P. (2017). Comparing two samples from an individual Likert question. *International Journal of Mathematics and Statistics*, 18(3). <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/882904/comparing-two-samples-from-an-individual-likert-question>

DeVaney, S. A. (2015). *Understanding the Millennial Generation*. 6.

Dillard, J., Dujon, V., & King, M. C. (Eds.). (2012). *Understanding the social dimension of sustainability*. Routledge.

Dohlman, L., DiMeglio, M., Hajj, J., & Laudanski, K. (2019). Global Brain Drain: How Can the Maslow Theory of Motivation Improve Our Understanding of Physician Migration? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(7), Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071182>

Domsch, M. E., & Ladwig, D. H. (2015). Erwartungen der Generation Y. *Personal Quarterly*, 67(1), 10–14.

Dragicevic, A. Z. (2018). Deconstructing sustainability. *Sustainable Development*, 26(6), 525–532. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1746>

Du, P. J., & Roodt, G. (2010). Work engagement, burnout and related constructs as predictors of turnover intentions: Original research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 36(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC89193>

Dunlop, R., & Scheepers, C. B. (2022). The influence of female agentic and communal leadership on work engagement: Vigour, dedication and absorption. *Management Research Review, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-11-2021-0796>

Duthler, G., & Dhanesh, G. S. (2018). The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and internal CSR communication in predicting employee engagement: Perspectives from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Public Relations Review*, 44(4), 453–462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.04.001>

Dwidienawati, D., Abdinagoro, S. B., Gandasari, D., & Tjahjana, D. (2021). Do generation Y and Z really concern about environmental issues? *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 729, 012137. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/729/1/012137>

Dyllick, T., & Hockerts, K. (2002). Beyond the business case for corporate sustainability. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 11(2), 130–141. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.323>

Ebru Ulu-Genisel | LinkedIn. (2023). <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ebru-ulu-genisel-81a89157/>

Ehnert, I. (2009). *Sustainable human resource management: A conceptual and exploratory analysis from a paradox perspective*. Physica-Verlag.

Eisenmenger, N., Pichler, M., Krenmayr, N., Noll, D., Plank, B., Schalmann, E., Wandl, M.-T., & Gingrich, S. (2020). The Sustainable Development Goals prioritize economic growth over sustainable resource use: A critical reflection on the SDGs from a socio-ecological perspective. *Sustainability Science*, 15(4), 1101–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-020-00813-x>

Ellerup Nielsen, A., & Thomsen, C. (2009). CSR communication in small and medium-sized enterprises: A study of the attitudes and beliefs of middle managers. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 14(2), 176–189.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280910953852>

Elliott, J. (2018, May 22). *The True Cost of Hiring an Employee in 2023*. Toggl Blog. <https://toggl.com/blog/cost-of-hiring-an-employee>

Fang, Z., Costas, R., Tian, W., Wang, X., & Wouters, P. (2021). How is science clicked on Twitter? Click metrics for Bitly short links to scientific publications. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 72(7), 918–932. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24458>

Faran, Y., & Zanbar, L. (2019). Do required fields in online surveys in the social sciences impair reliability? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(6), 637–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2019.1630899>

Farhat, S. (2020, January 21). *Rising inequality affecting more than two-thirds of the globe, but it's not inevitable: New UN report*. UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1055681>

Fernandez-Feijoo, B., Romero, S., & Ruiz, S. (2014). Effect of Stakeholders' Pressure on Transparency of Sustainability Reports within the GRI Framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 122(1), 53–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1748-5>

Ferrarini, G. (2021). Redefining Corporate Purpose: Sustainability as a Game Changer. In D. Busch, G. Ferrarini, & S. Grünewald (Eds.), *Sustainable Finance in Europe: Corporate Governance, Financial Stability and Financial Markets* (pp. 85–150). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71834-3\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71834-3_4)

Ferreira, P., & Real de Oliveira, E. (2014). Does corporate social responsibility impact on employee engagement? *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 26(3/4), 232–247. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-09-2013-0070>

Fogg, B. J. (2019). *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Forbringer, L. R. (2002). Overview of the Gallup Organization's Q-12 Survey. *O.E. Solutions*.  
Foster, J. (2001). Education as Sustainability. *Environmental Education Research*, 7(2), 153–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620120043162>

Frankental, P. (2001). Corporate social responsibility – a PR invention? *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 6(1), 18–23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280110381170>

Frech, A. (2022). *Council Post: The Tipping Point: Why Sustainability Will Trigger Exponential Growth*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/01/11/the-tipping-point-why-sustainability-will-trigger-exponential-growth/>

Freestone, D. (1994). The Road from Rio: International Environmental Law after the Earth Summit. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 6(2), 193–218.

Gaidhani, S., Arora, D., & Sharma, B. (2019). *UNDERSTANDING THE ATTITUDE OF GENERATION Z TOWARDS WORKPLACE*. 9.

Gallego-Álvarez, I., Prado-Lorenzo, J., Rodríguez-Domínguez, L., & García-Sánchez, I. (2010). Are social and environmental practices a marketing tool? Empirical evidence for the biggest European companies. *Management Decision*, 48(10), 1440–1455. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741011090261>

Gallup Inc. (2021). *How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace*. Gallup.Com. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/285674/improve-employee-engagement-workplace.aspx>

Gallup Inc. (2022a). *Indicator Employee Engagement*. Gallup.Com. <https://www.gallup.com/394373/indicator-employee-engagement.aspx>

Gallup Inc. (2022b). *State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report*. Gallup Inc.

Gallup Inc. (2022). *The World's \$7.8 Trillion Workplace Problem*. Gallup.Com. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/393497/world-trillion-workplace-problem.aspx>

Gallup Inc., G. (2021). *Gallup's Q12 Employee Engagement Survey—Gallup*. Gallup.Com. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/356063/gallup-q12-employee-engagement-survey.aspx>

Galuppo, L., Gorli, M., Scaratti, G., & Kaneklin, C. (2014). Building social sustainability: Multi-stakeholder processes and conflict management. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 10(4), 685–701. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-10-2012-0134>

Garriga, E., & Melé, D. (2004). Corporate Social Responsibility Theories: Mapping the Territory. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 53(1/2), 51–71. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:BUSI.0000039399.90587.34>

Gatti, L., Seele, P., & Rademacher, L. (2019). Grey zone in – greenwash out. A review of greenwashing research and implications for the voluntary-mandatory transition of CSR. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 4(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-019-0044-9>

Genç, R. (2017). The Importance of Communication in Sustainability & Sustainable Strategies. *Procedia Manufacturing*, 8, 511–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.promfg.2017.02.065>

Gerhart, B., & Fang, M. (2015). Pay, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Performance, and Creativity in the Workplace: Revisiting Long-Held Beliefs. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2(1), 489–521. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032414-111418>

Ghahramanpouri, A., Lamit, H., & Sedaghatnia, S. (2013). Urban Social Sustainability Trends in Research Literature. *Asian Social Science*, 9(4), p185. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n4p185>

Ghatak, S., & Singh, S. (2019). Examining Maslow's Hierarchy Need Theory in the Social Media Adoption. *FIIIB Business Review*, 8(4), 292–302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2319714519882830>

Giddings, B., Hopwood, B., & O'Brien, G. (2002). Environment, economy and society: Fitting them together into sustainable development. *Sustainable Development*, 10(4), 187–196. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.199>

Glavas, A., & Kelley, K. (2014). The Effects of Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility on Employee Attitudes. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 24(2), 165–202. <https://doi.org/10.5840/beq20143206>

Godemann, J., & Michelsen, G. (Eds.). (2011). *Sustainability Communication*. Springer Netherlands. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1697-1>

Goodland, R., & Bank, W. (2002). Sustainability: Human, Social, Economic and Environmental. *Social Science*, 6, 220–225.

Gould, R., Missimer, M., & Mesquita, P. L. (2017). Using social sustainability principles to analyse activities of the extraction lifecycle phase: Learnings from designing support for concept selection. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 140, 267–276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.08.004>

Govindan, K., Shaw, M., & Majumdar, A. (2021). Social sustainability tensions in multi-tier supply chain: A systematic literature review towards conceptual framework development. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 279, 123075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.123075>

Gowdy, J. (2005). Toward a new welfare economics for sustainability. *Ecological Economics*, 53(2), 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2004.08.007>

Green, H., Facer, K., & Rudd, T. (2005). *Personalisation and Digital Technologies*. 31.

Green, P. I., Finkel, E. J., Fitzsimons, G. M., & Gino, F. (2017). The energizing nature of work engagement: Toward a new need-based theory of work motivation. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 37, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2017.10.007>

Grosser, K. (2009). Corporate social responsibility and gender equality: Women as stakeholders and the European Union sustainability strategy. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 18(3), 290–307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8608.2009.01564.x>

Gupta, J. (2002). Global Sustainable Development Governance: Institutional Challenges from a Theoretical Perspective. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and*

*Economics*, 2(4), 361–388. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021387308065>

Gupta, J., & Vegelin, C. (2016). Sustainable development goals and inclusive development. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 16(3), 433–448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-016-9323-z>

Gupta, N., & Sharma, V. (2016). Exploring Employee Engagement—A Way to Better Business Performance. *Global Business Review*, 17(3\_suppl), 45S-63S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150916631082>

Gupta-Sunderji, M. (2004). Employee Retention and Turnover: The Real Reasons Employees Stay or Go. *Financial Management Institute Journal*, 15(2), 37–40, 48.

Haase, F.-A. (2013). Business communication and globalized English :recent definitions and applications of a concept across the corporate world. *Business Communication and Globalized English: Recent Definitions and Applications of a Concept across the Corporate World*, 52–83.

Häberlein, M. (2011). Pre-Industrial Economic History in Germany: Trends, Problems and Prospects. *Pre-Industrial Economic History in Germany*, 143–152. <https://doi.org/10.1400/167824>

Haekal, M., & Ginting, H. (2019). *EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME FACULTY MEMBERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI BANDUNG*.

Halbesleben, J. R. B. (2010). A meta-analysis of work engagement: Relationships with burnout, demands, resources, and consequences. In *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research* (pp. 102–117). Psychology Press.

Hancock, J. I., Allen, D. G., Bosco, F. A., McDaniel, K. R., & Pierce, C. A. (2013). Meta-Analytic Review of Employee Turnover as a Predictor of Firm Performance. *Journal of Management*, 39(3), 573–603. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311424943>

Hansen, J., Kharecha, P., Sato, M., Masson-Delmotte, V., Ackerman, F., Beerling, D. J., Hearty, P. J., Hoegh-Guldberg, O., Hsu, S.-L., Parmesan, C., Rockstrom, J., Rohling, E. J., Sachs, J., Smith, P., Steffen, K., Susteren, L. V., Schuckmann, K. von, & Zachos, J. C. (2013). Assessing “Dangerous Climate Change”: Required Reduction of Carbon Emissions to Protect Young People, Future Generations and Nature. *PLOS ONE*, 8(12), e81648. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0081648>

Hansmann, R., Mieg, H. A., & Frischknecht, P. (2012). Principal sustainability components: Empirical analysis of synergies between the three pillars of sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 19(5), 451–459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2012.696220>

Harry, W. (2014). The Relevance of the Vision of Sustainability to HRM Practice. In I. Ehnert, W. Harry, & K. J. Zink (Eds.), *Sustainability and Human Resource Management: Developing Sustainable Business Organizations* (pp. 401–419). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-37524-8\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-37524-8_18)

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 268–279. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.2.268>

Hawkins, C. V., & Wang, X. (2012). Sustainable Development Governance: Citizen Participation and Support Networks in Local Sustainability Initiatives. *Public Works Management & Policy*, 17(1), 7–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087724X11429045>

Hay, C. (2020). Does capitalism (still) come in varieties? *Review of International Political Economy*, 27(2), 302–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1633382>

Herrity, J. (2023). *Work Experience and Your Career: Importance and Tips* | Indeed.com. Indeed Career Guide. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/work-experience>

Hickel, J. (2019). The contradiction of the sustainable development goals: Growth versus ecology on a finite planet. *Sustainable Development*, 27(5), 873–884. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1947>

Hjarvard, S., Biltereyst, D., Volkmer, I., Paterson, C., Jensen, K., Holm, H.-H., Slaatta, T., Wildermuth, N., Vreese, C., Nohrstedt, S., Ottosen, R., & Thussu, D. (2001). *News in a globalized society*.

Holland, P. J., Sheehan, C. R., Donohue, R. D., & Pyman, A. (2007). *Contemporary Issues and Challenges in HRM*. Tilde University Press.  
<https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/contemporary-issues-and-challenges-in-hrm-2>

Hoppock, R. (1935). *Job Satisfaction*. Harper.

Hörisch, J., Freeman, R. E., & Schaltegger, S. (2014). Applying Stakeholder Theory in Sustainability Management: Links, Similarities, Dissimilarities, and a Conceptual Framework. *Organization & Environment*, 27(4), 328–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026614535786>

Hörisch, J., Johnson, M. P., & Schaltegger, S. (2015). Implementation of Sustainability Management and Company Size: A Knowledge-Based View. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 24(8), 765–779. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1844>

Howell, L. P., Joad, J. P., Callahan, E., Servis, G., & Bonham, A. C. (2009). Generational Forecasting in Academic Medicine: A Unique Method of Planning for Success in the Next Two Decades. *Academic Medicine*, 84(8), 985–993.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181acf408>

Huey Yiing, L., & Zaman Bin Ahmad, K. (2009). The moderating effects of organizational culture on the relationships between leadership behaviour and organizational commitment and between organizational commitment and job satisfaction and performance. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 30(1), 53–86.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730910927106>

Huffman, A. H., & Klein, S. R. (Eds.). (2013). *Green organizations: Driving change with I-O psychology*. Routledge.

Hutchins, M. J., Richter, J. S., Henry, M. L., & Sutherland, J. W. (2019). Development of indicators for the social dimension of sustainability in a U.S. business context. *Journal of*

*Cleaner Production*, 212, 687–697. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.11.199>

ICT Channel. (2006). *Compass Treuhand gibt Beteiligung ab: Datagroup übernimmt Messerknecht*. ICT Presse. <https://www.ict-channel.com/markt/datagroup-uebernimmt-messerknecht.33507.html>

Idowu, S. O. (2015). CSR, Sustainability, Ethics and Governance. In S. O. Idowu, N. Capaldi, M. S. Fifka, L. Zu, & R. Schmidpeter (Eds.), *Dictionary of Corporate Social Responsibility* (pp. 457–531). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-10536-9\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-10536-9_19)

*Indicators of Sustainable Development: Framework and Methodologies — European Environment Agency*. (1996). [Rationale Reference]. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/land-cover-distribution-and-change/indicators-of-sustainable-development-framework>

Issa, T., & Isaias, P. (2016). Internet factors influencing generations Y and Z in Australia and Portugal: A practical study. *Information Processing & Management*, 52(4), 592–617. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2015.12.006>

Jamali, D. (2008). A Stakeholder Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility: A Fresh Perspective into Theory and Practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 82(1), 213–231. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9572-4>

James, P. (2014). *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice*. [https://www.academia.edu/9294719/Urban\\_Sustainability\\_in\\_Theory\\_and\\_Practice\\_Circles\\_of\\_Sustainability\\_2015](https://www.academia.edu/9294719/Urban_Sustainability_in_Theory_and_Practice_Circles_of_Sustainability_2015)

Janes, G., Mills, T., Budworth, L., Johnson, J., & Lawton, R. (2021). The Association Between Health Care Staff Engagement and Patient Safety Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Patient Safety*, 17(3), 207–216. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PTS.0000000000000807>

Janker, J., Mann, S., & Rist, S. (2019). Social sustainability in agriculture – A system-based framework. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 65, 32–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.12.010>

Jenn, N. C. (2006). Designing A Questionnaire. *Malaysian Family Physician : The Official Journal of the Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysia*, 1(1), 32–35.

