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Environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context

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Abstract			
<p>Industrial companies are increasingly interested in sustainability and stakeholder pressure extends to all manufacturer and supplier chains. Also, industrial companies recognize the opportunities of sustainability as it becomes more important to their customers as well. However, how these industrial companies can become sustainable, what sustainability means for these companies and how it can be utilized in stakeholder relations and marketing communications is unclear.</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to further understand how industrial companies can become truly sustainable through co-creating an environmentally sustainable brand identity as well as utilizing it in their stakeholder relations. Sustainability in an industrial context, especially in industrial or corporate branding, is scarce. Thus, focusing on the specific context of industrial B2B companies and their brands allows to further understand their conditions rather than trying to apply the more researched B2C perspective on the industrial markets.</p> <p>Empirical data of this study were collected from 18 semi-structured online interviews. The interviews are from the case organization, a component producer factory, and its close stakeholder, a sales and assembly company, that together form the Finnish organization of their parent company. The parent company is a Central European industrial multinational. The interviewees varied from job title to position, and many groups of people from top management to employees were interviewed. The empirical research gave a deep understanding of the industrial context and how environmentally sustainable brand identities are and can be co-created.</p> <p>The study allowed to identify the process of environmentally sustainable brand identities are co-created as well as what are the enablers, actions, mediators, inhibitors, drivers, and actions of this process. Together they form a further understanding on how environmentally sustainable brand identities are co-created in an industrial context. The literature review provided a comprehensive model of the brand identity co-creation process, and the empirical research allowed to understand the industrial context and its concrete actions to foster sustainability in the brand identity co-creation process. Thus, the study offers understanding of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation on both processual and concrete level. Also, marketing and communications of environmentally sustainable brand identity is discussed.</p>			
Keywords Sustainability, brand identity, industrial branding, environmental sustainability, domesticated market			
Additional information The thesis is part of Oulu University's Green Factory – towards carbon neutral production (GREEF) project			

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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis is done in co-operation with Green Factory (GREEF) project at Oulu University. The objective of the GREEF-project is understanding how to link environmentally sustainable manufacturing operations to the industrial branding of manufacturers in mature markets. In relation to that objective the aim of this thesis is to discover if and how brand identity co-creation can be a part of industrial companies' sustainable business and branding development. Further aim is to gain further understanding on environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation and what are the dimensions within the phenomenon. Thus, the research problem is to understand what the co-creation process of environmentally sustainable brand identity is and how it can contribute to companies' sustainability branding and sustainable business development, especially in the industrial context.

1.1 Introduction to the research topic and justifications

The evolution of meaning of brand has come to a point where brands are held to higher standards as agents of social change (Swaminathan Sorescu, Steenkamp, O'Guinn, & Schmitt, 2020). Corporate brands face a challenge in transforming themselves into purpose-driven brands that aim for greater good and sustainability on many levels of the organization and its stakeholders such as the Earth (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). This implicates growing responsibilities of brands to match their position as a moral agent whether they want it or not. To meet the responsibilities of a moral agent brands are required to include sustainability as a core matter of the organization, which has consequences and sets new standards. For instance, Swaminathan et al. (2020) argue that corporate brands face demands for social responsibility and sustainability that exceed mere profit maximization. Thus, research on how to meet the growing expectations of stakeholders and incorporate sustainability to the core of organizations is needed. Additionally, brand is the means of communicating the core of an organization to its stakeholders. Therefore, because identity is the essence of a business to business (B2B) corporate brand (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic & Koporcic, 2020a), brand identity becomes the focus of the research.

In other words, increasing demand for organizations to take responsibility over sustainable development can be answered with researching how organizations can become sustainable by putting sustainability in its core focus, essentially creating a sustainable identity. Since brands are the symbols or ideas that communicate the identity, the focus of research is justifiably on brand identities and how to co-create an environmentally sustainable brand identity. Overall marketing has a critical intra- and inter-organizational role in aiding companies' objectives for environmental sustainability (Sharma, Iyer, Mehrota, & Krishnan, 2010). In addition to Iglesias et al. (2020a) arguing that identity is in the core of B2B brands, Robertson and Arachchige (2015) present identity as the success factor in positioning companies in a rapidly changing environment. Thus, brand identity is the most meaningful phenomena to approach the research question with. Also, evidence on the connection of excellent organizations and ethicality has been found (Bendixen & Abratt, 2007), thus making sustainability as part of ethical organizations and their identities meaningful intertwined phenomena to be researched.

There are plenty of research covering the need to understand sustainability and corporate social responsibility in the B2C market (e.g., Kim, Hur & Yeo, 2015; Rodrigues & Borges 2015; Rivera, Bigne & Curras-Perez, 2016; Muniz, Guzmán, Paswan & Crawford, 2019). In addition, brand identity research is largely concentrated on discussing the B2C or product brand perspective on brand identity (e.g. Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009; Urde, 2013). However, there is insufficient amount of research in the field of sustainable brand identities or the relationship of operations and sustainability marketing in industrial B2B contexts. For instance, Lahtinen and Närvänen (2020) present the absence of sustainable corporate branding research, whereas Seyedghorban, Matanda and LaPlaca (2016) found that B2B branding research has been dominated by the limited perspectives of brand equity, brand power and managing brand equity. Thus, it is necessary to take the perspective of industrial B2B companies and research how sustainability transformations of their brand identities are developed. This makes managerial perspectives, employees and external stakeholders in the organization's network the main actors of the research.

Also, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) argue that benefits of sustainability in a B2B context can be achieved through integrating sustainability-geared operations

with branding efforts. However, it is unclear how they can be integrated and as Iglesias and Ind (2020) present corporate brands are struggling to embed sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the core of their brand strategy. The relationship between environmental sustainability and B2B branding is also less researched (Vesal, Siahtiri, & O'Cass, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the research topic is well justified, and the research topic issues relevant themes that address timely needs of both academic and private institutions.

The introduction chapter presents background on sustainability, brand identity research and justifies the relevance and timeliness of the research topic. The perspective of sustainable brand identity is justified, and later research questions are presented. Further, the structure of the research, methodology and key concepts are presented. Understanding on sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context is developed through an empirical case study.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

The research aims to further understanding on how environmentally sustainable brand identities are co-created. In order to accomplish that a comprehensive framework on environmental sustainability and brand identity is formed which is completed with empirical case study of an industrial B2B manufacturer. Further, the industrial B2B manufacturer is set in a domesticated market setting, meaning products or services are sold within a corporation based on pre-negotiated rules of exchange (Arndt, 1979). Since the case study interviews are internal, it takes the focus of internal co-creation. Since internal marketing is essential for coordinated effort and strategy implementation in the environmental sustainability context (Sharma et al., 2010), the focus is well argued for. The interviews will provide information on what is the process of co-creating a sustainable brand identity, what the challenges are and how it can be utilized in sustainable business and branding development. Thus, the research topic is approached through the main research question:

How is an environmentally sustainable brand identity co-created?

The co-creation of an environmentally sustainable brand identity is inspected from the perspective of co-creation process and the more detailed dimensions of identity. Together they form a clear and structured answer to the main research questions. Thus, a set of sub-questions are formed to support the main research question:

What is the process of co-creating environmentally sustainable brand identities?

What are the actions, enablers and inhibitors of this process?

1.3 Methodology

The thesis research is qualitative and consists of a literature review and qualitative empirical research. Based on the literature review a theoretical framework is formed. The empirical data is analyzed, and conclusions are drawn in accordance with the theoretical framework. Empirical data was collected through 18 semi-structured online interviews. The interviews were conducted with the case organization and another corporation organization, together constructing the Finnish entity of the case organization's corporation. Since there is little previous research on the topic, the aim of the interviews is to provide further understanding on the thesis topic.

Semi-structured interviews are an effective method for the research since it allows the researcher to have a sufficient amount of control over the interview while leaving room for the interviewee to describe their own perspective (Koskinen, Alasuutari & Pelkonen). The interview questions were formed based on the preliminary theoretical framework and in accordance with the research question. Diversity of interviewed organizations and individuals allows to gain more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Applying qualitative thematic analysis to analyze the interviews, in-depth insights into sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial and domesticated market setting are provided.

1.4 Definition of key concepts

This chapter covers the key concepts of the thesis, which helps to understand them in the context of the research and streamlines the reading experience. The definitions

start from the concept of a brand evolving to the final conceptualization of an environmentally sustainable brand identity in an industrial and domesticated market setting.

Brand

This thesis adopts the concept of a brand to the extent that identity is tightly accompanied to a brand within the context of profit-seeking companies. Identity alone is not enough to express what organizational identities contain; thus, the concept of brand gives more depth and focus on examining the co-creation of environmentally sustainable identities. Brand gives the identity creation a direction and goals, e.g., greater performance, collective understanding of value or renewed position in a company's network, among many. In other words, the brand sets a context in which the organization's identity can be observed, evaluated or planned. Therefore, from the perspective of this thesis brands could be seen as relational constructs, signifiers and intangible associations that exist in between organizations and their internal and external stakeholders, essentially held as images, ideas and interpretations (Cornelissen, 2022). These intangible meanings associated with the brand are co-created with the stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2022).

Brand identity

Identity adds to the concept of a brand by giving it more depth as the object of interaction that is between the identity of an organization and how it is transmitted or perceived. Brand identity is dynamic and constructed over time through interactions in the stakeholder network (e.g., Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Von Wallpach, Hemetsberger & Espersen, 2017). Further, it is a 'continually evolving constellation of meanings, constructed through a dialectical process among a multitude of stakeholders in relation to their individual and collective identities' (Essamri, McKechnie, & Winklhofer, 2019). Thus, in this thesis brand identity is defined as a set of fluid, dynamic and polysemous meanings co-created by internal and external stakeholders (Von Wallpach et al., 2017).

Brand co-creation

As brand identity is constructed through interactions in the stakeholder network (e.g., Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Von Wallpach, Hemetsberger & Espersen, 2017), the thesis focuses on direct or indirect interactive co-creation of stakeholders and the organization, in which a managerial perspective is dominant without forgetting the internal stakeholders like employees. The definition of co-creation is dependent on the target of co-creation (e.g., identity, strategy, meaning) and the individual researcher deciding which concepts under co-creation they want to use. These concepts can be seen as tools to specify who is participating in co-creation, who has agency and power, who benefits and how is co-creation viewed (e.g., process or attitude) within different contexts. (Tähtinen & Suomi, 2022.)