Johnson, M. W. (2020, July 24). Do the U.S.'s Big Four Tech Companies Have a Vision for the Future? *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/07/do-the-u-s-s-big-four-tech-companies-have-a-vision-for-the-future>

Johnston, A., Amaeshi, K., Adegbite, E., & Osuji, O. (2021). Corporate Social Responsibility as Obligated Internalisation of Social Costs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 170(1), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04329-y>

Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S., & Pal, D. (2015). Likert Scale: Explored and Explained. *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4), 396–403. <https://doi.org/10.9734/BJAST/2015/14975>

Juma, C. (2002). The global sustainability challenge: From agreement to action. *International Journal of Global Environmental Issues*, 2(1–2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJGENVI.2002.000985>

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256287>

Kaliski, B. S. (2007). *Encyclopedia of business and finance. (2nd ed.). Volume 1: A-I*. Macmillan Reference USA,. [http://repository.vnu.edu.vn/handle/VNU\\_123/78284](http://repository.vnu.edu.vn/handle/VNU_123/78284)

Kataria, A., Kataria, A., & Garg, R. (2013). Effective Internal Communication: A Way Towards Sustainability.: EBSCOhost. *International Journal of Business Insights & Transformation*, 6(2).

Kent, M. D., & Kopacek, P. (2021). Social and Ethical Aspects of Automation. In N. M. Durakbasa & M. G. Gençyılmaz (Eds.), *Digital Conversion on the Way to Industry 4.0* (pp.

363–372). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62784-3\\_30](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62784-3_30)

Kernodle, T. A., & Noble, D. (2013). Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Its Importance in Academics. *American Journal of Business Education*, 6(2), 235–239.

Khanna, R. (2020). RE-EXPLORE THE VIABILITY AND AUTHENTICITY OF GALLUP WORKPLACE AUDIT IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY. *Business, Management and Education*, 18(2), 344–362.

Kocmanová, A., & Dočekalová, M. (2012). Global environmental, social and economic crises: Voluntary corporate activities as a possible solution. *Ekonomická Revue - Central European Review of Economic Issues*, 15(4), 217–224. <https://doi.org/10.7327/cerei.2012.12.02>

Koster, A. (2018, April 17). How to Engage More Millennials With Corporate Social Responsibility | iCIMS. *ICIMS | The Leading Cloud Recruiting Software*. <https://www.icims.com/blog/how-to-engage-more-millennials-with-corporate-social-responsibility/>

Kostoska, O., & Kocarev, L. (2019). A Novel ICT Framework for Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainability*, 11(7), Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11071961>

Kotzé, L. J., Kim, R. E., Burdon, P., du Toit, L., Glass, L.-M., Kashwan, P., Liverman, D., Montesano, F. S., Rantala, S., Sénit, C.-A., Treyer, S., & Calzadilla, P. V. (2022). Planetary Integrity. In C.-A. Sénit, F. Biermann, & T. Hickmann (Eds.), *The Political Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals: Transforming Governance Through Global Goals?* (pp. 140–171). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009082945.007>

Krosnick, J. A. (2018). Questionnaire Design. In D. L. Vannette & J. A. Krosnick (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Survey Research* (pp. 439–455). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54395-6\\_53](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54395-6_53)

Kruggel, A., Tiberius, V., & Fabro, M. (2020). Corporate Citizenship: Structuring the Research Field. *Sustainability*, 12(13), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12135289>

Kruja, A. (2013). Sustainable Economic Development, a Necessity of the 21st Century. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(10), Article 10.

Kuhlman, T., & Farrington, J. (2010). What is Sustainability? *Sustainability*, 2(11), Article 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su2113436>

Kular, S. (2008). *Employee engagement: A literature review*.

Kultalahti, S., & Viitala, R. (2014). Sufficient challenges and a weekend ahead - Generation Y describing motivation at work. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-05-2014-0101>

Kununu – hmmh. (2023). kununu.com. <https://www.kununu.com/de/hmmh>

Kupperschmidt, B. R. (1998). Understanding Generation X Employees. *JONA: The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 28(12), 36–43.

Labuschagne, C., Brent, A. C., & van Erck, R. P. G. (2005). Assessing the sustainability performances of industries. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 13(4), 373–385. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2003.10.007>

Landorf, C. (2011). Evaluating social sustainability in historic urban environments. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17(5), 463–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2011.563788>

Laszlo, A., Laszlo, K., & Dunsky, H. (2009). Redefining Success: Designing Systemic Sustainable Strategies. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 27, 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.982>

Latapí Agudelo, M. A., Jóhannsdóttir, L., & Davídsdóttir, B. (2019). A literature review of the history and evolution of corporate social responsibility. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 4(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-018-0039-y>

Lawson, K. J., Noblet, A. J., & Rodwell, J. J. (2009). Promoting employee wellbeing: The relevance of work characteristics and organizational justice. *Health Promotion International*, 24(3), 223–233. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dap025>

Leadbeater, C. (2010). *We-Think: Mass innovation, not mass production*. Profile Books.

Leal Filho, W., Tripathi, S. K., Andrade Guerra, J. B. S. O. D., Giné-Garriga, R., Orlovic Lovren, V., & Willats, J. (2019). Using the sustainable development goals towards a better understanding of sustainability challenges. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 26(2), 179–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2018.1505674>

Leng, F. M., Zheng, L. E., Bin, P. Z., & Yi, T. X. (2015). *TALENT RETENTION: A STUDY IN MALAYSIA MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY*.

Leschinsky, R. M., & Michael, J. H. (2004). Motivators and desired company values of wood products industry employees: Investigating generational differences. *Forest Products Journal*, 54(1), 34–39.

Lettink, A. (2019). *No, Millennials will NOT be 75% of the Workforce in 2025 (or ever)!* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/millennials-75-workforce-2025-ever-anita-lettink/>

Li, J., Bünning, M., Kaiser, T., & Hipp, L. (2022). Who suffered most? Parental stress and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. *JFR – Journal of Family Research*, 34(1), 281–309. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-704>

Licht, K. de F., & Folland, A. (2019). Defining “Social Sustainability”: Towards a Sustainable Solution to the Conceptual Confusion. *Etikk i Praksis - Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics*, 2, Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.5324/eip.v13i2.2913>

Lin, T. C. W. (2018). *Incorporating Social Activism* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 3294317). <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3294317>

Linguee.de. (2023). *social sustainability—Deutsch-Übersetzung – Linguee Wörterbuch*.

Linguee.de. <https://www.linguee.de/englisch-deutsch/uebersetzung/social+sustainability.html>

LinkedIn. (2023). *LinkedIn – hmmh AG: Beiträge*. <https://www.linkedin.com/company/hmmh-ag/posts/?feedView=all>

Loew, T., Ankele, K., Braun, S., & Clausen, J. (2004). *Bedeutung der internationalen CSR-Diskussion für Nachhaltigkeit und die sich daraus ergebenden Anforderungen an Unternehmen mit Fokus Berichterstattung*.

Logan, R. K. (2010). *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*. Peter Lang.

Lomas, T., Ishikawa, Y., Diego-Rosell, P., Daly, J., English, C., Harter, J., Standridge, P., Clouet, B., Diener, E., & Lai, A. Y. (2022). Balance and harmony in the Gallup World Poll: The development of the Global Wellbeing Initiative module. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 12(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v12i4.2655>

Lozano, R., & Huisingh, D. (2011). Inter-linking issues and dimensions in sustainability reporting. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 19(2), 99–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2010.01.004>

Luo, S., Henninger, C. E., Normand, A. L., & Blazquez, M. (2022). Gen Y consumer perceptions of web-based sustainability communications – the case of luxury fashion. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 0(0), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2160483>

Macey, W. H., & Schneider, B. (2008). The Meaning of Employee Engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 1(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2007.0002.x>

MacFarlane, K., & Mitchell, K. (2019). Hamburg's Spaces of Danger: Race, Violence and Memory in a Contemporary Global City. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(5), 816–832. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12814>

Magis, K., & Shinn, C. (2008). Emergent Principles of Social Sustainability. In *Understanding the Social Dimension of Sustainability* (pp. 31–60). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203892978-10>

Maioli, D. E. (2017). New Generations and Employment: An Exploratory Study about Tensions Between the Psycho-social Characteristics of the Generation Z and Expectations and Actions of Organizational Structures Related with Employment (CABA, 2016). *Journal of Business*, 2(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.18533/job.v2i1.53>

Maischak, L. (2005). *A cosmopolitan community: Hanseatic merchants in the German-American Atlantic of the nineteenth century* - ProQuest. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/4fcf306bb3d3a2d95bea354716dba53/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Management Board | hmmh. (2016). <https://www.hmmh.de/news/hmmh-erweitert-management-board>

Maslow, A. H. (1958). A Dynamic Theory of Human Motivation. In *Understanding human motivation* (pp. 26–47). Howard Allen Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11305-004>

Matten, D., & Crane, A. (2005). Corporate Citizenship: Toward an Extended Theoretical Conceptualization. *The Academy of Management Review*, 30(1), 166–179.

Matthies, A.-L., Peeters, J., Hirvilammi, T., & Stamm, I. (2020). Ecosocial innovations enabling social work to promote new forms of sustainable economy. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 29(4), 378–389. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12423>

May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 77(1), 11–37. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317904322915892>

Mazzetti, G., Robledo, E., Vignoli, M., Topa, G., Guglielmi, D., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2021). Work Engagement: A meta-Analysis Using the Job Demands-Resources Model. *Psychological Reports*, 00332941211051988. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941211051988>

McAteer, P. (2020). *The sustainability advantage, leadership, change and the future of business (rev ed)*. Anthem Press.

- McKenzie, S. (2004). *Hawke Research Institute Working Paper Series No 27*. 31.
- McLuhan, M., & Powers, B. R. (1992). *The global village: Transformations in world life and media in the 21th century* (New ed.). Oxford Univ. Press.
- Michaels, E., Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B. (2001). *The War for Talent*. Harvard Business Press.
- Mikryukov, A., Chilimova, T., Serebrennikova, A., & Sofronova, I. (2022). *Interconnection of Concepts of Social Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Development at the Current Stage of Economy*. 253–260. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220106.046>
- Mishra, S., & Mishra, S. (2017). Impact of Intrinsic Motivational Factors on Employee Retention among Gen Y:A Qualitative Perspective. *Parikalpana: KIIT Journal of Management*, 13(1), 31. <https://doi.org/10.23862/kiit-parikalpana/2017/v13/i1/151269>
- Mohr, H., & Mohn, J. (2015). *Medien der Religion: Theoretische, gesellschaftliche und historische Aspekte*. Theologischer Verlag Zürich.
- Moir, S., & Carter, K. (2012). *DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY – A REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS*. Proceedings 28th Annual ARCOM Conference, Edinburgh.
- Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14(2), 224–247. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(79\)90072-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(79)90072-1)
- Mubarok, E. S., & Darmawan, J. (2019). The Influence of Training, Motivation, and Work Ethics on the Internal Communication and Their Impact on the Employee Performance. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 11(24). <https://doi.org/10.7176/EJBM/11-24-10>
- Murphy, K. (2012). The social pillar of sustainable development: A literature review and framework for policy analysis. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 8(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2012.11908081>

Muskat, B., & Reitsamer, B. F. (2019). Quality of work life and Generation Y: How gender and organizational type moderate job satisfaction. *Personnel Review*, 49(1), 265–283. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2018-0448>

Myers, L., & Sirois, M. J. (2006). Spearman Correlation Coefficients, Differences between. In *Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0471667196.ess5050.pub2>

Nagori, R. (2019). *WHAT DRIVES EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN DIFFERENT GLOBAL CONTEXTS? A COMPARISON OF THE ENABLERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND INDIA*. 6, 26.

Naidoo, M., & Gasparatos, A. (2018). Corporate environmental sustainability in the retail sector: Drivers, strategies and performance measurement. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 203, 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.08.253>

Ness, R. O., Sachs, K., & Vitek, O. (2016). From Correlation to Causality: Statistical Approaches to Learning Regulatory Relationships in Large-Scale Biomolecular Investigations. *Journal of Proteome Research*, 15(3), 683–690. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jproteome.5b00911>

Newig, J. (2011). Climate Change as an Element of Sustainability Communication. In J. Godemann & G. Michelsen (Eds.), *Sustainability Communication: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Theoretical Foundation* (pp. 119–128). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1697-1\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1697-1_11)

Newport, F. (2019). *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 2017*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Nink, M. (2018). *Engagement Index: Die neuesten Daten und Erkenntnisse der Gallup-Studie* (1. Auflage). Redline Verlag.

Noltemeyer, A., James, A. G., Bush, K., Bergen, D., Barrios, V., & Patton, J. (2021). The Relationship between Deficiency Needs and Growth Needs: The Continuing Investigation of Maslow's Theory. *Child & Youth Services*, 42(1), 24–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2020.1818558>

Organ, D. W. (1988). *Organizational citizenship behavior: The good soldier syndrome* (pp. xiii, 132). Lexington Books/D. C. Heath and Com.

O'Shea. (2022). *Recruitment Advertising: Attracting Gen X, Millennial, And Gen Z Talent*. <https://info.recruitics.com/blog/recruitment-advertising-generational-talent>

*Our services* | Deloitte. (2023). <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/services.html>

Our World in Data. (2018). *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Tracker*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/sdg-tracker-update>

Paauwe, J. (2004). *HRM and Performance: Achieving Long-term Viability*. Oxford University Press.

Page, K. M., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2009). The 'What', 'Why' and 'How' of Employee Well-Being: A New Model. *Social Indicators Research*, 90(3), 441–458. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-008-9270-3>

Paris Agreement. (2016). *International Legal Materials*, 55(4), 743–755.

Parker, C. P., Baltes, B. B., Young, S. A., Huff, J. W., Altmann, R. A., LaCost, H. A., & Roberts, J. E. (2003). Relationships between psychological climate perceptions and work outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 24(4), 389–416. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.198>

Parker, D. W., Holesgrove, M., & Pathak, R. (2015). Improving productivity with self-organised teams and agile leadership. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 64(1), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-10-2013-0178>

Parmar, B. L., Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Purnell, L., & de Colle, S. (2010). Stakeholder Theory: *The State of the Art*. *Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), 403–445. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2010.495581>

- Pearman, O., Boykoff, M., Katzung, J., & Nacu-Schmidt, A. (2022). *Media and Climate Change Observatory Special Issue 2021: A Review of Media Coverage of Climate Change and Global Warming in 2021*. <https://doi.org/10.25810/3VAZ-2Z04>
- Pfeffer, J. (2010). Building Sustainable Organizations: The Human Factor. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 24(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.24.1.34>
- Pichierri, A. (2013). *Die Hanse — Staat der Städte: Ein ökonomisches und politisches Modell der Städtevernetzung*. Springer-Verlag.
- Pimentel, J. (2019). Some Biases in Likert Scaling Usage and its Correction. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)*, 45, 183–191.
- Pohl, M. (2012). Corporate Culture and CSR—How They Interrelate and Consequences for Successful Implementation. In *The ICCA Handbook on Corporate Social Responsibility* (pp. 47–59). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119202110.ch2>
- Poon Teng Fatt, J. (1998). Nonverbal communication and business success. *Management Research News*, 21(4/5), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409179810781464>
- Popescu, O. (2020). *Chancen und Risiken von sozialen Medien für das Personalmarketing. Xing und Kununu*. <https://www.grin.com/document/922417>
- Porter, M. E. (1997). COMPETITIVE STRATEGY. *Measuring Business Excellence*, 1(2), 12–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb025476>
- PR Report. (2013). *Hmmh-Nachwuchs schnappt sich Challenge Award*. <https://www.prreport.de/singlenews/uid-7415/hmmh-nachwuchs-schnappt-sich-challenge-award/>
- Prematunga, R. K. (2012). Correlational analysis. *Australian Critical Care*, 25(3), 195–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aucc.2012.02.003>
- Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*. 9(5), 6.

Prion, S., & Haerling, K. A. (2014). Making Sense of Methods and Measurement: Spearman-Rho Ranked-Order Correlation Coefficient. *Clinical Simulation In Nursing*, 10(10), 535–536. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2014.07.005>

Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2019). Three pillars of sustainability: In search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science*, 14(3), 681–695. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5>

Puteh, F., Kaliannan, M., & Alam, N. (2015). *Assessing Gen Y Impact on Organizational Performance: An Analysis from Top Management Perspective*.

Putri, V. L., & Welly, J. (2014). MEASURING THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT USING Q12 GALLUP: CASE STUDY IN PT SAFTA FERTI. *Journal of Business and Management*, 3(8), 904–912.

Rahi, S., Alnasar, F., & Ghani, M. A. (2019). Designing survey research: Recommendation for questionnaire development, calculating sample size and selecting research paradigms. In *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings* (pp. 1157–1169).

Ramachandran, D. K. K., Deepa, D. M., & Vallabi, M. (2022). A Study On Organisation Culture And Employee Engagement. *Specialusis Ugdymas*, 1(43), Article 43.

Rank, S., & Contreras, F. (2021). Do Millennials pay attention to Corporate Social Responsibility in comparison to previous generations? Are they motivated to lead in times of transformation? A qualitative review of generations, CSR and work motivation. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 6(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-020-00058-y>

Rasouli, A. H., & Kumarasuriyar, Dr. A. (2016). The Social Dimension of Sustainability: Towards Some Definitions and Analysis. *Journal of Social Science for Policy Implications*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.15640/jsspi.v4n2a3>

Raub, S., & Blunschi, S. (2014). The Power of Meaningful Work: How Awareness of CSR Initiatives Fosters Task Significance and Positive Work Outcomes in Service Employees.

*Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 55(1), 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965513498300>

Reilly, A. H., & Hynan, K. A. (2014). Corporate communication, sustainability, and social media: It's not easy (really) being green. *Business Horizons*, 57(6), 747–758. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.07.008>

Reiss, S. (2012). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. *Teaching of Psychology*, 39(2), 152–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628312437704>

Rich, B. L., Lepine, J. A., & Crawford, E. R. (2010). Job Engagement: Antecedents and Effects on Job Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(3), 617–635. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.51468988>

Roach-Higgins, M. E., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). Dress and Identity. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 10(4), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X9201000401>

Robertson, I. T., & Cooper, C. (2015). *Personnel Psychology and Human Resources Management: A Reader for Students and Practitioners*. John Wiley & Sons.

Roser, M. (2013). Economic Growth. *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth>

Roser, M., Ritchie, H., & Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2015). Internet. *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/internet>

Rotenberry, P. F., & Moberg, P. J. (2007). Assessing the impact of job involvement on performance. *Management Research News*, 30(3), 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170710733278>

Rupp, D. E., Ganapathi, J., Aguilera, R. V., & Williams, C. A. (2006). Employee reactions to corporate social responsibility: An organizational justice framework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(4), 537–543. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.380>

Russell, S. (2022). *Getting In-Depth with Gallup Q12 Employee Surveys*. <https://www.cashort.com/blog/getting-in-depth-with-the-gallup-q12-employee-surveys>

Russo, A. (2020). Hyper-globalization and capitalism: Socio-political effects of the international economy. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 41(5/6), 584–596. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-04-2020-0128>

Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2022). *Sustainable Development Report 2022*. Cambridge University Press.

Sajjad, A., & Shahbaz, W. (2020). Mindfulness and Social Sustainability: An Integrative Review. *Social Indicators Research*, 150(1), 73–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02297-9>

Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(7), 600–619. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690169>

Salvia, A. L., Leal Filho, W., Brandli, L. L., & Griebeler, J. S. (2019). Assessing research trends related to Sustainable Development Goals: Local and global issues. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 208, 841–849. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.242>

Sánchez-Fernández, J., Muñoz-Leiva, F., & Montoro-Ríos, F. J. (2012). Improving retention rate and response quality in Web-based surveys. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(2), 507–514. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.023>

Sasidharan Dhanesh, G. (2012). The view from within: Internal publics and CSR. *Journal of Communication Management*, 16(1), 39–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541211197987>

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248>

Schild, M. (1995). *CORRELATION, DETERMINATION AND CAUSALITY IN INTRODUCTORY STATISTICS*.

Schiffbauer, S., & Engelen, M. (2021). *LinkedIn und Kununu für B2B Unternehmen: Aktueller Stand der Nutzung, Best Practices Beispiele und Empfehlungen*. Bibliothek der Technischen Hochschule Köln.

Schmidt, A., Ivanova, A., & Schäfer, M. S. (2013). Media attention for climate change around the world: A comparative analysis of newspaper coverage in 27 countries. *Global Environmental Change*, 23(5), 1233–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.07.020>

Schneider, S., & Clauß, T. (2020). Business Models for Sustainability: Choices and Consequences. *Organization & Environment*, 33(3), 384–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026619854217>

Schönborn, G., Berlin, C., Pinzone, M., Hanisch, C., Georgoulas, K., & Lanz, M. (2019). Why social sustainability counts: The impact of corporate social sustainability culture on financial success. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 17, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2018.08.008>

Schrader, U. (2022). Corporate Citizenship. In M. S. Abländer (Ed.), *Handbuch Wirtschaftsethik* (pp. 147–158). J.B. Metzler. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05806-5\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05806-5_14)

Schrempf-Stirling, J., Palazzo, G., & Phillips, R. A. (2016). Historic Corporate Social Responsibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(4), 700–719. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0137>

Schuhmacher, F., & Geschwill, R. (Eds.). (2009). Employer Branding. In *Employer Branding: Human Resources Management für die Unternehmensführung* (pp. 37–51). Gabler. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-8166-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-8166-0_2)

Schwartz, M. S., & Carroll, A. B. (2008). Integrating and Unifying Competing and Complementary Frameworks: The Search for a Common Core in the Business and Society Field. *Business & Society*, 47(2), 148–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650306297942>

Selman, P., & Parker, J. (1997). Citizenship, civicness and social capital in local agenda 21. *Local Environment*, 2(2), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839708725522>

Selwyn, N. (2009). The digital native – myth and reality. *Aslib Proceedings*, 61(4), 364–379. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00012530910973776>

Servaes, J., Polk, E., Shi, S., Reilly, D., & Yakupitijage, T. (2012). Towards a framework of sustainability indicators for ‘communication for development and social change’ projects. *International Communication Gazette*, 74(2), 99–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048511432598>

Sheehy, B. (2015). Defining CSR: Problems and Solutions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 131(3), 625–648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2281-x>

Sikka, P. (2016). Big Four Accounting Firms: Addicted to Tax Avoidance. In J. Haslam & P.

Sikka (Eds.), *Pioneers of Critical Accounting: A Celebration of the Life of Tony Lowe* (pp. 259–274). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54212-0\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54212-0_13)

Singh, A. (2013). Achieving sustainability through internal communication and soft skills. *Journal of Soft Skills*, 7(1), 21–25.

Softgarden. (2016). *hmmh multimediahaus AG als Arbeitgeber: Bewertungen & Feedback*. softgarden Arbeitgeberzertifikat. <https://certificate.softgarden.io/hmmh/de>

Spacey, J. (2018). *11 Examples of Job Levels*. Simplicable. <https://simplicable.com/new/job-levels>

Spector, P. E. (1997). *Job Satisfaction: Application, Assessment, Causes, and Consequences*. SAGE.

Spector, P. E. (2021). *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Research and Practice*. John Wiley & Sons.

Spiro, L. N. (2003). *Gallup, the Pollster, Wants to Be Known for Its Consulting—The New York Times*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/21/business/media-gallup-the-pollster-wants-to-be-known-for-its-consulting.html>

Staniškienė, E., & Stankevičiūtė, Ž. (2018). Social sustainability measurement framework: The case of employee perspective in a CSR-committed organisation. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 188, 708–719. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.03.269>

Statista. (2022). *Serviceplan-Gruppe—Umsatz bis 2022*. Statista. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1031386/umfrage/umsatzentwicklung-der-serviceplan-gruppe/>

Statista—Big Four employees. (2023). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250503/big-four-accounting-firms-number-of-employees/>

Statista—Big Four revenue. (2023). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250479/big-four-accounting-firms-global-revenue/>

Stefan Messerknecht | XING. (2023). [https://www.xing.com/profile/Stefan\\_Messerknecht/cv](https://www.xing.com/profile/Stefan_Messerknecht/cv)

Sternfels, B., Francis, T., Madgavkar, A., & Smit, S. (2021). *Economic growth for the good of all: Sustainable and inclusive* | McKinsey. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/sustainable-inclusive-growth/our-future-lives-and-livelihoods-sustainable-and-inclusive-and-growing>

Strom, D. L., Sears, K. L., & Kelly, K. M. (2014). Work Engagement: The Roles of Organizational Justice and Leadership Style in Predicting Engagement Among Employees. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(1), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051813485437>

Strömsdörfer, N. (2022, June 13). *Ranking: Die besten Arbeitgeber Deutschlands 2022*.

Kununu News. <https://news.kununu.com/beste-arbeitgeber-deutschland/>

Suchanek, P. D. A. (2021). *Definition: Corporate Citizenship* [Text]. <https://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/definition/corporate-citizenship-31191>; Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH. <https://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/definition/corporate-citizenship-31191>

Tapscott, D., & Williams, A. D. (2006). *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything*. Portfolio.

Tarricone, P., & Luca, J. (2002). Employees, teamwork and social interdependence – a formula for successful business? *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*, 8(3/4), 54–59. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13527590210433348>

Taylor, J. (1987). *New York Magazine*. New York Media, LLC.

Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2017). *Exploring public relations: Global strategic communication* (Fourth Edition). Pearson.

Ter Haar, B. P., & Copeland, P. (2010). What are the Future Prospects for the European Social Model? An Analysis of EU Equal Opportunities and Employment Policy. *European Law Journal*, 16(3), 273–291. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2010.00508.x>

*THE 17 GOALS – Sustainable Development*. (2022). <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The Danish Institute for Human Rights. (2016). *Goals, targets and indicators | The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://sdg.humanrights.dk/en/goals-and-targets>

The World Bank. (2016). *Social Dimensions of Climate Change* [Text/HTML]. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-dimensions-of-climate-change>

Thompson, C., & Gregory, J. B. (2012). Managing Millennials: A Framework for Improving Attraction, Motivation, and Retention. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 15(4), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10887156.2012.730444>

Tkalac Verčić, A., Sinčić Ćorić, D., & Pološki Vokić, N. (2021). Measuring internal communication satisfaction: Validating the internal communication satisfaction questionnaire. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26(3), 589–604. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-01-2021-0006>

Tkalac Verčič, A., & Špoljarić, A. (2020). Managing internal communication: How the choice of channels affects internal communication satisfaction. *Public Relations Review*, 46(3), 101926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101926>

Todorov, V., & Marinova, D. (2009). Models of Sustainability. *Proceedings of MODSIM 2009 International Congress on Modelling and Simulation*. MODSIM 2009 International Congress on Modelling and Simulation. <https://espace.curtin.edu.au/handle/20.500.11937/24684>

Tortora, R. D., Srinivasan, R., & Esipova, N. (2010). The Gallup World Poll. In *Survey Methods in Multinational, Multiregional, and Multicultural Contexts* (pp. 535–543). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470609927.ch31>

Toussaint, M., Cabanelas, P., & Blanco-González, A. (2021). Social sustainability in the food value chain: An integrative approach beyond corporate social responsibility. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 28(1), 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2035>

Tseklevs, E., Cooper, R., & Spencer, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Design for global challenges and goals*. Routledge.

Ucoglu, D. (2020). CURRENT MACHINE LEARNING APPLICATIONS IN ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING. *PressAcademia Procedia*, 12(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2020.1337>

UN General Assembly. (2012). *Future We Want—Outcome document* ∴. *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>

United Nations. (1997). *KYOTO PROTOCOL TO THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE*. Kyoto Conference, Kyoto, Japan. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/docs/cop3/107a01.pdf>

United Nations. (2011). *The Social Dimensions of Climate Change*. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_169567.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_169567.pdf)

United Nations. (2022). *SDG Indicators—SDG Indicators*.  
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2014). *Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030* | UNECE.  
<https://unece.org/environment/documents/2022/05/working-documents/framework-implementation-united-nations-economic>

Vallance, S., Perkins, H. C., & Dixon, J. E. (2011). What is social sustainability? A clarification of concepts. *Geoforum*, 42(3), 342–348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.01.002>

Valor, C. (2005). Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Citizenship: Towards Corporate Accountability. *Business and Society Review*, 110(2), 191–212.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0045-3609.2005.00011.x>

Vasantharaju, N., & N.S., H. (2016). *Online survey tools: A case study of Google Forms*.

Vaughan-Whitehead, D. (2010). Fair Wages. In *Books*. Edward Elgar Publishing.  
<https://ideas.repec.org/b/elg/eebook/13968.html>

Veen, W., & Vrakking, B. (2006). *Homo Zappiens: Growing Up in a Digital Age* von Wim Veen/ Ben Vrakking. A&C Black. <https://www.abebooks.de/9781855392205/Homo-Zappiens-Growing-Digital-Age-1855392208/plp>

Vermeir, P., Blot, S., Degroote, S., Vandijck, D., Mariman, A., Vanacker, T., Peleman, R., Verhaeghe, R., & Vogelaers, D. (2018). Communication satisfaction and job satisfaction among critical care nurses and their impact on burnout and intention to leave: A questionnaire study. *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing*, 48, 21–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iccn.2018.07.001>

Waddock, S. (2004). Parallel universes: Companies, academics, and the progress of corporate citizenship. *Business & Society*, 109(1), 5.42.

Wagner, R., & Harter, J. K. (2006). *12: The elements of great managing* (1st ed). Gallup Press.

Waljee, J. F., Chopra, V., & Saint, S. (2020). Mentoring Millennials. *JAMA*, 323(17), 1716–1717. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.3085>

Wallis, C. (2006). *The Multitasking Generation*. 167(13), 48–55.