The researched phenomenon of the thesis, co-creation of environmentally sustainable brand identities, makes brand identity and its meanings as the obvious concept and target of co-creation. The thesis takes the perspective of co-creation as a process, however, dives deeper in the psychological or emotional drivers behind co-creation which could be viewed as attitudinal perspective on co-creation. Hence, the thesis also takes the brand engagement perspective that emphasizes interaction processes and emotional or attitudinal states towards co-creation. Here engagement is raised as a prerequisite of co-creation or as the process itself (Tähtinen & Suomi, 2022.)

Environmentally sustainable brand identity

Discussing the co-creation of environmentally sustainable brand identities means discussing the transformation of a whole organization, and from a wider perspective the transformation of its whole network. When the desire and decision of change towards sustainability is made the organization changes (Sheth & Sinh, 2015). In other words, environmentally sustainable brand identities embrace sustainability as part of the organization's culture (Gupta & Kumar, 2013), set it as the core mission of the company and proactively involve stakeholders to its co-creation (Tarnovskaya., Hånell & Tolstoy, 2022; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014). Thus, environmentally sustainable brand identity is the result of these ambitions, decisions and actions. This way environmentally sustainable brand becomes the descriptive

symbol of what drives the behavior and decisions of an organization and its individuals. B2C activist brands like Patagonia or Oatly could be good examples of strong sustainable brand identities which clearly state to the external and assumingly internal audiences the driving essence and goals of the organization.

Industrial market

Industrial markets are characterized by their buyers and consist of profit seeking business firms and budget constrained institutions. Industrial firms typically have a smaller number of customers in comparison to B2C markets, and these customers can be described as profit-motivated and budget-constrained. In industrial markets buying decisions are a combination of individual and organizational decision making involving several actors and series of decision stages. The role of branding, especially corporate branding, and its components like value propositions or communication strategies are essential in the buying process and understanding of it. In addition, industrial markets are characterized by the size of customer purchases and the relationships between buyers and suppliers. (Webster & Keller, 2004.) Currently industrial markets are viewed from an ecosystem perspective in addition to a traditional dyadic perspective, since the ecosystem is where the B2B brand's narratives and discourse are built (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

Domesticated market

Domesticated market refers to transactions moved inside a company or inside a group of companies committed to cooperation based on negotiated rules of exchange. Domesticated markets have centralized control procedures and information is consciously or directly managed. In other words, products or services sold within a corporation based on pre-negotiated rules of exchange can be called a domesticated market. (Arndt, 1979.)

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with introduction where the research topic and justifications for the research topic are covered. In addition, research question, aim of the thesis, research

methods and key concepts of the thesis are presented. Later in chapter two brand identity as a phenomenon is approached through an extensive literature review and a theoretical framework is formed in the end of the chapter. The chapter covers the industrial context, environmental sustainability, brand identity as well as the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process stages. In the third chapter a deeper look is taken into the empirical research, therefore research methods and results of the empirical research are presented. The fourth chapter dives deeper to the results of the empirical research and findings are presented in accordance with the theoretical framework. Finally, in the fifth chapter conclusions are made, research questions answered, managerial and theoretical implications are presented alongside with discussion for further research.

2 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE BRAND IDENTITY

The theoretical background presents the characteristics of the industrial context, what brand identity and environmental sustainability are as well as describes the learnings of the literature review in the form of three staged brand identity co-creation process.

2.1 Characteristics of the industrial context

The research on B2B branding has slowly developed to recognize brands as strategic assets for industrial companies (Seyedghorban et al., 2016). The perspectives vary from which point of view the phenomenon is discussed, for example, a cluster of functional and emotional values, which promises a particular experience (de Chernatony, 2002) or the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization's unique business model (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). All definitions of brand and branding bring their own unique and valuable perspective while trying to capture the essence of a brand. However, their frameworks could potentially be oversimplifying, too focused on image advertising as well as undervaluing of the personal business relationships in the B2B and industrial contexts. Corporate or B2B brand identities require more careful inspection of internal factors like culture, core values and mission as well as deeper understanding of positioning and value proposition. (Urde, 2013.) The thesis case company is heavily embedded in the industrial context, thus more careful inspection of industrial brand marketing characteristics is needed.

Industrial markets are not characterized by their products, but rather their buyers. The industrial markets can be seen to consist of budget constrained institutions (e.g., government agencies, healthcare or educational organizations) as well as profit seeking business firms whose demand is derived from other profit seeking business firms. Industrial companies typically gain most of their revenue from a relatively small number of customers. Common categorization for industrial companies' goods and services are raw materials, processed materials, component parts, subassemblies, light equipment, heavy capital equipment, construction, maintenance, repair and operating supplies as well as services (e.g., consulting, marketing or technical and data-processing management). It is essential to understand that in industrial markets customers' buying decisions have individuals behind them, and these individuals

have their own personal motivations within the organization's goals, resources, structures and guiding systems. (Webster & Keller, 2004.)

Brands have a role affecting these buying decisions, for instance, through lowering risk and reducing information search costs (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011). Industrial brands have a myriad of possibilities for brand building and differentiation, for instance functional performance associations (product value proposition, promised benefits) or more abstract associations (e.g., trust, corporate social responsibility and credibility). However, industrial sales and marketing has become cooperation with customers and long-term relationship management. (Webster & Keller, 2004.) Indeed, abstract associations like trust that tap into the emotional aspects of creating long-term relationships are essential in understanding, building and nurturing of B2B relationships. Competitive advantage can be sought through branding since developing emotional qualities besides product's functional qualities differentiate one from others as well as make acquiring and retaining customers more likely through emotional bonds inspiring enduring buyer-seller relations (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007). Especially in B2B context these emotional qualities together with functional qualities could encourage relationship development where the emotional values and interactions are emphasized (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

Strong brand can reduce industrial buyers' information costs and risks associated with the purchase (Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014) as well as create reassurance, trust and credibility of the supplier as risk is reduced (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). For instance, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001) associate brand trust with a feeling of security, positive intentions and interest in the other party's welfare. Further, trust combined to top management support creates the optimal environment for improving sustainability operations like green supply chain management which again creates credibility and benevolence of the supplier and enhances further sustainability development. So, together with cross-functional cooperation, trust and credibility help to create relationships focused on mutual gains and longevity, which again contributes to convince stakeholders like customers to collaborate on and commit to challenging projects like environmental sustainability. (Hoejmose, Brammer & Millington, 2012; Zhu & Sarkis 2004.)

Industrial companies are moving towards partnership-oriented thinking, thus placing emphasis the more abstract associations of their brands (Webster & Keller, 2004). Further, suppliers that engage in extensive personal interactions and joint problem solving co-create value with their customers through this dialogue and interaction, ultimately aiming to achieve a mutual understanding of what generates optimal value (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012). However, in the context of the thesis the role of the product in an industrial brand is also essential issue to discuss. The organization and the product they produce intertwine together, affecting the industrial brand. For instance, in B2B software brand building companies can be heavily technology-oriented and base marketing communications on product features, often resulting in neglecting marketing and brand building activities. So, while products can be needed as an essential part of planning brand building activities, brand building should be taken into consideration early on and internally coordinated with multiple divisions, like technology and marketing. (Ojasalo, Nätti, Olkkonen, 2008.)

In B2B setting, the term corporate brand can also be used to point that the discussion is about the organization. A corporate brand is a promise of the brand's values and what they stand for (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Reflecting the emphasis on abstract associations of brands (Webster & Keller, 2004), a strong corporate brand signifies quality, trustworthiness, distinctiveness (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Abratt & Mingione, 2022) and is inviting (Urde, 2022). They all combine to authenticity that consists of e.g. originality, credibility, reliability, consistency, continuity and integrity (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). Further, authenticity is consistent delivering on promises, conforming to relevant norms of society and connecting the brand to its heritage (time, place, culture founders etc.) (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). However, like mutual understanding of value (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012) authenticity is co-created in individuals' own understanding of what is true or authentic (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). Overall, a successful corporate brand is the result of cross-functional and participatory effort of all organization members (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Webster & Keller, 2004; Ojasalo et al., 2008), including the interplay of strategic vision, culture and brand images held by stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Thus, the industrial company should know what their customers value in their decision-making process and cater to these values, varying from functional performance to more abstract associations, i.e., from partnership and benefit focused customers to product and transaction focused customers (Webster & Keller, 2004; Ojasalo et al., 2008). Currently industrial markets are viewed from an ecosystem perspective in addition to a traditional dyadic perspective, since the ecosystem is where the B2B brand's narratives and discourse are built (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

2.2 Environmental sustainability

Due to intensive co-operation between B2B businesses and their stakeholders (Vesal et al., 2021) and organizational learning processes (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022) sustainability can be tied to the overall process of brand identity creation. For instance, Lusch and Vargo (2014) present that a company that learns together with its stakeholders and unifies their needs into their value proposition becomes sustainable through this need-unifying collaboration. From another perspective, value propositions emerge from close interactions with the stakeholder network when actions are driven by a vision of making sustainable change (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). Indeed, through learning environmental sustainability is brought into an organization's managerial paradigm (i.e., assumptions on what matters, how the world works) thus including the environment to the underlying value system of the organization. However, to learn these environmental values and beliefs, engaging to action is required. (Halme, 2002.)

In this thesis focus is given on environmental sustainability, which can be determined as pollution prevention, waste minimization, reduction of raw material and energy consumption and other actions aiming at diminishing the firm's impact on the environment (Gupta & Kumar, 2013). Vesal et al. (2021) add that environmental sustainability is manifested through environmental remediation (reducing emissions, waste, consumption of hazardous materials and environmental accidents) and economic efficiency (efficient use of resources). In a larger context economic and social aspects of sustainability are as important as economic ones, for instance Elkington (1998) presents them as the Triple Bottom line in his widely popular

definition of sustainability. Also, Lunde (2018) integrates the three in the GREEN framework that highlights sustainability's integration to business practices, responsible environmental behavior for current and future generations, ethical consumption and company strategies that promote behavior resulting in higher quality of life. Overall, reformative and transformative sustainability marketing suggest promoting sustainable lifestyles, demarketing, circular economy, stakeholder perspective, putting continuity over profit, changing institutions and critical assessment of the current capitalist neoliberal economy, as well as attaching sustainability as part of company culture, mission and decision-making (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019).

Other actions and practices in an industrial context are green logistics and eco-friendly transportation (Dekker, Bloemhof, & Mallidis, 2012), environmentally-conscious supply management, remanufacturing and replacing legacy systems (Sharma et al., 2010), green product innovation (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010), resource-constrained product development (Sharma & Iyer, 2012), collaboration for resource usage optimization (Gold, Seuring & Beske, 2010) and adopting a green supply chain (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004) or a closed loop supply chain (Dekker et al., 2012). Additionally, industrial sustainability can utilize lean manufacturing, low carbon solutions, cradle-to-cradle design, industrial symbiosis, de-materialization and green chemistry as well. A more holistic approach would combine the aforementioned with social and organizational dimensions. For instance, ethical trade, radical transparency of sustainability impact, not-for-profit collaboration or hybrid businesses (for profit and non-profit structures). (Bocken, Short, Rana & Evans, 2014.) To adopt practices like green supply chain the support of top management and development of trustful partnerships with supply chain partners are required (Hoejmose et al., 2012).

Overall, implementing sustainability related goals requires adaptation of sustainability as part of organization's culture (Gupta & Kumar, 2013), the complete focus and genuine commitment of the entire organization (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022) as well as top-level management's acknowledgment on the importance of establishing trusted relationships with diverse stakeholders (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). Especially value-driven moral motives behind environmental

sustainability as well as integrating climate change into business strategies engages stakeholders to sustainability actions. However, companies that operate in emission intensive industries have higher probability of instrumental motives for stakeholder engagement, meaning they use engagement to compensate actions and to have temporary relief from stakeholder pressure. (Lintukangas, Arminen, Kähkönen & Karttunen, 2022.)

Especially in the context of environmental sustainability joint environmental planning and cooperative problem-solving of environmental challenges is essential (Goodman, Korsunova & Halme, 2017; Vachon & Klassen, 2008). More precisely, environmental collaboration can be determined as direct involvement and joint planning of an organization with its suppliers and customers for environmental management and solutions (Vachon & Klassen, 2008). However, more peripheral or secondary stakeholders like academic institutions or public authorities should also be involved and can actually become more relevant than primary stakeholders such as suppliers (Goodman et al., 2017). For instance, a case study of 3M's long-term commitment to sustainability showed that they managed to establish joint problem solving with its stakeholders (employees, customers, partners, government, communities) to solve global challenges and improve lives with a collaborative and science-based approach (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). Autonomy of the participating stakeholders is crucial to engage them in co-creation whereas dictation compromises peoples' willingness to participate (Mühlbacher, 2022). Additionally, Cortez, Freytag and Ingstrup (2022) present measuring and controlling of firm-level emissions, real-time sharing of emission data with other network actors as well as operations and business regulation based on ecosystem emissions as legitimizing and trust creating practices for collaborative ecosystems. These collaborative efforts and co-specialized inter-firm resources provide competitive advantage that is sustainable in the sense that it is hard to imitate, socially complex, developed by time and causally ambiguous (Gold et al. 2010).

Therefore, corporate sustainability needs to be viewed as a proactive approach to place sustainability as a strategic area of focus, thus enabling companies to co-create sustainability agendas that reach further than only the immediate business operations. Taking a proactive market approach tackling grand social or environmental

sustainability challenges allows companies to make sustainable change and gain long-term benefits besides mere risk-mitigation, for instance, through shaping the market. To create systemic and ideological change in an industry as well as shape stakeholder behavior, relationship-building activities and co-operation of several actors are essential (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). From a more business perspective, Vesal et al. (2021) also encourage reshaping customer attitudes to favor environmental sustainability in order to maximize brand image value and enhance market performance. In practice this change can happen for instance through joining forces with other organizations to drive structural change by collective bargaining or showing successful example and becoming a target of benchmarking (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). Consequently, sustainability and its collaborative implementation become an ongoing learning process requiring stakeholder interaction on the same level with ongoing brand identity co-creation, thus intertwining them together.

More generally, sustainability actions and practices can be categorized in many ways. Gupta and Kumar (2013) categorize them to economic, social and environmental dimensions including the triple bottom line people planet profit categorization within each dimension. Listing several aforementioned green initiatives, they also identify several managerial, marketing and operational opportunities like efficient resource utilization and supply chain management, improved profitability, efficient marketing and resource planning, efficient product management, improved customer facing and knowledge management as well as improved market assessment. Additionally, they propose sustainability performance reporting systems, identifying investments, educative labels and performance-oriented roadmaps as meaningful sources of information to drive sustainability initiatives.

Dangelico and Pujari (2010) categorize actions and practices into strategy, process or design and performance. They propose ethical code and sustainability plan, mission statement, eco-design guideline, extranets for green supplier networks, industry association networks, regulation and government incentives, credible green marketing and energy savings illustrating software as useful tools within these categories. In addition, they recognize several useful activities: creating incentives or awards for employee engagement, energy efficient products, use of recyclable

materials, adoption of life cycle perspective, third party certifications, highlighting the benefits of green products, cross-functional collaboration in product development as well as gathering information and knowledge from policy makers, scientific sources, society, universities and other companies creating sustainable cultures. Overall, the strategic decisions become attitudes and mediators to practical actions that facilitate or enable the sustainable brand identity creation. Similarly, Saraniemi and Norrgrann (2022) present that change in the firm's environment creates need for change in strategy, meaning that to respond to changing needs and values strategic actions are needed to create actual behavioral change.

B2B manufacturers' brand images benefit from environmental sustainability activities which translates into market performance through effective customer relationship management (CRM) and working with business customers that possess positive attitudes towards environmental sustainability. This means developing internal processes that communicate the sustainability initiatives and actions to customers who also acknowledge the importance of environmental sustainability. (Vesal et al., 2021.) For instance, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) argue that values can be associated to a brand through implementing actions and practices into operations and communicating these actions, sustainability being a good example. Hence, organizational behavior becomes values and identity, or the other way around.

Similarly, in business to customer (B2C) literature it has been found that customer's own attitude towards a brand (Rivera et al., 2016), cultural environment (Muniz et al., 2019), as well as their own integrity and moral virtues (Rodrigues & Borges, 2015) affect how customers react to sustainability initiatives. Customers can witness sustainability actions due to the co-operation that B2B business requires from suppliers and its stakeholders. Examples of other ways of communication are performance reports, pro-environment campaigns, training workshops, advertising, salesforce and labels. Also, effective CRM capabilities and dialogue with customers in complex or technical contexts enables creating a closer relationship and sending more observable signals about environmentally sustainable actions thus maximizing the contributions of environmental sustainability investments on a brand. This is even more relevant in industries where environmental damage and resource

exploitation are significant issues, meaning that achieving environmentally sustainable position regarding brand image can increase sales revenue, profitability and public valuation. (Vesal et al., 2021.)

To respond to the growing responsibilities of that role conscience has been considered as part of sustainability (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). The idea of conscientiousness offers multiple virtues for companies: being true to themselves, open to dialogue, willing to submit their decision for the public and have incorporated sustainability or CSR in their culture which is lived by employees and ideally stakeholders as well (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). In other words, applying value-driven branding with a transformative purpose (e.g. sustainability, empowering customers) aiming to contribute to societal transformations is essential (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022). Value of a purpose comes from connecting it to the actual capabilities of the organization and to strategic decision-making (Ind, 2022), thus demonstrating that sustainability as core part of purpose needs to be understood by the organization by themselves and in their own context.

Together with stakeholder engaging governance models (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022), purpose is concerned with value creation for all stakeholders, thus providing guidance and clarity for strategic decision-making and grounds for performance measurements from the perspective of diverse stakeholders. In other words, values, conscientiousness and the organizational culture take a guiding role and help decision making by giving the organization internal clarity even when tough decision ought to be made. In practice it requires commitment to using the business as means to drive sustainable change in society, environment and competitive landscape as well as adopting a participatory and empathetic leadership style (Iglesias & Ind, 2020.) Additionally, such companies offering emotionally intelligent leadership can leverage the emotional, experiential and social value their organization creates besides mere product or solution delivery (Sheth & Sinha, 2015). Becoming a spiritual corporate brand can be called the aim of sustainability transformation, which means the ideology and practices of an organization have created a strong foundation that empowers its members to act in a sustainable way. Organizational and contextual conditions have a great effect on how and where the building of a

sustainable organization starts, however the real challenge is in persevering after the initial push to start the process. (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022.)

Environmental sustainability can be a priority focus, but organizations should balance environmental, economic and societal dimensions of sustainability. There is critique towards financial outcomes or profit being the driving motivations behind corporate sustainability, thus simultaneous pursuing of all dimensions even if they contradict is demanded (Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss and Figge, 2015). Whereas identity is not free of conflict but rather builds on it (Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022; da Silveira & Simões, 2022) sustainability is also in its complexity full of conflicting perspectives of differing goals of stakeholders (Hahn et al., 2015). Further, much of the industrial sustainability work has concentrated on maximizing material productivity and energy efficiency (Bocken et al., 2014), which lacks the holistic and proactive approach to organizations' sustainability transformation. Consequently, environmental sustainability is an independent phenomenon but exists alongside economic and social sustainability phenomena that are equally independent and important dimensions of sustainability.

2.3 What is a brand identity

Identity is the essence of a B2B corporate brand (Iglesias et al., 2020a), thus brand identity takes a deeper look into how organizations become what they are. Identity derives from the Latin word *idem* meaning 'same' (Lawler, 2015), which in sociology's perspective implies sameness with oneself, however including difference and uniqueness as the result of social interaction (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015). The anti-essentialist approach highlights identity as something associated with doing rather than being, while being related to values, beliefs and attributes (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015). Identity helps to tell who you are as a product of interaction through memories, understandings, experiences and interpretations shaped by narratives (Lawler, 2015). A modern approach denies identities as stable and unchanging, rather the perspective is that individual and organizational identities are in continual change (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017) or in an active processual engagement with the world (Lawler, 2015).

Sociology provides useful analogies to understanding organizational identities. Identity can be seen as force of change through language that is used, which points towards identity and its language, communication and interactions as maker of meanings rather than just carrier of meanings, thus a social process consisting of narratives that construct identities. Further, identity could be seen as one entity engaged in processes of producing an identity through assembly of memories, episodes, experiences, understandings, interpretations and so on within narrative, including the wider cultural narratives and symbols. In other words, identity is produced in a series of creative acts in which memories and experiences are interpreted and reinterpreted which is articulated within narrative. These bits and pieces are put together to form an overall plot which is connected within a complex web of other entities with their own narratives and plots. There is an interplay of people adopting the notions of what is socially said about the group or category they have or have been attached to, as opposed to people no longer identifying with what is socially said about them thus changing the very category itself. (Lawler, 2015.)

A B2B perspective on brand identity is often handled through the concept of corporate brand identity to highlight that the discussion is about an organization rather than its products or services. Corporate brand identity can be defined as a set of fluid, dynamic and polysemous meanings co-created by internal and external stakeholders (von Wallpach et al. 2017). From a managerial perspective, the definition and alignment of corporate brand identity is a formulation of strategic intent where management has an aim for how the corporate brand is perceived by internal and external stakeholders (Urde, 2013). In B2B setting these stakeholders typically include end users, customers, regulators, advocacy groups, employees, suppliers, investors, governments and society (Sheth & Sinha, 2015).