Weber, M. (2014, July 24). *Serviceplan kauft E-Commerce-Agentur HMMH | W&V*. <https://www.wuv.de/Archiv/Serviceplan-kauft-E-Commerce-Agentur-HMMH>

Wegweiser. (2022). *Unternehmen Wegweiser*. <https://www.wegweiser-duales-studium.de/unternehmen/hmmh-multimediahaus/>

Weingaertner, C., & Moberg, Å. (2014). Exploring Social Sustainability: Learning from Perspectives on Urban Development and Companies and Products. *Sustainable Development*, 22(2), 122–133. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.536>

Westerman, J. W., & Yamamura, J. H. (2007). Generational preferences for work environment fit: Effects on employee outcomes. *Career Development International*, 12(2), 150–161. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430710733631>

Wey Smola, K., & Sutton, C. D. (2002). Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(4), 363–382. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.147>

Weyland, A. (2011). Engagement and talent management of Gen Y. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 43(7), 439–445. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00197851111171863>

Wiedermann, W., & Eye, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Statistics and Causality: Methods for Applied Empirical Research* (1st ed.). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118947074>

Windisch, E., & Medman, N. (2008). Understanding the digital natives. *Ericsson Business Review*, 1(39). <http://doczz.com.br/doc/1086034/understanding-the-digital-natives>

Windsor, D. (2006). Corporate Social Responsibility: Three Key Approaches. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(1), 93–114. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00584.x>

Winters, M. (2021, June 29). *A brief introduction to the GRI reporting framework*. Conservice ESG. <https://www.gobyinc.com/brief-introduction-gri-reporting-framework/>

Woodcraft, S., Bacon, N., Hackett, T., Caistor-Arendar, L., & Hall, F. (2012). *Design for Social Sustainability: A framework for creating thriving new communities*.

Zainee, I. A., & Puteh, F. (2020). Corporate social responsibility impact on talent retention among Generation Y. *Revista de Gestão*, 27(4), 369–392. <https://doi.org/10.1108/REG-06-2019-0070>

Zaugg, R. J. (2009). *Nachhaltiges Personalmanagement: Eine neue Perspektive und empirische Exploration des Human Resource Management*. Springer-Verlag.

Zhong, Y. (1987). *After the Storm: American Society a Decade After the Vietnam War: Proceedings of the International Conference on "The U.S.A.: A Decade After the Vietnam War."* 6-8 June 1986, Taipei. Institute of American Culture, Academia Sinica.

Zwijze-Koning, K., & de Jong, M. (2007). Evaluating the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire as a Communication Audit Tool. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 20(3), 261–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318906295680>

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Exploratory Interview with Stefan Messerknecht, CEO of

#### hmmh

Mr. Messerknecht invited me to Wesertower, the office building of hmmh, in Bremen right next to the Weser. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December we met in his office and I went through my questions. The questions were prepared and sent to Mr. Messerknecht in beforehand. He requested the questionnaire in order to be prepared. The interview was conducted in a semi structured way which means that I did prepare distinct and specific questions. However, due to the course of the conversations additional questions had been asked or the existing questions had been altered.

**Moritz Vetter:** So, first of all, as I told you, I'm doing this for my master's thesis, and this is supposed to be a semi-structured interview. So this basically means that, as you know, I prepared some questions. I sent them to you in beforehand. I adapted them slightly just a little bit. But it's basically the same you already saw. I'm super interested in what you can share with me and your insights that you have based on my questions. But also if you have any input, depending on how the course of the conversation goes, let's go with the flow and see what you can share and what you can contribute. So this is a semi-structured interview. So just to get on the same page, I would quickly talk a bit about social sustainability. I don't know if you've heard about the specific term, but you probably have heard of corporate social responsibility, which is very similar even it's not exactly the same term, but they're just very different definitions out there. And social sustainability just basically means that you don't just concentrate on minimising the negative impact of of a company on society, but you think about how you can actually contribute in a positive manner. So how can a business contribute to the wellbeing of society? To break it down, that's social sustainability. That's why for me this is quite important and quite interesting. And I think there is a lot to examine and it is the future for our economy. Coming back to my thesis, my scientific question is: does perceived social sustainability influence job engagement of gen? So first of all, what I wanted to do is I wanted to combine sustainability and economy because you as the CEO of a company, you are obviously interested in a sustainable business. So you are interested in profit which is a requirement for our capitalistic market. But by combining these two, I want to show that there is actually economical benefits from being sustainable. So for a company like hmmh, it can be

quite an interesting goal to be social sustainable because you have benefits from it which we will potentially explore today. And one reason obviously is the war for talent, you are trying to get the best employees out there and but also once you get them, you want them to be engaged. In this context engaged can be substituted with motivated. So come to work, be motivated, be on time, not having many sick days, execute what is needed. So being motivated benefits your company in the end. And this combination of social sustainability and engagement is basically the gist of my topic. In my work I'm doing a survey of employees, asking about job engagement and their perception of social sustainability. So, for example, I could ask your employees and give them my survey and they would fill it out and hand it back to me. This would be the employee perspective, but you give me the opportunity to get the managerial perspective as the CEO. So I also want to see, okay, from the employee perspective, this is interesting, this is engaging, motivating. But also from your perspective, what can you do? What have you done in practice to achieve engagement or social sustainability? So that basically enables me to cover the topic from both sides. So this is a brilliant option and opportunity for me. This is the reason and purpose of this interview as a quick introduction.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Thank you. That is good. Okay.

**Moritz Vetter:** So I obviously I know a bit about hmmh, but would you be so kind to tell me about the most important milestones of the company? Maybe mainly the last 10 to 15 years?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** First of all, I brought a PowerPoint where you can see these milestones on paper. But after founding hmmh in 1995, which actually was a foundation out of an ad agency, a classical ad agency, because that former owner Detlev Hanke, he saw digital business coming up, e-commerce business coming up and you can be offering aged e-commerce systems service. As hmmh, because hmmh at that time did the first e-commerce ecosystem in Germany for the Otto group, the entire Otto group (one of the world's biggest e-commerce companies based in Germany) (Berger, 2022; *Otto Group - Statistics & Facts* | Statista, 2022). And that was the very first one. And this is the reason why Otto is still there. And the big competitors, Neckermann and Quelle, are also big mail order companies are not there anymore because they couldn't digitalise and used their paper catalog too long. Michael Otto invested in digital e-commerce business.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you would say the like partnering with hmmh basically enabled them to sustain on the market?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That secured survival. And 1996 more shops for Otto, Tchibo the famous Hamburg coffee company came along. And we have very long term customers. These are our customers we still have. And now we're talking end of 2022. But you were asking about some milestones. And I think the second big milestone was since hmmh was was a regional company and only based in Bremen, was that we opened Berlin and Hamburg as branches in order to be a little closer to at least the Hamburg clients we have, because we almost have no clients in Bremen and it's still this way today.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's interesting. That's interesting for multiple reasons to me because you are a digital agency. You work in the digital world. However, you say it's important to be close to the client, physically speaking.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** At that time it was because at that time communication was not that far as it is today. Nowadays it's only for employment purposes. It does not really matter where we are and it's not affordable to be very close to clients. So we have our offices today in Berlin and Hamburg in order to give our people a better feeling and but it has nothing to do with being near to the clients anymore. But at that time it has been a concern of the client.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you don't use it anymore that you have a big client and you invite them over to your branch in Hamburg or Berlin?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We do, we do. And they come we have one of our very big clients in the house for two days now for workshops, for retros, for lean coffees, for an open space for project work. They love to be here in Bremen because only digital. It's boring for the people. Yeah, but it's much more digital than it used to be. So that was the branches and a big milestone was 2014. In 2013 our parent company and utility company in Oldenburg, EWE, decided to sell us because of the change in the energy industry. And they saw well, they have nothing to do with energy, so let's get rid of them because they cleaned their portfolio.

**Moritz Vetter:** Why were they involved in the first place? I mean, you never had something to do with energy.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Because the former owner of hmmh and the CEO of the Oldenburg EWE company went fly fishing together and he said, oh, that might be a good business for the future.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And that was the point where we came into place and wanted actually to move towards the direction of Service Plan Company because the Service Plant company owner Florian Haller is a long term friend of mine and he always said, okay, e-commerce is a good topic for us. We don't have that. If something happens in your environment, please let me know. Yeah, and I let him know. Then 2013 and by summer 2014 we landed in the Service Plan company.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That was a big step, but it was important for us not to go to the big ones like Telekom, Accenture, because we could keep hmmh, we could keep being an agency, we could keep our portfolio. We kept being in Bremen. So we basically moved the company as it was from one owner to the other owner, but with better topics because the value chain of media, e-commerce marketing is much better connected to us than a utility company.

**Moritz Vetter:** Is it connected, would you say that the business of hmmh is connected to the Service Plan network?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah, it is. It is connected. We are now in the group for eight years. We know a lot of people. We have some very close alliance alliances within the group where we pitch together, we win together. Sometimes we lose together and we actually implement projects together.

**Moritz Vetter:** On the operational basis as well?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Well, on the operational base, we have one sister company called Planet Cologne, very nice guys, and we won the big pitch for Handelskrankenkasse here in Bremen rare enough and we started this project and we win the next content project too with the cologne guys and this is a very close connection. It almost feels like one company. Yeah, at least one project group.

**Moritz Vetter:** So, that's the best case scenario for you then.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That is our best case. Why it works in some cases and in some cases not is because we are almost totally agile and need Scrum Masters product on those retros dailies. And the companies within the group who don't have that are not good working with us or we are not good at working with that.

**Moritz Vetter:** It doesn't match perfectly.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It doesn't match. So we cannot pitch together and we cannot implement projects together. But some are as far as we are and with these companies was really good and.

**Moritz Vetter:** And you learned that in the last eight years for which of the connections were viable to you?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah, yeah. It is tough. There are some personal friendships, great people in the group. Even if we don't cooperate, there's still great people in it. Yeah, so much better than the older scenario. I mean, the older people were nice too, but they were with their topics so far away from us. So the Munich Service Plan Group with media, with digital, with edge agencies are much closer to us. So we have a lot more to talk on our level.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay. That's that is very interesting.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And the next big step was that we built an Indian based company because we saw workforce is difficult in Germany. The group needed it. I invited an Englishman who founded a company in Dubai and he had two companies in India to come to the group. We bought the majority of that company and then a big deal came in with the service plan company, which is BMW worldwide, serving all the portals. And it was clear that Germans can't do that. And we needed Indian people, we need Polish people. And for that we built that in India. And the next step was then being shareholder in a company in Poland. HMMH Poland, this Indian company that's a bit difficult. But the two Indian companies we gave them into the group.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We don't own them anymore. We use them and cooperate, but we don't own them anymore. But we invest in hmmm Middle East and Dubai.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** So opening markets. So from Dubai, the Middle East and Poland and we are now talking maybe Switzerland. So we are expanding internationally a little bit. Next big steps.

**Moritz Vetter:** May I ask how many employees you have at this point?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** About 350. And here is a corporate social responsibility. Very minor, but important thing for us. We never talk about employees. We have us, we always say colleagues. Because we are colleagues.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay. That's that is a nice tweak. I like it.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** So basically those are the milestones again, so that the numbers are about 350 heads, not full time equivalent. Full time equivalent is about 250 and revenue is consolidated with middle East is about €30 million.

**Moritz Vetter:** You apparently read my script because you were already talking about social sustainability. So thank you so much for the quick history which is very helpful to understand the full picture.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** When we come to points later of all some um, some teams more responsible for this topic than others, I have an organisational chart which shows you the structure and then you'll find what I mentioned.

**Moritz Vetter:** That is great. So because you already mentioned it very specifically now, would you say that social sustainability is part of your corporate strategy right now?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, it is. It is part of the strategy. We did a major change in 2015 because we had quite unsatisfied clients and quite unsatisfied colleagues and the results were not good. And we started to ask our colleagues, what is bad, what is good, what do we need to do? And we poured that into a strategic project vision, mission, strategy, structure, a very

classical approach, but an unusual implementation, because our vision is "pioneers and future commerce". My colleagues were pioneers in 1995. Really pioneers. We were pioneers setting mobile commerce. We were one of the first in Germany offering mobile commerce. Then we called it digital commerce, and now we call it connected commerce, connecting digital channels of sales and connecting online and offline business. Market fashion, outlet city Metzingen. And in that process, vision and mission made by the management, strategy made by colleagues.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** A strategy taskforce works on hmmmh strategy. No management involved. Ten people. And they knew this would be the strategy. No supervisory board. Nothing. A big responsibility. 15th of October 2015 the presentation took place.

**Moritz Vetter:** Big presentation.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Big presentation. And we as a management took the work they gave us. It was not only offer, it was the strategy. And we took it and saw very good results. We liked it. Agile, sustainability approach, agile structure. And we saw the old structure doesn't hold anymore in pillars. So we dissolved all pillars.

**Moritz Vetter:** So it was a holistic strategy.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Holistic strategy change, and, of course, a culture change. So structure follows strategy and culture eats strategy for breakfast. Peter Drucker At its best. So we did that and implemented a whole new set up in 2016. We threw 300 people in the air, let them land, dissolved all pillars, had interdisciplinary client and topic oriented teams, and we still have. 2015 we started, 2016 we implemented.

**Moritz Vetter:** Because earlier I think you mentioned that you said you got feedback from clients and you got feedback from. And you basically knew something had to be changed. May I ask, how did you internally and externally, how did you get the feedback? Was it over years or like a rapid thing or something that happened out of nowhere?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We felt internally when we were talking about clients, a lot of stress. We had more complex projects. The pillars wouldn't hold a vertical organisation, serving a horizontal project in an agile way didn't work anymore and that caused big problems and

Service Plan does a colleague satisfaction survey every year and that was the first time we took part. In 2014 and that showed no good results.

**Moritz Vetter:** I see. That's highly interesting. So that's something basically you adapted from Service Plan?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** To survey yes, the feeling that something is wrong we had before.

**Moritz Vetter:** And then it was basically on paper that something was off?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's interesting. You said the structure was not sufficient anymore, but was it also something that you felt like on a personal level, people are saying like they are less happy. They are, you know, not happy about work. less confident at work?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** People are traditionally very tied into the hmmm philosophy and culture. The culture was still okay because culture doesn't change in six months. But there was dissatisfaction because projects were not implemented right. We were not profitable. I mean, not every project was bad, but the average of projects was not good, the results were not good, and by the end the profit was not good. And so we had that feeling and people told us. We have a very open culture here. And we needed to do something. And then we started the process.

**Moritz Vetter:** Interesting. So as I understood, the colleagues were basically in charge of the strategy. And sustainability was already a part of this holistic strategy. And it is still this way? They thought of a strategy, there was a think tank of ten people and they thought of something holistic. And that's the way you went with it.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** The big part and one of the goals was to become a very good partner of our partners. For our vendors and partners, became a very good employer and become a very good member in our Service Plan group and thriving to be a very good employer. We needed to implement things or do things maybe differently than we had before because obviously more people were unsatisfied here. And one of those things was more responsibility was needed, internally and externally, so social responsibility.

**Moritz Vetter:** You said being a good partner, a good employer, this is more like a strategic goal. Were distinct actions already part of this strategy?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** There were actions. We changed the organisation from vertical to interdisciplinary, agile, self-steering teams. The first action was to make the people more comfortable. We looked at Spotify and beforehand it was that all software developers were one pillar, one all the designers and one to the project managers. And that cost the pain because we needed all of them in one client approach, but they were in different teams and reporting lines after that. Not anymore. But all the software developers lost their heritage and group of sitting together with all the other software developers. So we implemented communities of practice or in German called "Gilden" or the "Gilde der Software Entwickler" self-steering managed, not by management but managed by them and offering them time off their work to organise their experience.

**Moritz Vetter:** Time and resources then?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Time and resources. And the same thing: we did implement work groups, which came out of our first open space in 2016. Open space is an agile format. And people would discuss gender topics, work life balance topics, strategic big topics, whatever somebody pitches, everything is allowed. And from that first open space on we had, and I wrote it down here, we had work and we still have workgroups of gender and pay equality installed. They installed it themselves. They asked us, this is an idea of an open space. Should we do that? Of course you should do that.

**Moritz Vetter:** With certain authority? I mean, it's one thing to implement something that's but it's another to give them the responsibility and resources.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Self-steering as all the other ones are also self-steering. One work group for perks. Perks is what we call a surrounding conditions. To work, your chair your, pay, your desk.