Affecting both corporate brands and identities, the current paradigm shifts or megatrends within corporate branding are regarded to be digitalization, servitization of business models and ESG investing (Iglesias, Ind & Schultz, 2022). From a managerial perspective, these paradigm changes have made corporate branding to be a co-creative process, experience management and conscientious endeavor. Digitalization and co-creation are characterized by managerial roles becoming facilitating and corporate brands being seen as organic entities. Servitization and

corporate brands as experiences adds the perspectives of branding as management of experience ecosystems and experience centric co-creation. Finally, ESG investing and conscientiousness makes corporate brands internal moral compasses, value creators for diverse stakeholders and highlights the need for humble, empathetic and participatory managerial mindsets. (Iglesias et al., 2022.)

In the bigger picture the role of a corporate brand becomes guiding while answering to the need of openness towards the multiple stakeholders in the organization's ecosystem. For instance, this guidance or the corporate brand helps managerial decision making and provides internal clarity which in turn engages the stakeholder network to further create the shared understanding of value and purpose. (Iglesias et al., 2022.) For the identity co-creation process this implicates changes in managerial roles, organization's responsibility towards its stakeholders and how the experience of identity co-creation process is thought in order to engage stakeholders. Overall, the process of corporate brand building can then be outlined as internal engagement and acceptance, stakeholder involvement, corporate communications, relationship building and managing brand experiences (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). However, as the brand is seen as the emergent signifier of organizational identity, or corporate brands are seen as expression of identity (Iglesias et al., 2022), it is essential to understand the process of identity creation.

2.4 Process and components of identity

Process can be understood as 'a sequence of events or activities that describes how things change over time, or that represents an underlying pattern of cognitive transition by an entity dealing with an issue' (Van de Ven, 1992, p.170). For instance, from brand positioning perspective drivers of change can be ownership changes (mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures), external pressure (competition, falling value and reputation of an organization, poor performance, digital developments or competition of talented workforce) or internal pressure (changes in corporate structure, values or vision, outdated brand, filling gaps from previous positioning efforts) (Koch, 2014).

Various actors construct and challenge brand identities through their effort of enacting their own identities, consequently weaving the two realities into an iterative identity construction process that involves social interaction, negotiation and contesting of meanings (Von Wallpach et al., 2017). Therefore, the process of brand identity involves interaction with stakeholders and the identities of stakeholders as well, making brand identity construction a co-creational process that happens in interactions. In other words, co-creation allows internal and external stakeholders to take part in the organization's purpose and enact their own identity construction activities, consequently contributing to the corporate brand identity (da Silveira & Simões, 2022). More precisely, corporate brand identity is ongoingly co-created through stakeholder performances that could be described as communicating, internalizing, contesting and elucidating (Von Wallpach et al., 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020). They describe the process of stakeholders transmitting the brand identity, activities performed to bring the brand identity into behaviors and routines, challenging and comparing existing identity with other stakeholder perspectives as well as developing a newly evolved shared understanding of the brand identity. So, identity as a performance and achieved collective understanding of what is important and who we are, could then be described as a shared desire to achieve a set of goals and to behave together in accordance with these goals.

From another perspective, the process of identity creation can be understood through emerging identity of B2B ventures. Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) present that identity develops through four stages: latent, emergent, clarified and adjusted corporate brand identity. The latent stage means the early years of finding market opportunities and business partnerships yet having only a vague understanding of what the company can offer. The corporate brand identity and its expression could be described as unclear, confused or product oriented. Indeed, the challenges of creating a clear brand identity in this stage come down to the absence of clear strategic direction. In this situation values of the organization are usually derived from the individual founders. The transition to emergent stage starts when relationships with important actors like investors and first customers are established and main target market is identified. These interactions and dialogue allow to put the promised value in practice and gain insight of what the company can offer, thus igniting an internal discussion of who they are and what makes their existence meaningful. Especially in

the emerging stage conflicts between internal reality and external expectations can happen, which ideally leads to adaptation and adjusting of brand identity, thus creating a more coherent identity. (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.)

The stage of clarified corporate brand identity is characterized by organizational learning through interactions with stakeholders like customers. It highlights identity development as an interactive process where the learning process with e.g. customers enables to gain clarity and coherence internally, reinforce the company's self-perception and adapt to core customers' expectations. In this stage outside interactions help to achieve internal clarity through creating collective understanding of the company's future vision and adding meaning to individual employees' perception but also to the identity. This in turn contributes to answering the questions of "who we are" and "how do we want to be perceived" (Urde, 2013).

As a result of higher level of coherence, clear customer focus and collective understanding of what is important, resources can be better allocated, and communications designed to be more effective and appealing. Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) also mention that the case company renewed their self-perception from technology manufacturer to a service brand which resonates with the perspective of service dominant logic (SDL) stating that service is the fundamental basis of exchange, ultimately viewing goods as mere distribution mechanism of services (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). In addition, Seyedghorban et al. (2016) suggest a paradigmatic and intellectual change in industrial markets towards inclusion of service branding. SDL also highlights learning with stakeholders as a meaningful way of adapting to the changing values of stakeholders like customers and creating more relevant value propositions for them. The customers and other external and internal stakeholders are co-creators of value (Lusch & Vargo, 2014) thus the co-creators of brand identity through creating a shared understanding of value.

The last stage, adjusted corporate brand identity, of Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones' (2017) framework present the need of continuous learning with stakeholders, however having a nuance of achieved stability within the core of the brand identity as argued by Robertson and Arachchige (2015). In the last stage stability of the identity can be seen as established strong position in the market where the identity has been co-

created while simultaneously keeping an eye on emerging market opportunities which might ignite the need to adjust or adapt the identity. In practice and from the perspective of resource allocation of the company this temporary stabilization is needed to support the process of ongoing change. So, besides a temporary stabilization due to an achieved strong and identifiable brand identity, the ongoing process means having a mutually influential social interactions between company and its stakeholders and constant reassessment as reflection on how the stakeholders respond to the brand in these interactions. So, in the target market where the organization operates (context) the brand identity forms through the stakeholder network interactions where key actors' characteristics, values and expectations are the drivers of corporate brand identity meanings (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017).

This dialogue, learning and responsiveness could also be described as interactive theatre where meaningfulness for internal and external stakeholders is created through participating. This highlights the need of internal actors to create a meaningful whole of their organization while keeping it relevant and meaningful to the external actors by enabling them to relate to the brand identity. In practice this could mean for instance involving customers in service or product development, which is also an example of the co-creation, learning and goal of reaching a shared understanding of value. (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.) Taking inspiration from B2C literature, von Wallpach et al. (2017) present brand identity as something that is performed in dynamic co-construction and as something that one does rather than has. This way changes of performance or activity within different contexts, situations spaces, places and time contributes to changes in identity. The change in activity on the other hand is tied to the changing needs of stakeholders' own identities and how they want to fulfill them. To be noted is that this view denies roles or stakes of managers and stakeholders as defining factors of identity, rather it presents that identity is defined by activity and performativity. (von Wallpach et al., 2017.)

As stated, process means change in attitudes and behavior which is ongoing in the context of identity as continuous learning and creation of meanings. Within this process one can identify the components of identity. They allow to inspect what can be done with this process and where the organization can lead it. Indeed, there is tension between the demand of continuous development of identity and the

seemingly stable components of identity. Solving this paradox could offer a valuable perspective on the nature of identity: the organization's core identity obtains the relative sameness or stable composition of identity whereas the ways this core identity is interpreted, practiced, communicated and promoted are more dynamic and subject to change (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015).

Forming a corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM) Urde (2013) presents nine possible components of brand identity: value proposition, relationships and position (external dimension), culture, competencies, mission and vision (internal dimension) as well as individual character or personality, verbal and visual expression, brand core containing the brand promise and core values (internal-external dimension). Relevant addition to the CBIM is context which means the environmental factors like social interaction, location, time, narratives, perception and status or roles (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015). In their identity model Robertson and Arachchige (2015) present that the core also contains beliefs and attributes related to organization's purpose and philosophy. In an ideal setting with a coherent corporate brand identity the core represents and reflects all the other elements, and all the elements represent and reflect the core. In other words, coherence with the other elements is crucial.

The external component focuses on how identity influences external stakeholders' view on image and reputation as well as how it is tied to external stakeholders' identity. Especially relationships are seen to be influential on the brand identity, and the choices of how for example service is delivered reflects the brand identity. Value proposition plays a great role in the CBIM as a tool between organization and stakeholders like customers. The internal component in Urde's (2013) CBIM contributes to clarifying the organization's reason to exist, what it is good at, what inspires it as well as values and attitudes, which affect e.g., services, products and the corporate brand identity. It is also the source of creating and maintaining competitive advantage. The internal-external component should invigorate strategic discussion about core values, what the organization promises and what it stands for. Interestingly, Urde (2013) presents that in corporate identity context the personality element is more tied to the personality of the employees.

Within context, social interaction points to e.g., management, employees, competitors, the general public and governments. Perception highlights the need for alignment between reality and how the organization perceives its identity, whereas narratives refer to the informal and formal use of narratives in identity development internally or externally. Status refers to legitimacy and validating organization's authenticity which contributes to formation, management and maintenance of identity. These factors constitute the relationship between identity's core and its environment, which again is mediated by ambiguity, expectations and openness to change (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015.) These mediators highlight the fact that organizational identities require flexibility to allow mutual influence of the core and its environment (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015), and this flexibility comes naturally due to the co-creational or symbiotic nature of corporate brand identities (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Inability to be flexible, i.e., open and symbiotic, should have its consequences in an organization not being able to respond to the changes in its environment or having troubles legitimizing or validating the core of its identity.

In other words, the essence of the brand identity is reflected in the core of the organization and the external elements are more transmitting or signaling in their nature and towards stakeholders like customers. (Urde, 2013.) Overall, the defined core of corporate identity is an opportunity to position and communicate a corporate brand, thus build its reputation and have a clear point of departure for understanding and managing the organization (Urde, 2022). As an example, Vesal et al. (2021) found that environmental sustainability functions as a signaling element to communicate the firm's values and credibility. So, there should be a defined core of the environmentally sustainable brand identity that's interpretation or communication are subject to the process of learning, co-creation and gradual adjustments to stakeholders' responses.