**Moritz Vetter:** Working conditions.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah. Working conditions. Hansefit, a local gym. Whatever goodies you want. This group still exists. We have an ecology group. We are not a production industrial company and we have a rented space, so there's not too much to do. But we can still look at company cars and mobility and so on. So these self-steering groups were originated 2016 from the first open space we had and they still exist. It's now six years ago and they will exist in the future.

**Moritz Vetter:** My next question would be what role Service Plan play in this. If I understood correctly, when the acquisition took place, they gave you some kind of a survey. The survey gave you the result that people are unhappy we have to adapt. We have to change something. Apart from that, did Service Plan contribute or steer anything in that matter?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No. It was not the initial, but it was a helping tool. But they are not involved in this part our business.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And we're still doing that annually. We will come to that later on.

**Moritz Vetter:** From your point of view, why is the company actually interested in social sustainability? Why is that a relevant topic to hmmh?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Hmmh interest is to be a good corporate citizen. In Bremen and in Germany. That has been before. That has been since hmmh started. Detlev Hanke, the original founder and owner, Hanke Multi Media House was that way. My colleague Björn, you just saw him in the elevator. He's 33 years with the company, he's only 52. So he started as an apprentice with 19 and that has always been the case, but it increased over the last years. What we all saw, the question is, to show attitude. Example, last year and the year before Christopher Street Day. Diversity group, gender group originated and we invested in lighting up our eight floors into LGBTQ colours by a pretty tough installation. We started to show Bremen hmmh is in favor of that, and when the people see it at night and they drive by or see that from the city.

**Moritz Vetter:** I mean, this right here is a perfect location in terms of the visibility in the city at the Weser, right?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** So showing the attitude, being a good corporate citizen and showing the attitude. Yes, that is why the company is interested and invests also in that.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you would say it's part of your DNA. Because basically it was founded that way. Through the actions it just organically grew.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I know, some companies have that, but with us not. There was not the one turning point and from that turning point on strategically we decided now we do this. That is not the case with hmmm. That has always been there. And maybe it's increased and it's organised a little differently, but there's no turning point.

**Moritz Vetter:** The next question would be, what were the first touchpoint and first steps to initiate the process of social sustainability, which you already answered in a way, because you said well basically the founder having altruistic ideas. And then you he took it from there and grew with it. And when you say talking about service plan again in 2014, that's a big step and a milestone for the company, as you put it. But would you say that this was a relevant change regarding social sustainability for hmmm, or would you say that was just something that happened next to it?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That was it. The Service Plan Group didn't even know that. We would do this project. They had no clue that we what we did here.

**Moritz Vetter:** Can you explain a bit more about the new structures and community groups you set up?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** The one thing is that we organise professional groups in communities of practice. But that's not what I mean we would call that work group. Diversity or work group. Gender, pay, ecology. It's just work groups.

**Moritz Vetter:** But the work groups. Are the members fixed? Can you tell me: okay for this group, there are 12 colleagues?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No, who shows up shows up. How is that originated? One or two people say, okay, I take the responsibility facilitating this group, not setting the topics, but facilitating.

Setting the date, setting the time frame, and then inviting people via Intranet or via Teams. And then next Tuesdays there is the work group, let's say diversity. And there's a core of people taking part every time. But everybody is welcome to take part and setting topics and discussing topics. The management doesn't know it. When they have outputs and they need a decision of investment or they need a decision of certain activities, and they can't decide that because it's, you know, it costs money or they need some organisation to do that here. Then we hear from them.

**Moritz Vetter:** But there is no requirement for management saying like, okay, if you do a working group, these three things are necessary or needed. No, but it's it is agile and free with the colleagues? Only if they need support, eg. Financially.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** If nobody comes, the workgroup dies.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay. How many work groups exist right now?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Five. It's gender pay and diversity is probably one, perks is two. Ecology is three. It's we have two more. Mobility. And one. Yeah, but we had five. But one is basically almost dissolved because we called that facility work group because I told you we skipped two stores here. And we needed a new facilitation, new work environment plan. And this was a group of five people. There's a different form, actually. We don't call it workgroup, we call it SIG. SIG is a special interest group. So you can, within a community of practice, of, let's say, software developers, there is a topic in the company: we need to choose a new communication system. And ten years ago the head of IT would sit with us and said we have rocketchat and slack and he had the choices and then we decide. And then we decided. And then the people using rocket ship would say Slack is much better. Nowadays, the special interest group is responsible. The company needs a decision on such a thing. One leads it, let's say the head of the system administration. Then asking: who is interested in doing a three months project of finding the right solution for that and recommending that to the board. And then three people say, Yes, I'm in. But then after the decision, this group, special interest group is dissolved. And that happened with the facility work group starting two years ago. And now is dissolving by Christmas because we moved the furniture, everything is in place. So this is it. 3 formats: work groups, communities of practice and special Interest groups.

**Moritz Vetter:** What about the mobility group. What are they working on?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We don't have a lot of company cars. We have only company cars for management and some salespeople. The outcome was we lease new cars, only E-cars. Recommendation of less flying, more train recommendation of more Bahncards (discount card for German trains), less cars, these kind of things.

**Moritz Vetter:** So really, how to get to work, how to get to clients. Was there something that you thought of? But in the end, due to limitations of financial resources or whatever that you didn't tackle because it was just not feasible for you as a company.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No.

**Moritz Vetter:** You were able to implement what you wanted to?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I thought about that and the suggestions which came out of somewhere from the company were all so realistic and feasible that I cannot remember any. No.

**Moritz Vetter:** The next question would be, were distinct actions of a general new way of thinking. And you told me it was something that was existing the entire time. When people entered hmmm was it something that you did while you onboarded them? Something that was given priority, meaning that you wanted to tell them about the culture and this way of thinking and in terms of social sustainability and general working environment. Working culture.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We do that. We tell the people that in the interviews, by the way, it changed. The person we want interviews us. In former times we interviewed the people. And in best case scenario, it's on eye level that works both ways. And we talk about that in interviews. People ask that more often than they did ten years ago. But interestingly enough, maybe for you interesting, there is a difference in generation Y and Z because the Gen Y ask more than Gen Z. Why is that? The younger people interestingly enough, talk about money. Very early in the process, different to Gen Y. They talk about money and they talk about what kind of projects and how do you work in the company. And all the other, let's say, soft factors. We talk about social responsibility, perks and whatever, they just say: I expected that anyways. That is nothing we need to talk about. If you don't have that, you are out anyway. We are

talking. How is the work done? What are my projects? Who are the colleagues and what's the money? That is a difference between Z and Y. The Gen Yers are more open and openly interested in these things.

**Moritz Vetter:** What's your perspective on that? Because I mean, you are neither Generation Z nor Y. You are Boomer Generation.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Baby Boomer, right. There are two hearts in my chest. The one is we came a good way along when they say: it has to be there any way. It shows that there has been movement. On the other hand, some people in that generation seem to care a little less.

**Moritz Vetter:** Because they don't have to fight for things? They are already there?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** True. They can pick between five different jobs and that used to be in India three years ago. People sign three working contracts and then just chose one and just don't show up on the first day on the other two. That happens in Germany now too. We had cases, I mean, and we are really a friendly interviewing company with some good environment and we have people that just don't show up.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you definitely can see a change. You see a change.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I can see a change.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay. Well, that's that is interesting. This is something that you read about, obviously, and there is some kind of data, but and not so much because obviously, many companies don't want to share everything about no shows and things like that. So there's more like, you know, let's say rumours and loose talk. But it's really interesting for me from like a very realistic point of view. And you have like the realistic hmmm data and then experience. You feel a difference, you can see a difference.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** What is the reason? One of my explanations? Home Office. When I sit home and work all day long and I don't move, why is it interesting for me how it looks in the company, how the work is, how the water is?

**Moritz Vetter:** I was still working during COVID. I quit during pandemic during lockdown. Home Office was already a thing pre-COVID, obviously, but it got a boost like crazy. Would you say this change of attitude was already existing or starting pre-COVID, or was it something that got a rapid change through COVID and the different experience?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's accelerated. The change.

**Moritz Vetter:** It accelerated? So it didn't initiate it?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** My surprise was how many young people love to stay home, by their own.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay. For me too because I didn't like it to be honest.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** For me it is nothing. These people miss a lot in their lives and they don't even know it.

**Moritz Vetter:** So I have it on record as well: that's one of the reasons why you implemented the coffee corner because you wanted people to come together and communicate?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, but we always had mobile office. We were much further with this new work thing than most of the companies. By the way, new work has been talked about a lot. It is not when you give somebody a laptop in his hand and so he can work in the train. New Work is something very different. I follow you Johanna Breitenbach and Verena Pausder. I discussed that with them too. The best explanation of New Work for me is when the decisions are made there where the best competencies are. That has nothing to do with the location. That is a attitude and a leadership style. We had new work for the last eight years, but we now changed the rooms a little bit. Most people built a new work business but have the same leadership: top down. It's a matter of leadership consciousness and not of locations. So when the people sit at home, especially the young people, they're not socialised in the company. They don't see if somebody is angry, getting fat, getting thin, has pale skin. You don't see that on teams.

**Moritz Vetter:** The well-being of your team. The emotions of the team.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Gossip on the floor. Gossip at the coffee bar. That doesn't happen digitally. You can implement digital coffee tables however you want it in teams but it doesn't work. And leadership is very different. And we sit very closely together with a leadership team and ask ourselves, what's the hybrid leadership of the future? How can we see that people have burnout? You see that here it is very difficult to see it here in person. It's almost impossible to notice it digitally. There will be a loss of stickiness at the company because people sit at home and if they sit at home all day long, they can work for Accenture for €1,000 a month more. Same thing.

**Moritz Vetter:** Did you see a change in retention rate during pandemic? Because people were not able to experience the hmmh culture and the upsides of it. So they felt less reluctant to quit the job and move towards something else.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Not yet. We have a turnover rate of between five and 10%, which is low for a company like ours. But I'm convinced it will go up. Because of home office.

**Moritz Vetter:** It makes sense. You are less emotionally invested. You don't have the culture. You don't feel really connected to the place, to the company.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Adventures. You don't have common, adventures and common emotions. Good things to learn bad things to learn. I don't want to complain. The company is running very well. The mood is very good. Hmmh is an example, in my view, of how it could work. But we are very alert with that.

**Moritz Vetter:** Hopefully we will get to that point as well. It seems to me that you are not only talking about hmmh but also about experiences or examples that you've heard from fellow CEOs or organisations that have the same kind of problems.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** All the time. I meet these people all the time in Germany. I've just been to a conference in Palma with our IPO club. Difficult. Much more difficult in an industry company than in our company.

**Moritz Vetter:** What is the current social sustainability situation in the company? Would you say that there are distinct actions that you can actually name? What would it be from your point of view?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** From the top of my head, it's not complete. We did a lot for a local organisation called "Ein Herz für die Ukraine", since March we're doing. We collected money from our colleagues and doubled it and I collected money in Bremen and donated it to this organisation. Fantastic ladies, who helped and didn't sleep for months and tried to get transports towards the Ukraine. And we have a project called "First Project" which every apprentice has to do here, a joint project. And since they are here since August, it was actually my idea to give them a new website, mobile website. So we're doing a new website for this organisation pro-bono. So Dr. Tatyana, she's so happy with that. So that is "Herz für die Ukraine". Now we are having a Christmas tree downstairs and there are carts with gift wishes from children, from the Caritas of Bremen, soccer ball, sunglasses, whatever and management promotes this in our team channel and says: "here is Karina from Gröpelingen and her wish is a soccer ball so she can play soccer with her kids. And please, somebody come up to the 12th floor and pick up the cards." So we advertise these gifts, that is in connection with Caritas. For years now, we have a good connection to Viva con Agua because we liked them very much. Once a year we do company bingo here and they go home with between 500 and 1.000€, which is a lot for them. And two years ago, when COVID started, Claudia and I offered old office machines from my heritage or family company, more than 100 year old typewriters and calculators. And we had a big auction and we put it in the internet with a picture and a minimum auction price. And then we had 100 people online colleagues, and they were bidding and bidding. And so we achieved much more than we expected. And Claudia and I said, we double it. And it was €10,000 for Viva con Agua. When I called this guy and said, you get €10,000, he cried on the phone. Because it was a very shitty year for them because everything was closed. They couldn't go to the bars and host their events. We appreciate very much voluntary work like THW, Corona help groups, flood help. We had people going to Ahrtal because of the flood catastrophe.

**Moritz Vetter:** Meaning if they work at hmmm, I can say, I want to help. Give me the day off?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Or even three days off.

**Moritz Vetter:** During company time?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Three days off. You don't have to take vacation. You just get three days off because you do voluntary work. Or you go to THW, or you do Corona help.

**Moritz Vetter:** And that would apply to any social work?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We appreciate industry associations. So my colleagues, somebody leads the board of Bremen Digital Media or somebody does the National Association of E-commerce. That we support locally and nationally.

**Moritz Vetter:** What about your colleagues? What about your staff? Social sustainability is a very broad topic. There is no distinct definition saying this is action is part of it, that is not. But one major part obviously is always the pay. So, you know, fair pay, gender pay gap, inclusion, these kind of things that they are all very substantial to the topic. And how do you deal with that?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Let me just complete short list here. We've talked about the work groups. We are supporting colleagues serving on sport club boards. Not with money, but we know that if somebody is the vice president of the tennis club, he needs time and he does mails and calls during his work day. I'm not so naive. I serve on a lot of boards and I know when I do these things and our colleagues do the same, but it is appreciated. Unless projects don't work and colleagues complain and nobody would say, No, you don't do that. And last week we had a session where we announced something in a video session. I think this is also a social responsibility topic. We give out inflation substitution money, not €3,000. We can't do that. That's worth €200,000 in total, which is 10% of our net income. People applauded and appreciate it very much. Of course, the low income get more and higher, the income gets less. And 26 people in the management their €500 they skip. We have a virtual fund with €13,000 for hard cases if somebody is really in need. We have €13,000 to spend to some special cases.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's something that you just implemented or something that happened regularly?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No, we just said that because this is this year on inflation.

**Moritz Vetter:** I mean this emergency fund.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Everybody can come up here and we helped a lot of people and nobody even knows here. A loan from the company financing somebody. But that's a very personal thing with Björn and myself and don't tell anybody. So that is not official.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That's the company. And what about myself? Well, I grew up with that. My grandfather served as a president of the Rowing Club for 20 years. My father led the Bremer Hockey Club for 40 years. I grew up with that and I believe in that as a good personal citizen here. And people know that about me here in Bremen. But my jobs outside are not related to hmmm. It's not part of the strategy. A lot of people know that here that I do that. But it's not part of the strategy, it is my personal approach.

**Moritz Vetter:** I have to accelerate a bit. Do not want to take too much of your time.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We have time. My next appointment is 3:30.

**Moritz Vetter:** What is the standing and prioritisation of social sustainability? What I understood so far it's something that is relevant throughout the business, I would say, right. So it's something that it's part of your operation and of your internal modus operandi.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Definitely.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's something that you personally care about. And you give them you give resources. You give time. Because it's a relevant and substantial part of hmmm.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Growing resources. Increasing resources. Because it gets more important.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's why I'm doing this. Would you say there is a, a social sustainability focus that hmmm has?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I think it's a mixture of all. There's not a special focus. Because we have these work groups work on different topics and all these topics are important and that's a mix. It is a bouquet of social responsibility. There's not one focus.

**Moritz Vetter:** Which departments are involved? All of them then?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah, true. And another thing for us here. We have colleagues, not employees, and we don't have departments because departments come from departing and we don't want to depart.

**Moritz Vetter:** How do you call them?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Teams or units. That is something which is language use. "Abteilung" (German word for department) is not a good word here because I don't like it. Because Abteilung comes from abteilen (German word for divide) and we don't want to divide something here, want we want to integrate people. Back to the units. That's why I brought to the Org-chart. The ideas can come from anybody here and the workgroups are connected with anybody here. But when it comes to organising the Christmas activity towards Caritas, or when it comes to all our sports activities, then we have two teams. One is the personal development team, which contains people for employer branding, for recruitment, and for our hmmm Academy, which is the development program internally for existing colleagues. If it comes to our famous motto Christmas party, then this team is heavily involved. Not necessarily the ideas.

**Moritz Vetter:** Personal Development?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Development development. We separated in our Org, in our organisation, the personnel office, wages, contracts, payroll accounting and we have personal development. Most companies have that under one roof. Call that HR? We separated that. So the personnel office team has nothing to do with these things. But personal development does. Employer branding, recruitment and hmmm academy in there.

**Moritz Vetter:** Why did you decide to separate it?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** In the middle we have our ten operating units. They are profit center. They are responsible for the revenue and they bring the profit. And we separated market oriented services and internal services. And the other team organises marketing communication because we communicate these things. So these two are heavily involved and supporting the actions and the activities.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** The other one is an internal service team. So payroll accounting has nothing to do with the market. Finance has nothing to do with the market. These have to do with the market (showing on Org chart). We call that team X and they are hanging out together because there's a lot of integration work in between these teams here.

**Moritz Vetter:** So personal development is heavily involved and marketing communication is heavily involved as they communicate your activities?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** They are sometimes even the drivers and give the ideas, but in some cases, it comes just from the company, from an open space, from the workforce. From whomever.

**Moritz Vetter:** I would come to the communication part now, we were already starting to talk about it. You already said you communicate. My study program is communication, organisation and leadership. So it is an integral part of my study. But I also think it's valuable and substantial to the topic, because you want to do something good, but you also want to communicate because it benefits your business and it benefits the cause as well. So communication is vital, I would say. And also my specific topic is perceived social sustainability and perception has something to do with communicate: what gets communicated to me, what do I communicate? What is my perception? So there's a direct link. So, how does hmmh communicate their social sustainability activities internally?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** First of all, internally. It is really important. Björn and I do since 2007, since I joined in 2006, a management quarterly, which is an all hands meeting and it takes place here at hmmh on the 12th floor. Nowadays, hybrid events in Corona times just digital just to give an idea what are the numbers, the new clients, internal stuff, anniversaries, birthdays or good projects. We do that four times a year. And this is also a platform where we introduce or where we applause results of this topic.

**Moritz Vetter:** And you mentioned some kind of intranet. What kind of channels do you use?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We have an Intranet which is based on Confluence (a web-based corporate wiki), where all the activities and workgroups are located. Some of them moved to Microsoft teams. There's a lot more on Microsoft teams. Four years ago that there has been no Microsoft teams. So those are the communications channels, the intranet, which is more one direction, communication and teams is more agile. We don't have slack and rocketchat (instant messaging tools for organisations) anymore, just Microsoft teams. We have a tool called Wissenshunger where people can signal and say: I have an interesting topic and that should be somehow business related. You can apply for a Wissenshunger next Tuesday, which means one hour, one source of information, presenter, speaker and maximum of 20 people. We buy them a pizza and they do a Wissenshunger.

**Moritz Vetter:** About what they choose to do present?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** What they choose. It could be a technological topic, it could be whatever. Maybe not a hobby, but somehow business related. And these things are topics of Wissenshunger. We have open spaces, as I told you once a year, we have lean coffees (meeting where the participants decide on the agenda at the beginning of the meeting). Those are our internal communication tools for these topics.

**Moritz Vetter:** Do you use email?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Less and less emails.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And externally. Some things you can find on the website. You can find us heavily on LinkedIn.

**Moritz Vetter:** But if I may say that; we talked for a while already and I can feel when you talk to me that it's an integral part of business and an integral part of your way of thinking. And from my point of view, these things doesn't happen on the website for example.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** True. We have an old website and we work on a new one, hopefully, and there's a much bigger part.

**Moritz Vetter:** So that's something that you would like to change?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, definitely.

**Moritz Vetter:** And you mentioned LinkedIn.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Website is less and less. The website actually is, it's an old website, but it works really well. And acquisition we unbelievably we get leads because people look at our website even though it is so old fashioned. But that's the way it is. Yeah. And at that point of time, this topic is not so important for our clients in the first place. When they get to know us and we talk about these things they give us feedback and say that's cool.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say you use LinkedIn as a content marketing tool then?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Almost. We are heavily investing in LinkedIn.

**Moritz Vetter:** What type of content you normally communicate on LinkedIn regarding social sustainability for example?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** This Christopher Street is one example. So what was the change? The change is, I think, video is more important. And it is more instagram-like and tiktok-like.

**Moritz Vetter:** Easy, approachable?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Easy, approachable. Sometimes the mix between funny and stupid. Our personal development. Ladies love to do some bullshit with fancy dresses. That is what I call tiktok-like. But it's really successful.

**Moritz Vetter:** So old business rules don't apply anymore?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** They do, but there's a change towards: shorter...

**Moritz Vetter:** And less uptight? The way of communication, in language, the tonality?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Sometimes. If we introduce a new content management system, this is not tiktok-like. This has to be very serious business and competence. But some are highly vibrant. That's a change.

**Moritz Vetter:** Did you have some kind of a learning effect? Something that was not sufficient due to the tonality for example?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I'm not so much involved in that. I see that. But, they try it out themselves, if they don't work, they do something else. Every campaign is evaluated, there's no campaign which is not evaluated.

**Moritz Vetter:** You use paid campaigns as well?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes.

**Moritz Vetter:** You mentioned that you get a lot of leads still through your website still, but also through LinkedIn. Do you get feedback on the social sustainability things you communicate through LinkedIn?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Not much. I mean, our postings on LinkedIn, I would say are 95% business is solution oriented and maybe 5% the other things.

**Moritz Vetter:** You as the CEO, how do you perceive this 5% type of content? Do you think it's a relevant part of business?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It is a relevant part of the business.

**Moritz Vetter:** In order to do what? To express hmmh?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes. To show attitude towards gender, towards diversity. It's a part of employer branding and image.

**Moritz Vetter:** And employer branding is something that you take rather seriously?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Very serious. How could we gain people? Certainly not with the highest wages when they go to Accenture or when they go somewhere else. They can always find the same job with more money.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you see that as a potential USP for hmmh in employer branding?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, one USP. And with the generation Z it's even more more relevant. If you don't have that, hey don't take you into account, they don't talk much about it. They just check. Do they have it or not. Even with apprentices, if they apply for a job here, we apply for them. You have no idea what they are asking for.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say it's over the line sometimes?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah, definitely. Sometimes.

**Moritz Vetter:** Sometimes it's not really appropriate. Okay. How do you manage these kind of situations?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We have very experienced interviewers and they can cope with that. We have 25 apprentices today and we have lots of experience with them.

**Moritz Vetter:** They know how to handle the situation.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** They know how to handle these situations. By the way, I think apprenticeship is also important regarding social responsibility. We always thought so. In September, once a year I do a day tour with all our apprentices. Just me. This is my thing. To an unknown location. I joke around and say: I show our apprentices a company where they really work.

**Moritz Vetter:** What do you show them?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Production industry where it stinks and it is loud. This is always a big adventure. And they meet here at Wesertower (office building of hmmh) at around 7:00 in the morning and then we take the bus for one or two hours and then we visit companies and I organise these trips. We meet their apprentices and they present their company and show us around in their company. And then they exchange experiences. And in the end, we invite them to Bremen and we do things here with them too. Obviously not producing anything, but maybe a small app pitch or digital things which they have never done.

**Moritz Vetter:** What's your motivation to do these kind of things?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** To be in contact with the apprentices and to show them that the milk is not coming from Edeka (big German supermarket chain) and the energy is not coming from the plug. Somewhere people have to produce things. Those are potentially our clients. And if not now, maybe in the future.

**Moritz Vetter:** That's kind of off topic, but that's interesting and relevant to me. You as the CEO, showing appreciation and attention to the apprentices is so important. Obviously you can't give them top money and top salary in the beginning. But you give them cognation of their value within hmmh by giving them giving them time, showing them around and actually showing interest.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Every week I do that, I go with them for lunch. I joke around with them, I ask how it's going. I initiate the first project with Ukraine. Education is for me a major topic.

**Moritz Vetter:** While I was in Lisbon. I was working for BNP. It's the Europe's biggest bank. Yeah. Even there people were saying, I was having lunch with the head of the department two or three times. I was surprised that he even knew my name because I was just a part time student and he was asking me: Moritz, would you be free for lunch? And I was surprised he knew my name. So but it showed me compassion and that people cared about who I was. When I had to quit because I left Brazil, he took the time to come to my desk and to talk to me and appreciate my work. And apart from social sustainability and this kind of thinking, it just shows people appreciation. They give you time, you give them time, and you value each other. And that's highly, highly valuable in the working environment to me, in the social environment as well.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I know every name here in the company.

**Moritz Vetter:** I can tell you, these things matter. From my perspective.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, I know. It's not that I play that role. What is my what is my role here? I have nothing to do with informatics. I cannot program. I'm not a designer, all the things that people do here, I cannot do. I'm just doing people work. I'm a people worker. That's my role. Chief Emotional Officer, CEO.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** This year we were at Goldbeck in Bielefeld (German construction company), fantastic family owned company. Jörg-Uwe is friend of mine (Jörg-Uwe Goldbeck is the CEO of the company). €6 billion revenue, setting logistics centers, building Elon Musk's factory in Brandenburg (Gigafactory 4 in Grünheide, Brandenburg is being build) 6 Billion Euro company. We come there and people said, well, steel and metal working and then apprentices showed us what they do. From every building they built they have a digital twin, which they plan and which they build with and which they maintain. To service after that. This is all controlled and checked by a drone. How far the building process is, very high tech. And then we went to their metall factory. And our apprentices worked with their apprentices in a boilersuit. They helped our people to drill a little magnetic metal nametag. It was almost smelling in the bus because they sweat so much. We had a beer and everything. We went to Sennheiser (German audio and electronics company) to see the factory. We went to Bahlsen (German pastry Company) we went to Tapeten Rasch (German wallpaper factory) in Bramsche just to show them where things are produced. Get connected to them and inviting them here.

**Moritz Vetter:** We were talking about strategy and social sustainability is part of your holistic strategy. What role does communication play?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's not the main part, but without communication, it is not possible because you need to advertise. Internal and external communication. For the company internal communication is worth more, for stickiness, for employer branding. External communication is good to show the world that we do that.

**Moritz Vetter:** Are defined goals connected to communication then? One would be to be perceived as an attractive employer, employer branding. Would you say that's also relevant for customers?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Not so much, way less.

**Moritz Vetter:** Are employees supposed to be engaged or influence through your communication activities? Resulting in a smaller turnover rate, for example?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Definitely. If it comes to turnover, we have a goal. We don't want to have turnover more than 10%. So everything what helps to do that, and this is a big part of that, is involved at the end measured by the colleagues satisfaction survey and, and the goal of turnover. The survey happens on a yearly basis.

**Moritz Vetter:** What do you do with the results?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** This will take hours. We are probably the company in the whole service conglomerate with more than 100 companies who take this input the most serious because that is the best input we can get. Especially not the check box and the evaluating in numbers but the free text rocks where people really sit down and give us 200 words about their criticism, projects and things they want to share with us.

**Moritz Vetter:** Is it anonymous?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It is anonymous, it has to be anonymous. It takes Service Plan 4 weeks to do the evaluation for the whole group and then we get the results and we take another four weeks to break that down into all the units we have. We have a unit result and a dedicated per unit result for the unit directors and they get that and we discuss that in the management round and then they do workshops and retros. First of all to show appreciation that people participated. We have a very high participant rate, probably the highest in the whole Service Plan group, but we are the biggest company. So we have a response rate of 85%, which is not as special if you have 20 colleagues in a small Service Plan company. Here we have more than 240, 250 people answering, which is the biggest block of answers. So the likelihood that you can use the results are much better.

**Moritz Vetter:** You mentioned that there is an evaluation by Service Plan first and then there is an evaluation by hmmh. What does Service Plan hands out to you? Just the results or do they offer or even advise you to take action?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** They do both. They do a whole public comparison. So there's a ranking and they show it in front of the management of all hundred companies. Comparing the satisfaction rate for example. Here is the good group, this is the middle one and there is the bottom one. And then there are calls from Central HR. The other companies don't have seperated HR departments or accounting. It's all centralised and then management get calls and it's called support but it's more strict than support. It's relatively well watched. We are always traditionally in the very high group.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say these results are also a result of your social sustainability actions?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Our people appreciate that. The survey is not perfectly elaborated in my opinion. In the end it is also highly relevant for the flexible income of the management. So there's only one and final grade. And all the rest of the information does not count as much for Serviceplan. So you get maybe 86% in the whole comparison, you'll be in the top group. And as a manager, you get the money. Based on this particular number. But it is a very extensive study. And we take more care of the rest because the rest is more interesting to us.

**Moritz Vetter:** Do you have a part in the survey that would address motivation or job engagement in particular?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you be able to share that with me?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Ask me again later. Kathrin does these things. She does the does the evaluation. I cannot ask her, because she is ill. But I will.

**Moritz Vetter:** What would you indicate as former, current and future challenges in regards to communicate social sustainability?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We were talking about how we use the different channels. It is very agile, meaning that people can communicate, they can initiate the process, initiate ideas. So it is an ongoing and never ending process.

**Moritz Vetter:** What had to be adapted, what had to be installed to cope with potential issues? From what I understood, there was not that one big thing that happend and changed, right?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's all about finding the right mix. Not too much. Not to little. Hopefully no lack of ideas from the people. Sometimes it is rather a focus problem because we get more ideas and we can serve. But not big ones. Just very small ones. That's what I meant, there was no major rejection of a big program. We've never had to. But sometimes somebody has a quick idea that we cannot realise.

**Moritz Vetter:** Do you have a quick example that you could think?

**Moritz Vetter:** Somebody comes up and proposes for the next Christmas collection of money, let's not take Viva con Agua but let's take somebody else. And then we say sorry, let's focus on these two or three we already have.

**Moritz Vetter:** Also referring to 2014. Do you see resistance in the company that occurred because of the change of strategy and the change of operating?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Not at all. 100%. Appreciation. Appreciation? Yes, 100%. People were ignited by it and saying, yes, I want to participate. A rush of motivation.

**Moritz Vetter:** Did you notice anything from outside the company?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No, not that I know. There are probably appreciations when our people talk to our clients very closely because they work closely together. But that's something I don't know of.

**Moritz Vetter:** Did colleagues changed sides from clients and started to work for hmmh?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Rarely.

**Moritz Vetter:** I forgot one thing. You said earlier that the colleagues were motivated and everyone was happy about the change. So change management was not a big topic for you then? I think your staff is relatively young, right?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** The mentality is young. The company is quite experienced. It's not like a young start up. There are a lot of people and even in management that have been with the company longer than I have been with the company (Stefan Messerknecht works at hmmh since 2006). It's a mix of very experienced and very young people. The advantage of a growing company is that you can always hire and add young people. I come from an old fashioned family business called Messerknecht. Every month i handed out the Golden Needle for 40 years of seniority at the company. The silver needle for 25 years. When you are not capable of growth then you cannot hire people. Normally, you mostly hire younger people. If you can't the average of age increase year by year. And only the possibility of growth makes you capable of hiring young people. And then maybe the average stays the same. I think we have 36 normally. Which is not very young but this also the most experienced e-commerce company in Germany. So we have both.