2.5 Challenge and contesting of meanings: the emergent corporate brand identity

According to Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017), in the emergent stage of corporate brand identity co-creation, the organization has established relationships and target market of operating is identified. However, through interactions and dialogue with

stakeholders like customers or employees a need for change is recognized, thus igniting an internal discussion of who they are and what makes their existence meaningful. Essentially, the meanings of who they are or what is meaningful have been contested (Von Wallpach et al., 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020). Further, this stage can be characterized by conflict between reality and expectations that is behind the ignition and contesting. The mission and challenge of the first stage is to arrange or engage the organization and its most important stakeholders to respond to the initial challenge of sustainability transformation. Consequently, involving various stakeholders in the very beginning will carry the co-creation process of environmentally sustainable brand identity.

The ignition for change or challenging of meanings can occur anywhere and anytime since all stakeholders from individuals to communities are seen as operant resources and value co-creators in a continuous social process (Merz et al, 2009). For instance, now that corporate brands are held accountable to their stakeholders (e.g., planet, people, society) and their value-creation is tied to this diverse set of stakeholders (da Silveira & Simões, 2022) it is essential to attach sustainability as part of the dynamic corporate brand identity creation process. While reaching the status of a megatrend, sustainability and sustainable development are a great example of changing needs and values of organization's stakeholders.

However, how this change should happen is not necessarily agreed on and transforming into a sustainable organization means transitioning from current business to more sustainable business practices and structures necessitating a change in corporate strategy and operations (Hahn et al., 2015). Sustainability will include alternative pathways and transformations leading to more sustainable business practices (Hahn et al. 2015), thus decision to transform towards an environmentally sustainable brand identity will progress through challenge and tensions. These tensions can be seen to vary from individuals to networks and can be categorized in economic, structural, psychological and behavioral tensions (Tura, Keränen & Patala, 2019). For instance, if a partner in a business network adopts new sustainability practices, tensions can arise between multiple actors. Relevant to the B2B and industrial context, the sustainability practices implementer and their supplier can have tensions regarding supplier's capability to meet new sustainability criteria, fear

of becoming a lower tier supplier if the criteria are not met as well as overall misaligned perception on sustainability (Tura et al., 2019).

Robertson and Arachchige (2015) point out that conflicting roles of an organization or misalignment of perception (how we see us versus how others see us) are a source of conflict. Essentially, the understanding of value and meanings is not always shared between an organization and its stakeholders. Inability, mistakes, lack of functional competence, lack of transparency or hypocrisy can be a cause to a conflict between an organization and its stakeholders (Mühlbacher, 2022). Also, a brand identity that is not legitimized or does not resonate with the brand's internal stakeholders will become challenged by the stakeholders (da Silveira & Simões, 2022). More precisely, brand resonance consists of behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement (Argenti, 2022), so lacking resonance is understandably a core issue. Further, Beverland and Cankurtaran (2022) identify possible gaps between identity and image, image and culture as well as identity and culture. They recognize interaction between employees and stakeholders, instilling a sense of purpose with employees, having employees take part in creating brand promises, authenticity and storytelling as the bridging factors between the possible gaps.

On the other hand, co-creation with stakeholders might not even result in desired strong brands (Aspara, Aula, Tienari, & Tikkanen, 2014) and the differing aims of various actors in the stakeholder network can hinder the change organizations want to make (Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022). Indeed, change itself and the changes that sustainability requires for altering of actions (Hahn et al., 2015) can hinder the sustainability transformation the organization wants to make. However, conflicts can become the catalysts of change and present an opportunity in the context of brand identity creation. For instance, Von Wallpach et al. (2017), Norrgrann and Saraniemi (2022) as well as Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) discuss negotiation and contesting (challenging existing brand identity) as a part of the process before achieving a new shared understanding or adjusting the corporate brand identity, or even recomposing something totally new. Hahn et al. (2015) also recognize conflicting views, motives and preferences on sustainability practices or actions desirable to achieve organizational learning, creativity and reorientation.

Market demand for sustainable production could trigger development of a brand's offer and value proposition, therefore triggering a change in negotiation position as well as in power and dependence relations, thus creating a need for reorchestration. More specifically, reorchestration includes creating new meanings and value as well as integrating brand elements, resources and actors to that process. Challenge is to coordinate this process and its resources to arrive at a desired solution. In practice this could mean managing the asynchrony of stakeholders' adaptation to this desired change in the brand's offer or managing new position in sales negotiations. (Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022.) So, within the organization's relatively complex network interactions and responses happen, and these interactions can act as catalysts of change through contradictions, contesting, negotiation and adjustment or reorchestration. Understanding customers' decision-making processes, identifying right internal stakeholders and gatekeepers as well as investing in the relationships with them can be helpful to promote the alignment of relationships in B2B context (Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022). Also, training and educating network partners like suppliers as well as designing inclusive strategies decreases these tensions by taking into account diverse stakeholder needs and plurality of values (Tura et al., 2019).

In other words, in a B2B context where contradictions are often in business relationships, does not have to mean a negative outcome but rather a positive outcome emerging from reorchestrating the collective activities. So, bringing new resources to a relationship might pose initial challenges for adjusting, but after alignment and reorchestration new meanings and value can emerge for the whole network. Also, it is a possibility for creating an authentic identity and brand that welcome diversity and various voices of its stakeholders. (Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022.) On the other hand, in siloed organizations where everyone does not share or know values and strategy of the organization this alignment or reorchestration process itself poses a challenge of conflict (Argenti, 2022). However, a stakeholder-unifying alignment process can ultimately engage even unlikely actors like competitors to the brand identity co-creation process when the stakeholder visions align (Abratt & Mingione, 2022). So, the role of conflict and acceptance of pursuing even conflicting interests (Hahn et al., 2015) can be further elaborated as an enabler of learning, creativity and challenging of perspectives in order to find solutions to demanding challenges such as change or sustainability.

Internal conflicts can occur at first when people react to change or attempts to change the organization, for example changes to transformation an organizational identity towards an environmentally sustainable identity. Issues of internal dysfunction can originate for instance from unclear and ineffective internal communications, misbehavior of owners, board members or managers, toxic leadership, misleading ideology or lack of real ambition or interest in building a conscientious organization (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022). As Lunde (2018) puts it, consumers, businesses and employees need to see the value and opportunities of sustainability to act on it. Also, psychological defenses play a major role in denying change when faced with challenging information. The collective self-concept might be so strong that seemingly threatening new information can be ignored, rejected, reinterpreted, hidden or lost. Especially the maintenance of collective self-esteem seems to be the trigger for denial, rationalization, idealization, fantasy and symbolization defenses which prevent learning in order to insulate the existing self-concept from analysis and challenge. In other words, the defenses are to maintain the organizational concept of self and self-esteem in order to avoid discomfort and prevent anxiety. Even if learnings in the past are not sufficient to sustain future prosperity, the familiarity and comfort of past self tends to facilitate regression to a past identity. (Brown & Starkey, 2000.) However, environmentally sustainable related learning and change can produce feelings of relief due to moral connection of the actions as well as feelings of satisfaction due to learning new things (Halme, 2002).

It could be argued that measuring and illustrating the benefits internally and externally helps to see the value in sustainability. For instance, Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) present that to efficiently engage customers and to shape their attitudes towards sustainability companies should know what the customers' values are and connect sustainable values to those in a way that embraces the customer's values as well as demonstrates win-win situations. These values can be unrelated to sustainability, like cost savings, health and safety, performance, status, prestige or consumer value (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014). So, educating or helping to understand concrete positive impacts on the environment, the environmental and economic returns on investments and tracking savings could be one of the practical measurements to increase trust and confidence to try and purchase green products

(Bonini & Oppenheim, 2008) thus engage stakeholders like customers and employees.

As internally and externally acknowledged sustainability-based green initiatives influence the firm's reputation and becomes its identity over time (Rodrigues & Child, 2008), the measures and assessment of outcomes of brand identity creation or its more concrete initiatives can therefore work as enablers of learning and co-creation, thus enablers of engagement and commitment. Also, Bose and Luo (2011) present that assessing the organization's ability to capture available opportunities for improving performance illustrates the effectiveness of sustainability-based green initiatives. It could also help identify the positive or negative outcomes of the brand identity creation process and facilitate the ongoing discussion and co-creation.

Engaging stakeholders and showing them the benefits of new green innovation also affects their overall attitude towards sustainability, which again resonates with Vesal et al., (2021) arguing that the stakeholders' like customers' attitudes towards sustainability is a determining factor on how well sustainability initiatives are executed. Hence, managerial relationship-management skills and goal setting skills are in an important role in order to figure out internal and external stakeholder requirements and to set meaningful and guiding goals with them. Additionally, Robertson and Arachchige (2015) point out that formulation of goals or objectives that do not reflect the reality of the past can result in confusion and even to a crisis considering identity. Thus, it could be said that shaping stakeholder attitudes towards sustainability and engaging them to the process to co-create an environmentally sustainable brand identity is a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures as well as social capabilities like understanding values and emotions.

To conclude, finding the conflicts of perspectives, what the stakeholder needs are, illustrating the benefits of sustainability and setting meaningful goals are essential marks of the challenge and contesting stage.

2.6 Exploration and reorchestration: the clarified corporate brand identity

Exploration and reorchestration require different techniques for the organization to learn together, find new perspectives together and decide which outcomes are most meaningful for the organization's environmentally sustainable brand identity. As Halme (2002) suggests, learning from experience, testing and refining ideas in action allows new knowledge to emerge, which further allows to challenge existing beliefs. Reorchestration points to the alignment of these meaningful outcomes and brand identity to achieve coherency and to contribute to elucidating of the brand identity. In this stage brand identity development is seen as interactive learning processes with stakeholders like employees or customers which enables to gain clarity and coherence internally, reinforce the company's self-perception and adapt to core customers' expectations (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Abratt & Mingione, 2022.) Interactions help to achieve internal clarity through creating collective understanding of the company's future vision and adding meaning to individual employees' perception but also to the identity, essentially answering the questions of "who we are" and "how do we want to be perceived" (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Urde, 2013).

For instance, Urde's (2013) CBIM can help explore the different dimensions of identity. Urde (2022) highlights the nine most important questions in their identity matrix: 1) what are our key offerings (value proposition), 2) what the nature of our stakeholder relationships should be (relationships), 3) what is our intended position in the market (position), 4) what is distinctive about how we communicate (expression), 5) what do we promise (brand core), 6) what qualities form our corporate character (personality), 7) what engages and inspires us beyond simple aim of profit (mission & vision), 8) what are our attitudes and behaviors (culture) and 9) what are we particularly good at (competences). The CBIM analysis allows to see the corporate persona, what promises it makes to itself and stakeholders, what kind of value it creates and how. It is a historical record that also points the way to the future, answering the questions of what we do and promise, how we work to achieve that, why are we engaged in doing so and with whom. (Urde, 2022.) However, as identity creation is an ongoing process the dimensions of identity should be used as a tool for ongoing conversation, aligning of the identity elements and strategy making. Thus, a

possible pitfall of exploration and reorchestration is that an organization gets stuck in a static state after one sufficient outcome.