**Moritz Vetter:** We were already talking about employee branding. So one big part of the motivation is that you want to keep the good people. And you are probably fully aware of the costs that come along with hiring and onboarding?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And that's why we have this KPI. Our KPI of turnover, hopefully not more than 10%. Because 10% of let's say 300 people is 30 people. So if you lose if we lose 30 people, we are looking for 30 people every year. And that's not incorporating growth and it's just.

**Moritz Vetter:** And you need months to get the new people on the same level.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** And you don't get them!

**Moritz Vetter:** I would like to talk about the outcome. From your perspective, what are outcomes of social sustainability activities that hmmh has done?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** As I mentioned, relatively low personnel turnover. Extremely nice and good colleagues. Since 2016 or 15, our strategy of hiring is, and we really do that, hire for attitude. train for skills (principle coined by Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines). It's very important for us to see that we get the right people with the right attitude and train them. I think we are relatively good at. When it comes to Bremen here, we are well-respected in the community.

**Moritz Vetter:** You have a reputation. You would say?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, a good reputation. That is partly Björn's work in the association, his work in the union of our industry. Which is very much appreciated. He did that now for more than ten years as a chairman. And also actually my activities here in Bremen which are not directly related to hmmh. But with being burseur der Bremer Eiswette (local charity event), Rotary, chamber of commerce...

**Moritz Vetter:** Young Presidents Organization?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** This is also a way of marketing for hmmh.

**Moritz Vetter:** You already said that feedback from clients is not something that you really get regarding social sustainability?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yeah, I would say so.

**Moritz Vetter:** From vendors, from partners?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No, I would say the same.

**Moritz Vetter:** Fom employees?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, that's that's the 100% positive.

**Moritz Vetter:** So one thing is that you get the feedback through the conversations and forums but you also get feedback in the evaluation form. So engagement is something that you ask for and you get positive feedback. So that's something that you incorporate.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, definitely.

**Moritz Vetter:** You were talking about new hires and interviews right in the beginning of our interview and we were talking about Gen Z and Gen Y. So that's also something that people actively ask you in the interview?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Less Gen Y, Z less than Every new hire I interview 4 to 8 weeks after the arrival. Sometimes one person, sometimes six. When the apprentices come, it's eight. Whoever is available. I ask them, How were your first weeks? How are you doing? It's not an interview of feedback. It's just: how were your first weeks? Were they good? Are you welcomed well? Do you need anything? And what is your experience? What do you appreciate most? Are there things we can learn from you? Would you do the first day organisation better than you experienced it and why?

**Moritz Vetter:** Are they reluctant to speak freely and openly to?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No. There's an open communication? It's 95% very positive. And obviously I ask the managers in these units in beforehand, what is your feeling how they arrived? And they tell me and then I go with that knowledge into these sessions. It mirrors the managers of the unit directors and then these people talk about these things. "I would have never thought how helpful people are here. Yes, they told me that in the interview. But you don't know what to believe and you need to experience it." It's hard to talk about hmmh. People or companies, HR departments tell you whatever they want to tell you, but in the end, you are disappointed. "The experience is great. And I like it very much and not too much pressure and the people are so helpful. And these programs and I took part in an open space and I'm part of the work group."

**Moritz Vetter:** Did you embrace the employer branding part for employee ambassadors? For example through LinkedIn, talk about your experience. Every colleague is a brand ambassador for hmmmh.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Sometimes we do. This is not easy, of course. We ask our people to write something nice on kununu (German platform to share employer experience; hmmmh has the outstanding rating of 4.5 out of 5 as of December 2022) . And if you see Kununu and hmmmh that it really works. It's a really good result. Even for the people after the interviews, who we don't employ they give us very good ratings. Also, every new arrival has a godfather or a godmother. And those are mostly people who are experienced and love this company more than others. And they accompany this new arrivals for the first eight weeks or so, show them around. Answer them. Being the first aid.

**Moritz Vetter:** A mentor program?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** A mentor, program. It's probably better than godfather or godmother. And this is very much appreciated by the new arrivals. It's not that the others don't help. They also there for them.

**Moritz Vetter:** Sometimes it's easier to have a dedicated person that you can directly contact.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Especially during the shitty work at home time. They sit at home. Who helps? So this mentor program really helps.

**Moritz Vetter:** Coming back to new hires or interviews. You said, yes, you get feedback. More from Gen Y than from Gen Z and Gen Y people tend to be more intrigued by it?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It is not the case that Gen Z is not interested, but there is a difference!

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say that you use your social sustainability strategy to specifically attract people? Do you have a strategy for hiring people?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's not something in the first rank to attract people. But in the second place it is. They don't come just because of that.

**Moritz Vetter:** Do you have a hiring strategy?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We have one dedicated person doing recruitment and this person has this hiring strategy. The budget for next year contains new additional people and then we have a turnover. And then every unit has its own strategy on how to attract more people. One unit says, okay, forget Germany, we do it in India. Or others say: we need massive people. The other unit says we need two but very good specialist and then they decide to use a headhunter. So it's a very different thing. But there is a dedicated hiring strategy for each unit.

**Moritz Vetter:** From your perspective, what's decisive for hmmh then? Why do people chose hmmh?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Image in the industry.

**Moritz Vetter:** Which is super difficult to measure, by the way. Because all the things that we are talking about there, it's super difficult to measure it in specific. But as you said, it's an holistic thing. It's an image and it's a feeling, it's a reputation and it's very difficult to distinct each element from other actions. But if you have a holistic understanding and approach to these things, they do pay out, but it's not as easy to measure it.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes. We don't ask people, why do you come? Sometimes it's the appreciation. A nice interviewer. Sometimes it's the building. Sometimes it's the topic. Our best advertising is colleagues. Colleagues recommend colleagues. We have the program for that providing €1,500 to people. But that's not the point, these people would also do without the money. Colleagues recommending colleagues is our best approach because nobody recommends a shitty company to his friend. And nobody recommends a shitty friend to a good company.

**Moritz Vetter:** Do you have any governmental or institutional structures that you talk to about these things? Your approach and your strategy?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It is our own thing. No money from the state, no support for projects. Björn and I, we're very reluctant. There are companies in Bremen who do it extensively. The

Neusta Group (local competitor) does. They get a lot of money from the state for projects they don't fulfil. The Digital HUB (local innovation centre) at the university is done by some company and it's very big public money. We are separated to that. We know them all. We know the program. We know the people in the business and the government. We know them all.

**Moritz Vetter:** Why did you decide against that?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Freedom. In my experience it makes you dependent from political thoughts. No politician does that without a hidden agenda. And that is a political agenda, not an economic agenda. And we want to be independent.

**Moritz Vetter:** You experienced that in your personal history?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I saw that for 30 years now being in Bremen. And I know that from all the other cities and my network.

**Moritz Vetter:** And I think Bremen is that kind of a city that you are connected to politics or governmental structures. It is not that big. So you know the people who are in charge.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I know everybody here. I'm very friendly and people like to talk to me, but they also know from me I don't get money from him, but he doesn't demand money from me.

**Moritz Vetter:** But I mean, as you are a relevant employer here in Bremen with your size of a company. That's an economical factor for the city, but you don't use it. That is interesting. From your level of the company, I would say that other companies, other CEOs would use that power potentially to influence, to gain awareness.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Most of them to do.

**Moritz Vetter:** Right?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I don't. I'm different.

**Moritz Vetter:** You mentioned Young Presidents Organization and Rotary. Social sustainability, is that something that matters in these kind of institutions? New work?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's very different. YPO is very private, thing. And this is not from shown anywhere and has nothing to do with any public things. It's a very, very private organisation.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say you advertise for your way of doing business?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** All the time. Not for my company but for their companies. I meet all the other CEOs and owners of big German companies, and I see them running in an old fashioned way and say, Oh my gosh, if he doesn't turn, if he doesn't understand what's going on... I have a very explosive mix. First of all, I know how not to guide a family business into the fourth generation because it failed (Stefan Messerknecht sold the family business "Messerknecht Informationssysteme GmbH" in 2006). Hopefully not just because of me, but because of various reasons. Typical split of family business. One survives, one doesn't. One will go. One will not go. So I failed. I can write a huge book on how hard it is to sell a family business two years before the family business becomes 100 years old. Secondly, all my life, I did projects in digital transformation, computer hardware, software, e-commerce. Thirdly, I know how to restructure a decent size, this is not a big company. Siemens is a big company, but a company like this into an agile organisation. And this is quite an explosive mix. And this is probably what I do next when I stop here, is somehow consulting or an accompanying entrepreneurs and owners who do not know how to do this transition. A generation transition or a digital transition that could be the next good field. I'm talking to my YPO friends all the time, they ask me, they call me. Just last week, I had somebody call me...

**Moritz Vetter:** Talking about about what exactly?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Organisational structural, questions of how did you do it? How did you get to trust your people so much? What made you so brave to risk asking your people to develop the strategy? You are the CEO, your job is the development of the strategy. And I say no. This is pretty strange for most of the people.

**Moritz Vetter:** This happens on a personal level?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Very personal, only very trustful personal level.

**Moritz Vetter:** But you said maybe past hmmm times, there will be something where you might teach others or show others your way of thinking and your way of operating a business?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I am already advisory council and supervisory board of the Sparkasse. These kind of things. I'm not part of the Sparkasse board because I'm the world's most famous banker ever, I have no clue about banking business. But they chose me because I know family business, their clients. I know digital transformation and I know how agile work functions. Yeah. And they do that too here. So I'm a good board member, although I know nothing about banking.

**Moritz Vetter:** That is project management. You don't need to know how the product is being done, but you need to have the ability to structure, to organise.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** This is what I did all my life. But I never told anybody I can do it and then I can't.

**Moritz Vetter:** As the CEO, what is your personal evaluation of just social sustainability? What is your understanding of it?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** If I look at hmmm, social responsibility is at a status where I want it to be as the CEO. I'm satisfied with the company. With the company's approach of how to take care of these topics and how many ideas of a very broad variety of people come towards are relevant and included by the company. With all the different fields of social responsibility. Okay. First of all, second. Is what was the question? I'm satisfied. But the better is always the enemy of the good. So the goal is to be aware and observe. Where people go, Generation Z, do whatever is needed and be agile.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you say that you identified any economical impact from the change of strategy, the change towards a more social sustainable strategy?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I don't know, because it's hard to measure. But what I know is since we implemented our new vision, mission, strategy, structure, the culture changed into this self steering momentum. These topics, social responsibility for example, got pushed an increasing relevance, got more important. And the overall economic impact is that there was an increase in sales revenue, there was an increase in profit, there was an increase in the client satisfaction study. We are not only doing a colleague satisfaction but also a client satisfaction survey. Very high up in the Service Plan group and colleagues satisfaction is also very high. So four relevant KPIs and I always say if you have this quadrant of four KPIs. Then you have in a successful company. If colleagues satisfaction goes down, probably client satisfaction goes down, then sales goes down and then profit goes down. So it's all very interdependent. And we have a status of hmmh, which has not been this positive manner all the time. But I would say after four or five years of approaching this, we have the relative stability of these four KPIs and that makes the success. But I know if one of the KPIs goes down, the others are jeopardised too. And then the success is jeopardised.

**Moritz Vetter:** Did the retention rate change over time?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** No, it didn't change much. But it is at a stable, good level since then.

**Moritz Vetter:** Would you be able to say which actions were important and which were not necessarily needed? Do you have any examples of that?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Not so many examples of what was not needed. Not many failures, I would say in that area. All the other programs or structures we talked about, I would say were good at the time they popped up.

**Moritz Vetter:** They disappeared?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Most of them are still installed. But when something disappears, it disappears. It probably made sense at that point of time. But when things, environmental things, societal things happen like conditions change, then this was maybe not necessary anymore. Yeah. So people vote with their feet. If there's a work group and nobody shows up there.

**Moritz Vetter:** From what I understood so far is that a lot of the things were organically happening. But it was something that happened from within the company. And then it's a different kind of transformation process.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** It's a self-steering an agile organisation. That's what it means. This is very complex leadership. It does not mean that an agile and self-steering company doesn't need any leadership. It needs more leadership than a top down, easy but bad leadership from former times. It's much more complex. But much more fun.

**Moritz Vetter:** You mentioned that in 2013 the company was in a bad spot. The sales were down and the engagement rate was down. Was there a change of reputation then after 2014, something that increased and developed?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** The story of hmmh was that we had very good years from 2006 to 2012. 2011 we knew over the next two years we would probably lose more than half of our business. For Tchibo we did a new website on a weekly basis (Tchibo is a big chain in Germany with food and non-food merchandise).

**Moritz Vetter:** A landing page I guess?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, "Jede Woche eine neue Welt" (Tchibo changes their offer slightly every week and promotes that through this weekly campaign. It can be translated with "every week a new world"). After ten years Tchibo and hmmh decided this is so important for them strategically. Hmmh did that over the years, every Tuesday and everything is fine. But that's so important strategically, we insource that now. We knew that before, we accompanied them into that business, but it ment €4 million less revenue for us. Otto at that time, our second biggest client, decided to insource most of its software development. So we lost half of the Otto business we had. Unfortunately, our third biggest client, Praktiker Baumärkte went bankrupt (big chain of hardware stores in Germany that declared bancrupcy in 2013). So within two years we lost almost 50% of our business. Thus, we acquired so many new clients and it costed so much. So revenue went down, profit went down. We had to let people go and people quit by themselves and that was real instability of the company. And then we got sold to the Service Plan, group what we wanted. Well, we didn't want to get sold in the first place but after the

general decision was made, we wanted to join the Serviceplan Group and then we started the whole process.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** You were mentioning the energy company in the beginning and that they wanted to clear out their portfolio. Was it a coincidence that the dip of business happened at the same time?

**Moritz Vetter:** Coincidence. They had nothing to do with it.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Good for Serviceplan then that there was an opportunity.

**Moritz Vetter:** You're a clever man. And we were clever, too. In that critical phase, this is kind of giving away company secrets, the naked skin, but we already hired some people we knew we would need in the future. Prepared hmmm strategically and balance sheet wise so it was easier for Serviceplan where we wanted to be. Then it was a relatively easy thing acquisition. Then we took off.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We are talking about evaluation now. Is there anything in particular that you get great feedback on in terms your efforts and activities? For me it is interesting to see that because you have a holistic approach to things. It may be different for others to pursue that approach. I think it takes a lot of time to change a business and to change the structure.

**Moritz Vetter:** I would not pick out anything in particular. The most important thing is that people who are interested in this field get space and resources and appreciation to work on these things and implement things. Not everything has to be implemented. They know that you cannot follow every idea. That is not possible. But having the feeling that if you give your thoughts into the company and it is well appreciated and taken seriously and there will be action. There can also be a clear no. Why don't we do that? Explanation, fine. That is what the company learned when we did the first open space in 2016. People were a little bit mistrustful. You ask for ideas and they disappear in some drawers under the desk. So then, no! It is very transparent, very clear promise. We take care of that. This part, we don't do, this part please form workgroups. This part as management we do. And we keep on reporting how far are we until we implement these things. The company learned that no matter who, the CEO or the apprentice, if there is a good idea, there is a good. And that is what the company needed to

learn. After a few years, they learned it. And now it's part of the culture. And it's not even outspoken, it's just the way it is. Culture cannot be managed. Company culture is the people. You cannot say from next year on, we have a different culture, you know. You can give directions and limitations, that's the limits. That's like a guide board. But within the company lives.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** You made clear throughout the interview that your personal background and attitude play a role. If I understood correctly, you would say that is substantial and that it is the core of your action and your ideas, your background, your experience, your surrounding. So it was integral for your understanding of people, of a business, of an economy.

**Moritz Vetter:** Yes. I saw that in my family. You don't get into the fourth generation when you don't take care of your people. It is not possible. First of all. Second of all, I saw at home, especially with my especially my father and my grandfather that work is not the only factor to be a good citizen. My father did a little bit of too much of voluntary work, so I left the company after some time and that turned out to be a bad idea. I was a little reluctant to do that the same way and I never did, But I did more than most of the others.

**Moritz Vetter:** So you would say that you learned from this situation?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I learned to take care of the company first and then do the other activities, not the other activities first and a little bit of the company.

**Moritz Vetter:** So that is something that was very relevant for you growing up and learning from the business if your family? My father was a psychiatrist, so obviously I was not in contact with these things. Would you consider that highly influential for you then?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes. I grew up in a very traditional neighbourhood with Eiswette, Schaffermahlzeit (local traditional banquet of merchants and seamen) and chamber of commerce. I love these things. But I always said, and Claudia, coming from Hamburg played a role here, there is hopefully more than in Bremen.

**Moritz Vetter:** Entrepreneurial mindset too?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Entrepreneurial but also social mindset. Claudia and I move around in Bremen (Bremen is one of the poorest cities in Germany with a high percentage of welfare cases). We know every quarter and we have bars and pubs where we go regularly. Most of our friends live in Oberneuland and in Schwachhausen (two wealthier areas in Bremen) and have never been to the Neustadt (low income area of the city). Only when they pass through the Neustadt when they head for the airport. That is too narrow for me. And I learned from my wonderful colleagues at hmmh, they live in the Neustadt, in the Schlachterviertel (lively neighbourhood of the city) and other totally different quarters. Very sophisticated people, all academical people, but they live a different life. I learned from these people how wonderful my hometown is since I was not limited anymore. And that's how we live today and that is what also taught me to do projects in other areas in Bremen, social responsible projects.

**Moritz Vetter:** Does your personal commitment to Rotary, Stifterverband and YPO matter in that regard? We talked about it, it is a personal thing, right?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, no part of the strategy.

**Moritz Vetter:** But it's something that is important for you. You use it as a forum to have conversations, to talk about relevant topics, your ideas and your approach to business. You mentioned you had a phone call with a fellow CEO last week.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I appreciate my own experience. Now I'm 59, I turn 60 next year and I have 30 years of experience and mostly good experience. But what I learned most from are bad experiences, like selling my family business. In my private life, my first wife died in a car accident and all these life's changing instabilities and I learned that from any instability, there will be another stability. You don't quite know what it would be, but it will come. That comes with age. The more you learn that, the more often you learn that, the more composure comes. It will go on somehow. That is something I appreciate very much nowadays. When I talk to people who are a little bit in turmoil I can catch up with them, this helps these people. This is the part of experience you cannot have with 26.

**Moritz Vetter:** I would say it is not easy to distinct these things. Management, entrepreneurship, society, altruism because it is a full mindset. As far as I understood you, you

don't necessarily distinct things. You have an idea of your life, of ethics, of morals and you apply it to different situations.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Yes, it is my life model. That is how I live.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I told you it was dangerous for me to talk about these things with me.

**Moritz Vetter:** To be honest, I was almost fully aware that after 5 minutes after meeting you. Okay. I'm very interested to see how that turns out. So I think this would be really quickly now. Do you have future goals for sustainability or general for your business? You said being better is always a thing. Obviously you are happy with the situation right now, but is there anything that you could declare as your goal?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Um. Hey, I don't see right now any major changes.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** We have a good status, but are listening to the people, interviewing young people, learning from them is very important. I would always be in favour of a little more agility, to be more agile, even more agile as we are with that when it comes to ideas and projects, this agility of a company. If I talk about an agile company. This is not, as you say, dogmatic.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** There are different people in the company, and there are units which are less agile, and there are units which are more agile. I call that, you know, as you know, as a controller for agility. It's like with a client. Some clients are more agile. Some clients are waterfall. Yeah, that is very difficult for us to work with. But so this is not all structured in one agile format here in the company. And I would wish that from the status where the units, all the teams are from that status of 2022. Every unit grows from where they are a little bit further into agility.

**Moritz Vetter:** Okay.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Which could be which could mean from different status, different things. Yeah. So that's what I think that's what I would want also for this topic is small adjustment, maybe a little more communication, I think a little bit more public, a public report of these

things we do could be helpful. You mentioned the website. This is certainly something I take as an as a good critique. I saw that actually I saw that this morning because I looked for the website that has nothing on.

**Moritz Vetter:** Yes, not that much. Would you say that, just because Gen Y as part of my topic: does the change that we were talking about, does that worry you in any way?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** What worries me most is Home Office. Because I think the people who work mostly from home, miss the second track or the third track of socialisation. This is more a social problem and societal problem because one track is working from home. One track is friends and family, and one track is most of the people who are up here in the office. It's a big social system of trust and mistrust. Gaining friends. Having the same adventures. Going to sports. Respect. Learn when somebody is in a bad mood, somebody yells at you at some point. These things disappear when you sit at home. And I think this is what worries me most right now, that these people, especially the young people who, from my point of view, have not much reason to sit at home. We're not talking about people driving 45 minutes or one hour each way. Yeah, of course. They don't have to come every day. Families with three little children. Of course, it's easier when somebody is at home. No question about it. But we have a lot of young people who actually sit at home as our trainees and don't miss anything. And this worries me most. Otherwise, I have no worries because I think every generation found its way and this new generation will also find its way.

**Moritz Vetter:** But because you say to yourself about generation and we've talked about home office, something that is a big topic, too, obviously. Would you say that Gen Z is shaped by Home Office and that's why they are acting the way they are? Or is it something that they have anyways and just, you know, Home Office is an accelerator?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** That's a very good question. My guess is it's a little bit shaped that way because most of them already studied at home. They don't even know what a university is because they never went to university. They sat home and did their bachelor.

**Moritz Vetter:** Yeah, that's true. But also because what we're talking about like social sustainability. Yeah, I'm 30 now. I already worked for like almost six years, so I have business experience and I know what I'm looking for. You know, I have I've made some experience and

now I have a better, clearer understanding. And I know, you know, I've been I've been born and raised in the nineties, which was a different, different world in terms of ecology, awareness, these kind of things. Well, and if you would be like an 18 year old now, I think in terms of ecology, climate change, discrimination, these kind of things, you have a different understanding.

**Moritz Vetter:** I thought in the beginning when you said, okay, they take it as a given, you know, Gen Z, they don't even ask about these kind of things because they think it's it's a given that you have to do that. It has to be part of the strategy. For me, I don't have that feeling because I have been working in the older economy. I'm not I'm not very experienced, but I'm a bit more experienced than a 20 year old. So that's something that I would definitely ask, you know. So would you say that this matters also?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** Because this matters. It's not that I mean, that they don't care about that. I don't say that at all. It's just related to the job. They said they do a checkbox and it's not an USP for a company, it's a must, it's a given. It's a must. The Gen Z, the millennials, have this environmental consciousness and they don't know how to deal with that because they get in trouble. Now when Habeck from the Green Party goes to Qatar and buys gas and I see that this tears them apart and me too but especially the young generation and I have understanding for the protest of the rebellion and of the last generation, not criminal things which jeopardise other people. I don't like that at all, but I have understanding for that. It's not that the generation doesn't care about that. They have the bigger problem because they now have inflation and they have the war in Europe, which from the environmental status, it's very bad news for the world. Because Putin gives a shit for that. The Chinese are a little bit more cautious. The Africans can't take care of that right now. And we sit in the middle and do not know what to do.

**Moritz Vetter:** But also prior to all that crisis that we have, single income households are not a thing anymore because you can't afford living. Prior the inflation already. So, I worked, I had a decent salary in Munich, but the rent was really high. I was already above average and I still would not have been able to support a potential wife or a kid. I would not have been able to do so.

**Stefan Messerknecht:** So the two worries, good that you mentioned that, the two worries I have for the very young generation is environmental issues, which are a little bit in the

background right now, and cost of living, housing, not cost of living, but housing. When a four person household cannot afford a decent flat or little row house anymore, working quite successfully, earning money, having two children. That is something which makes people very unsatisfied that the middle class has difficulties and that is politically dangerous. With the move towards the right. But the environmental and cost of living. Cost of housing. The two things for that generation and that counts for Y and X. While Z is not even that far until now. They are just students in their flats.

**Moritz Vetter:** In my age your focus changes a bit so you know, so you think of: okay, how am I actually provide if I want a family? And so it changes the prioritisation of things. Do you have anything to add from your side?

**Stefan Messerknecht:** I just appreciate it very much to talk about these things. From my perspective we covered a lot and definitely the most important aspects.

**Moritz Vetter:** Thank you very much for taking the time! This has been very interesting and instructive for me.

## **Appendix B: Informal Background Interview with Ebru-Genisel**

The segment of internal communication was self-established. The foundation of the items were existing research on the field and practical insights gained from Mr. Messerknecht and hmmm. However, the objective was to further substantiate the meaningfulness of the questions. A direct relevance for the real business environment appeared to be beneficial for the relevance of the questionnaire.

Thus, I was able to speak to Ebru Ulu-Genisel. She is a Manager in the Human Capital team at the global player Deloitte (*Ebru Ulu-Genisel | LinkedIn, 2023*). Deloitte is a professional services network and is considered as one of the Big Four, a group of the four biggest accounting firms measured by revenue (Sikka, 2016; Ucoglu, 2020).

As an employee at Deloitte, Ms. Ulu-Genisel has specialised in advising on HR transformations and is an expert in organisational change and communication.


The interview was conducted through zoom on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December.

I introduced myself and explained my scientific approach. By presenting the relevance of internal communication on my research, I pointed out the reason for the interview. She was considered to be an expert for internal communication and hence very valuable for my dissertation and considerations.

She was not able to provide me with an actual sample of a project or even a survey due to client confidentiality reasons. Nonetheless, she was willing to validate the internal communication questions that I prepared for the meeting. Those were the self-established questions.



She did confirm that the presented survey would also be a viable tool and could be one segment in a bigger and more elaborate survey. She did not propose adjustments for the questionnaire. Her high-level job and fitting job specification facilitated the validation for the questionnaire from a practical business perspective which was the set goal for this interview. The prepared items were not changed based on Mr Ubru-Genisel's input. The prepared segment was fully integrated in the final questionnaire of this dissertation.

## Appendix C: Online Questionnaire



### Survey Master Thesis

The survey takes 10 minutes and is completely anonymous.

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt  Konto wechseln

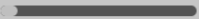
#### Master Thesis on Social Sustainability


My name is Moritz Vetter and I study at the Católica University in Lisbon.  
For my master thesis I am conducting a survey to examine the influence of Social Sustainability on employees of Generation Y (20 to 40 year olds).

Social Sustainability is part of the concept Sustainable Development and addresses its societal aspects. In short, Social Sustainability means that all humans are provided with the resources, living conditions and general needs they require. This applies to the current and all future generations.



My thesis concentrates on corporate Social Sustainability, the workplace and your personal experience.

Please answer all questions honestly.  
All replies are completely anonymous.  
Thank you!

 Seite 1 von 11



### Survey Master Thesis

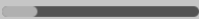
 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt  Konto wechseln

#### Limitation Participants

Thank you very much for taking the time and effort to participate in this survey!  
Please be aware that this survey only addresses people who:


- Are living in Germany
- Are between 20 and 40 years old
- Are currently under employment (not self-employed)

Please continue if this applies.  
Thank you!



 Seite 2 von 11

Dieser Inhalt wurde nicht von Google erstellt und wird von Google auch nicht unterstützt. [Missbrauch melden](#) - [Nutzungsbedingungen](#) - [Datenschutzerklärung](#)

Google Formulare



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

Please note that this survey only addresses 20 – 40 year olds.


What is your age? \*

- 20 – 23
- 24 – 27
- 28 – 31
- 32 – 35
- 36 – 40



Zurück Weiter

Seite 3 von 11

Alle Eingaben löschen



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

What gender do you identify as? \*

- Female
- Male
- Diverse
- Prefer not to answer

Zurück Weiter

Seite 4 von 11

Alle Eingaben löschen



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

What is your total annual income? \*

- < 24.999€
- 25.000€ – 49.999€
- 50.000€ – 74.999€
- 75.000€ – 99.999€
- > 100.000€
- Prefer not to answer



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

How many employees work at your organisation? \*

- < 10
- 10 – 49
- 50 – 249
- 250 – 4999
- > 5000
- Prefer not to answer



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

For how long have you been working at your current employer? \*

- < 1 year
- 1 – 2 years
- 3 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- > 10 years
- Prefer not to answer



## Survey Master Thesis

 morivetter@gmail.com wird nicht geteilt Konto wechseln 

\* Erforderlich

### Demographic Information

What describes your current job level best? \*

- Entry level
- Mid level
- Manager level
- Executive level
- Prefer not to answer

## Job Engagement

The scale reaches from 1 to 5. With your mobile device you may need to scroll to find all indications. Assess your personal situation at your workplace.

Please rate the statement below using 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). \*

	1	2	3	4	5
I know what is expected of me at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There is someone at work who encourages my development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At work, my opinions seem to count.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a best friend at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My organisation encourages the employees to provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation encourages the employees to cooperate by solving work-related problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation encourages the employees to share work-related experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation encourages team-working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation rewards the employees for cooperation activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees provide support for each other by solving work-related problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Social Sustainability**

The scale reaches from 1 to 5. With your mobile device you may need to scroll to find all indications. Assess your personal situation at your workplace.

Please rate the statement below using 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). \*

	1	2	3	4	5
Employees share their personal problems with line managers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees share the work-related problems with line managers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees provide suggestions concerning the improvement of processes at the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation encourages the employees to take responsibility for decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

More experienced employees share their working experience with colleagues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The compensation system is understandable to employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The compensation system is fair.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The employees are paid the same for the same work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation ensures equal personal development opportunities for employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation ensures equal opportunities for all candidates during the selection process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My organisation ensures equal opportunities for males and females to further their careers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation ensures possibilities for employees to develop general and professional competences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee competence development is oriented to the future requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation ensures possibilities for employees to participate in fairs, internships.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation applies different forms for employee development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My organisation constantly encourages the employees to develop their competences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation provides the necessary working equipment for the employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The workplaces fulfil safety requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation encourages the employees to give up bad habits.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation provides good conditions for rest for its employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation provides wellness opportunities for its employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation provides good working conditions for its employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My organisation cooperates with other organisations for the purpose of employee development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At request, the organisation provides recommendations for former employee.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation accepts students for practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation cooperates with other organisations for innovation projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Internal Communication

The scale reaches from 1 to 5. With your mobile device you may need to scroll to find all indications. Assess your personal situation at your workplace.

Please rate the statement below using 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). \*

	1	2	3	4	5
My company has a well-established internal communication (e.g. email, newsletter, posters, learning, town halls, all-hands meetings etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel well informed about my company's values and objectives through internal communication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel engaged and motivated by my company's internal communication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My company's internal communication positively encourages me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn through internal communication of my company.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I value my company's internal communication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>