One outcome of defining the identity elements and aligning them is a narrative or script that talks about the organization's identity. So, the exercise is not just lists or facts about features, rather the outcome is a source for narratives about the organization's past, present and future that connects differing perspectives and competing interests, often resulting in a signature story. Much like the corporate identity, this narrative should grab the attention of its audience, be authentic, involve key audiences and resonate with the essence of the corporate brand. Also, while the process might mean changes in ideological and behavioral levels much often remains unchanged, which rises to an equally important level with the subjects of change. (Urde, 2022.) Exploring within this narrative can help bring out the nuances of differing perspectives. In environmentally sustainable identity creation where understanding of sustainability and its meaning within the organization and its members can be unclear, the narrative can become a tool of education and inclusion where a shared understanding of value is achieved.

Another example of exercise that kindles exploration is scenario planning. It is one practical means to learn by setting aside existing frames of reference and create new scenarios and narratives. This is exploration and experimenting those questions the deepest assumptions of the organizations and its business. In other words, it is a challenge to think the unthinkable, for instance 'what if our core business went obsolete overnight'. The only assumption is that future is likely to be discontinuous and that identities need rethinking, hence encouraging to engage to play and game to experiment and envision different possible scenarios. This experimenting and roleplaying for alternate futures allows to learn coping with the possible anxieties. (Brown & Starkey, 2000.) Relevant sources of information for exploration and describing identity can be found from market and customer data, brand platforms, design guides, code of conduct, culture describing documents, customer research records as well as relevant policy and strategy documents. Further data can be acquired from interviewing employees and managers, having workshops and their feedback sessions as well as making internal and external surveys. (Urde, 2013.)

In this stage of exploration and reorchestration, internal stakeholders and their participation to exploration and alignment of the meaningful outcomes should be highlighted. Involvement and engaging of staff ensure that the identity definition project would not be ‘yet another initiative’ (Urde, 2013). Indeed, in industrial B2B settings employees are the ones to create and nurture the relationships with stakeholders crucial to creating the brand identity. Regarding sustainable brand identity creation, internal branding is among the main determinants of how sustainability operations and initiatives succeed. (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016.) So, it could be argued that co-creating with internal stakeholders makes a meaningful brand identity creation process. Further, Mühlbacher (2022) highlights the importance of hiring the right people and establishing activities to create and experience what the brand and its identity are about. Beverland and Cankurtaran (2022) also present that involving employees produces meaningful re-branding results and they move through passive awareness and interpretation to active appropriation and communication as their knowledge, trust and commitment develops. This illustrates co-creation internally as collecting and managing the various voices of internal groups that all have their own view on ‘who we are’.

Indeed, successful brand co-creation results in polyphony and harmonious coexistence of the different voices, which expresses the multifaceted identity or narratives of an organization and addresses stakeholders’ different needs and expectations. (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019.) Polyphony or multiple voices of brand identities include polysemy, meaning that these various perspectives create multiple possible meanings of the brand through cumulation of numerous actions and interactions (Zamparini, Visconti, Lurati, 2022). In sustainability transformations individual and organizational perspectives might differ so that the proper strategy for addressing the conflict is accepting the opposing views and letting them be pursued simultaneously (Hahn et al., 2015), thus polyphony and polysemy provide means for sustainability transformation management as well.

Consequently, managerial roles as facilitating or conducting are highlighted, which allows the brand identity to evolve and combine multiple stakeholder perspectives while staying true to the organization’s core values (Iglesias et al., 2020a). In other words, to orchestrate the different voices of the organization, give them a chance to

be heard and solve possible conflicts of different perspectives in order to find the shared understanding of what is the story the organization wants to tell (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019). This co-creational and enabling approach allows exploration to become an ongoing learning process where identity is challenged and reorchestrated when necessary through internal and external interactions and their responses. This is also supported by Brown and Starkey (2000) that illustrate organizational identity as learning process where individuals are prepared to challenge and question the organization's identity. Indeed, this makes exploration and reorchestration a time to develop new perspectives and routines as well as establish a sense of shared values and meanings. For instance, attitudinal change of accepting challenging perspectives and embracing identity as a learning organization can lead to routine dialogue where desirable future identities can be discussed (Brown & Starkey, 2000).

To facilitate the change, managers can invest in creating an organization culture which promotes challenging of existing mental models, learning, self-reflection, development of new visions and internal discussion regarding identity (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Such culture supports independent interpretation of the identity within the company guidelines and policies and have employees as active participants in e.g., defining values and norms (Beverland, & Cankurtaran, 2022). For instance, Kaufmann et al. (2016) present that to facilitate employees' active participation and internalization of brand values into employees' identity more collaborative and transformational leadership styles are required. Successfully managing this internalization and reflection could then lead to a self-reflexive and wise organization that is secure in the ability to challenge and negotiate identity as part of its strategic development. The challenge is to create an emotional climate where individuals balance group and individual identity to be able work towards organizational goals and enhance self-esteem as well as express oneself and their vulnerabilities. In other words, practicing empathy to permit a more objective view on external reality, openness to different perspectives and more mature view of oneself. (Brown & Starkey, 2000.)

Since people have differing perspectives and opinions regarding sustainability, different groups of people need different kind of facilitating. For instance, employees can be divided into groups (laggards, followers, leaders) based on their commitment

to the organization's cause, for instance sustainability. The committed employees (followers and leaders) have higher levels of commitment and motivation to support the achievement of company goals and initiatives. To keep the motivated groups excited the company should support and confirm their perceptions of the brand or its identity. However, for the unmotivated groups should be offered more relevant initiatives addressing their perspectives. In other words, employees with a higher level of organizational identification are more committed and in a sustainable brand identity context view sustainability as important for their company. (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016.)

Organizational learning that promotes change in the context of identity involves resynthesis of the process (means by which identity is encoded, elaborated and integrated), structure (way identity is organized) and content (from which information identity is constructed) in a way that prevents anxiety and satisfies the needs of self-esteem (Brown & Starkey, 2000.). Thus, the need for change and exploring for alternatives allow to create a new or improved process of creating identity, new or improved way of structuring the organizational identity, new information sources to the identity co-creation process as well as improved managerial skillsets to facilitate this change process. So, in experimenting and reorchestration it is important to develop managerial skills that allow for facilitating learning, finding different ways to challenge existing perspectives and ultimately find the ways of exploration that engages the various stakeholders. Engagement during exploration and reorchestration allows for finding the meanings of sustainability, environmental sustainability and what it means for the organization and its identity. Essential is to find the ways different groups of people want to learn and process the themes of the environmentally sustainable identity co-creation.

2.7 Commitment and elucidating: the adjusted or transformed corporate brand identity

The last stage, adjusted corporate brand identity, of Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones' (2017) framework present the need of continuous learning with stakeholders, while having a nuance of achieved stability within the core of the brand identity as argued by Robertson and Arachchige (2015). In the last stage stability of the identity can be

seen as established strong position in the market where the identity has been co-created while simultaneously keeping an eye on emerging market opportunities which might ignite the need to adjust or adapt the identity. In practice and from the perspective of resource allocation of the company this temporary stabilization is needed to support the process of ongoing change. So, besides a temporary stabilization due to an achieved strong and identifiable brand identity, the ongoing process means having a mutually influential social interactions between company and its stakeholders and constant reassessment as reflection on how the stakeholders respond to the brand and its identity in interaction.

In the heart of the identity co-creation process is the alignment of individual and organizational purpose that contributes to understanding a shared identity and brand meanings (Brown & Starkey, 2000; Saraniemi, 2022). Thus, reaching the stage of commitment and elucidating the organization needs to have solved the tensions between differing perspectives and reached a collective understanding of value and meanings to which they can commit to. Regarding environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation this means for instance committing to what sustainability and environmental sustainability are, what is the value of the process and reaching its goals and what sustainability means for the organization as a whole but for individuals and their network as well.

Implied by the established strong position in the market, a successful identity co-creation process leads to a strong corporate brand that values its origins while having a clarifying and stakeholder-unifying aim to the future. Signifying quality, trustworthiness and distinctiveness (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Abratt & Mingione, 2022), the strong, resonating and authentic corporate brand invites other actors of the ecosystem to join and take part in e.g., developing the sustainability of the organization and its ecosystem. A strong brand could be described as having robust customer equity due to consistent differentiation and delivering meaningful value for stakeholders. Therefore, a strong brand is essential in the context of sustainable brand identity since it allows for the marketing function (or the organization) to utilize the opportunities created by adopting a sustainable corporate culture as part of the sustainable brand identity creation. Due to a brands' ability to inform and educate people a strong brand can also be seen as a tool or intangible asset used to shape

markets towards sustainability. (Gupta & Kumar, 2013.) All in all, stakeholder attitudes towards sustainability (Rivera et al., 2016; Vesal et al., 2021), internal co-creation and identification with the organization (Korschun et al. 2014, p.21; (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016) as well as ultimately positive emotions attached to the brand such as brand love (Kaufmann, Loureiro & Manarioti, 2016) can aid in the co-creation of the strong environmentally sustainable brand identity internally as well as externally in the organization's network.

Another desirable outcome of the environmentally sustainable brand identity creation process is a conclusive narrative. Individuals, groups, communities and networks transform their experiences with a brand into stories, narratives and discourses of the organization. These stories are the multiple perspectives that individuals have about a brand and its organization, whereas the stories, actions, events, actors and other elements together form a conclusive narrative. These narratives and discourses create accepted statements and foundations around a certain topic, thus legitimizing for instance a brand if the discourse is favorable. If the character of an organization is best communicated through stories and narratives that engender emotion and create connections (Argenti, 2022), then having sustainability as a central topic of the organization, achieving polyphony around the narratives of the organization through mutual understanding of meanings as well as legitimating the sustainable brand identity is essential throughout and after the brand identity co-creation process. Thus, in the elucidating and commitment stage bringing sustainability into the experiences people have with the organization further co-creates the organization's reality through narratives that individuals, groups, communities and networks tell.

The mutually created values, enhanced self-image and self-identification (Kaufmann et al., 2016) are signified by the brand and its narrative that ultimately allows attachment and emotional bonds to be created both internally and externally. In other words, the co-creation of mutually shared understanding of meanings and value, solving conflicts as well as experimenting and co-creating with stakeholders should have produced a new or improved sense of 'us' that resonates and engages both internal and external stakeholders to further co-create or develop the organization's environmentally sustainable brand identity creation.

2.8 Environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context – a theoretical framework

The theoretical framework offers a processual illustration of brand identity co-creation and its surrounding elements. The brand identity co-creation process follows the interplay of achieved stability and constant change, commitment and challenging, making meanings and contesting their value. Ultimately, the process of co-creating an environmentally sustainable brand identity is an effort of co-creating a sustainable organization or better yet a sustainable ecosystem. Figure 1. illustrates the interactive process of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation, where each stage has their own characteristics. The goal of the process is resynthesis of the means of identity creation, the way identity is organized and from which information identity is constructed from. Ultimately, it aims at co-creating mutual understanding of meanings and value.

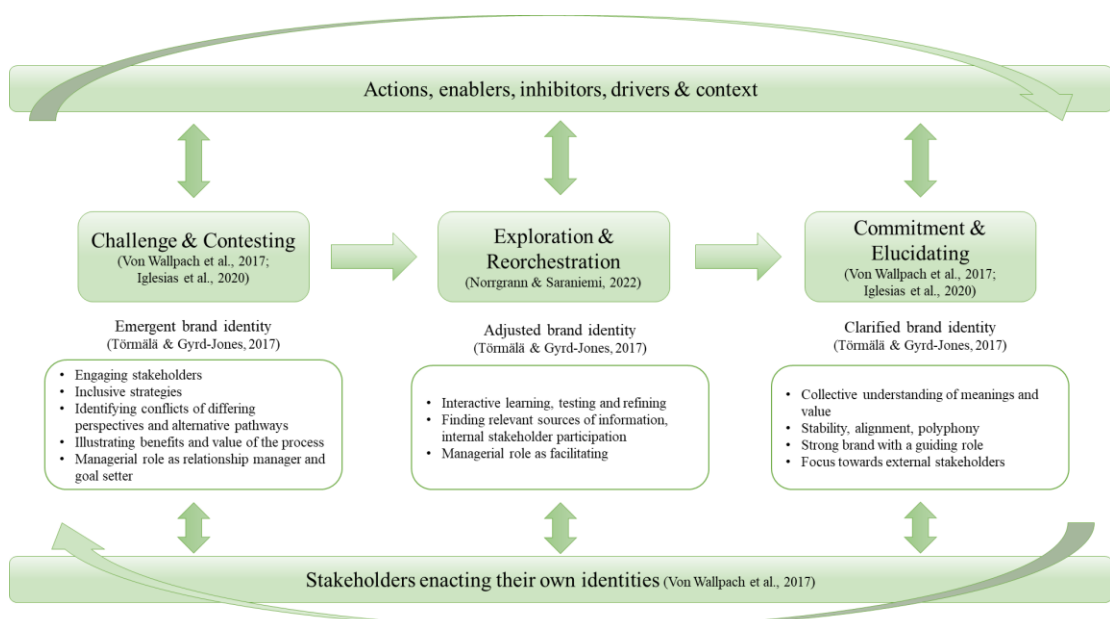


Figure 1. Interactive process to co-create brand identity as mutual understanding of meanings

First, brand identity co-creation has a starting point of challenging and contesting, which can be caused by internal or external conflict or trigger. The drivers of these triggers and conflicts are need for renewal, change in the market environment, megatrends, recognizing weak signals, key actors' characteristics, ownership changes, external pressure, internal pressure and a vision of making sustainable

change (Iglesias, Ind & Schultz, 2022; Halme, 2002; Törmälä & Gyrð-Jones, 2017; Koch, 2014; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). These lead to recognizing the need for change and finding the collectively shared understanding of what is meaningful again. In this stage the organization has established relationships and an identified market, but the corporate brand identity is emergent due to the conflict of current reality and current expectations, perhaps due to changing needs and losing common understanding of e.g., values and purpose. Characteristic for challenge and contesting is establishing stakeholder engagement to the brand identity co-creation process, identifying conflicts of differing perspectives of stakeholders and illustrating the value of change such as sustainability transformation. Managerial skills needed in this stage are goal setting skills and relationship-management skills.

Second, exploration and reorchestration stage illustrate the search for solving the identified conflicts and achieving a common understanding of meanings and value, for instance what is our purpose or what does sustainability mean for us. Reorchestration acts as exploration's pair to align the meaningful outcomes together. Finding relevant information sources for exploring the brand identity is essential, and different exercises as the CBIM (Urde, 2013) or scenario planning (Brown & Starkey, 2000) can be utilized to learn and categorize information. Thus, activities and interactive learning, internal stakeholders such as employees and identity as doing are highlighted (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016; Beverland and Cankurtaran, 2022; Robertson & Arachchige, 2015). Ultimately, the exploration and reorchestration stage should be an interactive learning process with multiple internal and external stakeholders where the brand identity and its various perspectives can be studied, consequently affecting attitudes and routines of the organization. As a result, or a final exercise, a narrative (Urde, 2022) can be made to further communicate the brand identity from history to future. Empathy and managerial roles as facilitating or collaborative are highlighted as well.

Third, elucidating and commitment is the arrival at the newly evolved shared understanding of the brand identity and its meanings. The brand identity can be adjusted or totally new. Even though a continuous learning with stakeholders is emphasized, the third stage has a nuance of achieved stability. In other words, the co-created brand identity is strong and holds its position in the market well, thus the

stability, but the organization needs to keep its open and critical mindset. In this stage, polyphony as the harmonious co-existence of various internal and external voices (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019) or perspectives has been achieved, for the moment. This stage can be described by coherency and alignment (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Abratt & Mingione, 2022) that contribute to internal clarity, consequently making the brand and its identity's role guiding (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Additionally, the achieved stability and strong position of a brand allows to move the organization's focus towards external stakeholders, such as educating and attitude shaping activities. Optimally, the brand identity and its image are inviting to external stakeholders and enables collaboration with the external network. Finally, the following experiences and reactions to interaction of stakeholders will continue to challenge the brand identity.

In these stages, enablers, actions and their mediators take place, which have been gathered to Appendix 1. Enablers characterize concepts and phenomena enabling environmentally sustainable brand identity creation. These strategic enablers require decisions to make the enabler part of the organization in order to create the activities that ultimately form the organization's reality and identity. Actions or activities are characterized through verbs and suggestions on what should be done or performed to bring the brand identity into behaviors and routines. Additionally, inhibitors of the process were identified: inflexibility, siloed organizations (Argenti, 2022), internal dysfunction (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022), psychological defenses (Brown & Starkey, 2000) and getting stuck at static outcomes. Also, the process exists within the organization's context. Because the components of brand identity are at the end mainly another exercise to explore the possibilities of the identity, it has not been illustrated in the model. However, the components can be further used as a starting point to continuously evaluate and align the internal, external and internal-external aspects of the brand identity. The actors in the identity co-creation process are the multiple actors or stakeholders of the organization's network. Recognized possible stakeholders are end-users, customers, regulators, advocacy groups, employees, suppliers, investors, governments and the society (Sheth & Sinha, 2015). The three stages are illustrations, and the process is unique to each organization and the stages can be overlapping.

Further elaborating on the nature of the process, a meta-paradigm model by Mingione and Abratt (2022) sheds light on the ontological premises of the interactive process to co-create brand identity as mutual understanding of meanings. The meta-paradigmatic approach combines static and dynamic to the same process, in this theoretical framework meaning that the interplay of a static objectified corporate brand identity and dynamic interactive corporate brand identity are valued stages of the same process. Thus, the process is progress-oriented and focuses on brand identity evolution, giving the brand identity a character of being both open to change and stable in its features.

This means that commitment and elucidating arrives at an adjusted and static yet unique brand identity that is independent from stakeholders' interpretations and co-creation of meanings. It is described as stableness as well as a momentary starting point for stakeholder interaction and co-creation. In other words, perspective is on the inside-out process of meaning-making. The dynamic brand identity considers the brand as being observed, interpreted and engaged with. It is actions, behavior and relationships with stakeholders as well as active meaning-making, both rational, emotional and polysemic. This meaning-making is from the outside-in, and contains the relationship in the continuum of past, present and future. (Mingione & Abratt, 2022.) For instance, the past experiences in the stages of challenging and exploration before commitment to an adjusted brand identity will remain in the stakeholder relationships in the future stages of challenging and exploration. Similarly, the past brand identity to which the organization had previously committed to becomes a historical artefact (Mingione & Abratt, 2022).

3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Research design, sample and interviews

Data were collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include 18 semi-structured interviews with the case organization's top and middle management as well as factory workers conducted between 17.06.2022 – 31.08.2022. The interviewees were selected based on their role in the organization and snowball sampling, which can be seen in detail on Table 1 in addition to organization of the interviewee and duration of the interview. In collecting the interview data, the interviewees were first asked general questions like "What is your current position and how long have you worked at the company", following with questions about the organization, its environment and character. Rest of the interview focused on how the interviewee understand sustainability, its challenges and what it means for their organization. Data collection was stopped when no new information was added. All interviewees were in Finnish.

The interviewees willingly participated in the study and were provided the privacy policy and a questionnaire to approve or decline the terms before the interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Transcriptions were divided to top and middle management, employees and other organizations in which answers were divided to themes based on the interview questions. The analysis of the data started with reading through the divided transcriptions. Then, the answers were further categorized under themes that were recognized from the interviews, mostly according to the interview questions and their themes. These themes were further analyzed and their findings are presented in chapter four. The analysis aims at recognizing the process of sustainable brand identity co-creation as well as to gain an understanding of its enablers, actions, drivers and inhibitors. As the case organization has recently started their sustainability transformation the focus is in the first stage of the theoretical framework, challenge and contesting. Further phases of the theoretical framework are assessed as future-oriented suggestions and possibilities in the case organization's identity co-creation process. Secondary data is acquired from case company's sustainability reports and code of conduct applying to Scandinavian

organizations. These multiple sources ensure that a diverse set of data is collected to potentially reveal unknown aspects of the research problem (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

The empirical research is qualitative to gain increased understanding of sustainable industrial brand identity co-creation. In its nature the research is abductive due to the mutual influence of theory and empirical evidence on each other. In other words, opposed to inductive and deductive reasoning this research does not make conclusion based on sole theory or create generalization based on empirical findings. This is called systematic combining which is characterized as “continuous movement between an empirical world and a model world” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, s. 554). Abductive approach is also well argued for in research aiming at discovery (Suddaby, 2006). It is a non-linear and path-dependent process that ultimately aims at matching theory with reality, meaning the movement between framework, data sources and analysis. In other words, the research issues and the theoretical framework are affected and can be re-organized or expanded due to the influence of the empirical observations. This back-and-forth iteration of research activities allows the researcher to expand their understanding of both theory and empirical phenomena. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002.)

Table 1. Interview information

Interviewee	Organization	Duration (minutes)
Engineer 1, top management position	Component Producer Factory	104
Engineer 2, top management position	Component Producer Factory	90
Top-manager 1	Component Producer Factory	88
Engineer 3, top management position	Component Producer Factory	86
Engineer 4, top management position	Component Producer Factory	93
Top-manager 2	Component Producer Factory	100
Top-manager 3	Sales & Assembly Organization	93
Top-manager 4	Sales & Assembly Organization	81
Employee 1	Component Producer Factory	72
Middle management 1	Component Producer Factory	61
Employee 2	Component Producer Factory	66
Engineer 5	Component Producer Factory	70
Engineer 6	Component Producer Factory	60
Engineer 7, middle management	Component Producer Factory	45
Top-manager 5	Sales & Assembly Organization	85
Top-manager 6	Component Producer Factory	91
Top-manager 7	Sales & Assembly Organization	90
Top-manager 8	Sales & Assembly Organization	70

3.2 Description of case organizations

3.2.1 Global Enterprise Organization

Global Enterprise Organization (GEO) is a Central European family-owned business and a market leader in its industry operating in 52 countries. The brand is managed by this entity and brand-related decisions are made in the headquarters of GEO. GEO's turnover is over 3 billion euros and they have over 100 000 active customers. GEO has grown through international expanding and acquisitions. Their strength is in their product concept and the guiding principle is that they aim to offer solutions and be holistic partner instead of separate products. Being a multinational with strong local organizations they have been able to offer the strength of a large corporation with local and flexible customer service. This means that they have sales, customer service and assembly organizations in most of the countries they operate in while manufacturing is concentrated on a few main locations. Sustainability is also important for GEO, and they have recognized the United Nation's sustainable development goals (SDG) their customers have adopted and are currently planning on how to answer to the needs these SDGs implicate for their customers. However, sustainability is still not an integrated part of their operations and decision making. Standardization is a big question for the moment and in Finland ISO 9001 system is in place.

3.2.2 Component Producer Factory

Component Producer Factory (CPF) is the main subject of the empirical research, and the focus of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation is on CPF's perspective. CPF is a Finnish manufacturing organization of around 200 people producing components for the sales organizations of GEO and through them for their various customers. The CPF organization is composed of manufacturing, design and purchasing as well as logistics. In the past two years sustainability has risen to great importance at CPF. They have a strong interest in developing environmentally sustainable solutions and be a leading expert in green technology within the organization's network. They want to strengthen their role within the whole organization, have their voice heard all the way to the end-user as well as clarify

their arising brand identity and make its creation more systematic. Through the strengthening of their position, they want to be able to influence the matters they deem important, and this has evolved to be a central initiative internally at CPF. CPF develops its brand identity inside the organization and under the corporate brand, hence the thesis context takes a more internal and domesticated market perspective. The domesticated market perspective puts emphasis on the relationships, collaborative activities and networks in which identity and brand are created. Thus, the empirical research focuses on the internal aspects of CPF as well as their network and relations in it.

3.2.3 Sales & Assembly Organization

Sales & Assembly Organization is an assembly and sales organization with close ties to CPF and together they form the GEO Finland organization. They share resources like human resources, marketing and information technology. As the expert on the product and its technology CPF helps to produce sales material to Sales & Assembly Organization, and one goal is to influence the sales and thus the end-user as their environmentally sustainable brand identity evolves. Their market is mainly in Finland and Europe; however, they sell to Asia and America as well.

3.2.4 Customers

GEO has several customers that are the end-users of their products and solutions. However, most of their customers are original equipment manufacturers (OEM) that build e.g., paper machines whose customers are the end-users. Characteristic for the OEMs is their interest in low prices and delivery time whereas the end-user might have vastly different interests such as sustainability related issues like energy consumption. However, it is mentioned that OEMs could also benefit from taking end-user interests in consideration in decision making and marketing activities.

3.3 Analysis of the data

The method chosen for analysis is qualitative thematic analysis. Qualitative approach is the most suitable for the analysis because it allows to take a deeper look into the

studied phenomena and get better understanding to answer the research questions. Thematic analysis allows “identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data” (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 297). In accordance with thematic analysis, codes and themes were identified from the groups of interviews, meaning that recognizing codes and themes allowed to understand the larger patterns of meanings in the qualitative data (Clarke et al. 2015). Organizing concept or core idea underlying the analysis is the theoretical framework and focus of the research. In other words, the interviews were analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework; process of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation is highlighted. As thematic analysis and systematic combining allow for flexibility (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Clarke et al., 2015), the focus of the research sharpened with the analysis process of both empirical evidence and theory.

Differences of the interview data and the theoretical framework are taken into consideration and their meaning to environmentally sustainable identity creation is analyzed. The secondary data comprises of code of conduct and sustainability report of 2016-2017. They were acquired from the company website and their content was analyzed in accordance with the research questions. The secondary data supplements the interview data.

4 FINDINGS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section covers the findings of the interviews. The following chapters have been sectioned similarly with the theoretical framework to present a comprehensive picture of the case company's environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation.

4.1 Component Producer Factory and its brand in an industrial context

Heritage or history is an essential part of a brand (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022), thus the history of CPF sets the grounds for its context. CPF has been established through collaboration and eventually of an acquisition between the Central European headquarter and the former Finnish component producer. The former Finnish component producer had a substantial reputation and role in the Finnish market. Thus, CPF has inherited a lot of the former producer's culture, reputation, knowledge and processes as well as its well-grounded role in the city and the Finnish market. So, whereas the current CPF organization is 25 years old their history goes back almost 100 years when the previous component producer was founded. After the acquisition, CPF is focused on a few sets of industrial components and has acquired specialized knowledge with both the components and their application in several industries.

In Finland CPF works with the Sales & Assembly Organization to provide the components and technical support. So, they are an independent company whose sales are determined internally by corporation transfer prices. Within the domesticated market environment (Arndt, 1979) the interaction points of their context (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015) were identified: Central European headquarters, internal corporation customers like Sales & Assembly Organization, some bigger customers and end-users, a supplier network of 100 actors, Scandinavian Innovation Organization, other manufacturing plants of GEO, professional forums and associations, universities and other schools as well as some end-users' collaboration organizations. Competition is not too relevant in this context, however sometimes they might be in a competition with another factory of the organization when making an offer to a sales organization such Sales & Assembly Organization. Thus, CPF's co-creation happens with employees, customers, Sales & Assembly Organization and

headquarters. Occasional co-creation with other network actors or multiple actors at the same time, such as the Scandinavian Innovation Organization might occur but not often or systematically.

Competition of GEO in their mature market also gives CPF pressure to stay efficient and improve continuously. Further, they are evaluated based on quality of products and delivery efficiency. So, being an internal organization of the corporation and having less monetary evaluation criteria they feel like they are less pressured to focus on profit. In other words, a family-owned corporation allows them to make decisions with a long-term perspective. Some level of narratives and status of the context (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015) can be identified as well. Essentially, two distinctive eras can be heard in the interviews: time of uncertainty while trying to claim their status in the corporation and moving to new facilities which symbolized CPF achieving an important role in the corporation as well as stabilization of their operations due to gaining their expert knowledge and developing their working processes.

Aligning with Webster and Keller (2004), Lusch and Vargo (2014) and Seyedghorban et al. (2016), GEO Finland and especially Sales & Assembly Organization has moved towards partnership-oriented service branding where they focus on managing mutually beneficial and long-term partnerships with their customers and but also with other stakeholders like suppliers. Also, it can also be recognized that Sales & Assembly Organization is moving from highlighting their functional performance (product and its benefits) towards highlighting more abstract associations like environmental sustainability alongside their trustful partnership. Aiming for more meaningful partnership with their customers instead of being a mere component provider was said to be achieved with adding services and solutions around their core competence, the component technology, i.e., the strength wheel. These strengths are for instance industry knowledge, daily services, customer and logistics support as well as secondary market services. Achieving a key partner status with end-user customers also improves their capabilities to influence OEMs since the end-user customers will require GEO products in their machinery. GEO Finland's top management is heavily invested in this change as well as on sustainability related change. Consequently, it is potentially creating an optimal environment for

improving sustainability operations, which again could increase their trustfulness and benevolence as well as convince stakeholders like customers to collaborate on and commit to challenging sustainability projects (Hoejmose et al., 2012; Zhu & Sarkis 2004).

CPF does not have their own websites and works under the GEO global brand, sharing marketing resources with Sales & Assembly Organization as well as collaborating with headquarters. Top and middle management interviewees described their marketing as internal communications towards employees. Other important marketing is their collaboration with customers and other network actors. Having showrooms at Sales & Assembly Organization facilities and bringing customers to CPF tour were reported as meaningful ways of marketing. For CPF personal connections as well as having conversation and full focus on their customers are important means of communication and brand creation. They feel that externally CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization are seen as GEO Finland and not separate companies, thus sharing a brand. However, globally, the customers will not be aware if the component is produced in CPF or another country.

Their brand was described to have been formed and made strong due to their excellent customer service and around-the-clock availability. Their success in delivering products and their maintenance has shown their competence and built trust over the years. This was said to be the primary brand image and that Sales & Assembly Organization is the organization through which CPF has built the image they have. Also, with sales support functions they build their brand towards sales organizations like Sales & Assembly Organization. This was said to happen through education about their products and applications as well as assisting customers with choosing the right solution. Due to this strong brand image with delivery and maintenance competence, CPF top and middle management said they are now ready to bring other messages through. On the other hand, unlike Sales & Assembly Organization that was founded under GEO, CPF has a long historical background under a different company name that still has reputation in the city CPF operates in. Thus, if quality, trustworthiness, consistent delivery on promises, conforming to relevant norms of society and connection to brand heritage constitute a strong and authentic B2B brand (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Abratt & Mingione, 2022;

Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022), CPF's challenge is on finding their connection to their heritage. CPF is also in a challenging position to have their voice and brand heard, since they technically do not have their own brand but operate under GEO and Sales & Assembly Organization.

Regarding sustainability, top and middle management of CPF said they have done a lot to improve their sustainability and are proactively interested in their customers' sustainability improvements, however, they have not communicated it forwards or utilized it in their marketing actions. Indeed, their marketing communications was said to mainly consist of their internal intranet that has information of their products, solutions and product application. The overall goal is to create a common sustainability value proposition and vision for the whole GEO Finland that aligns with the headquarter sustainability vision and strategy. Marketing-wise, Sales & Assembly Organization will take lead on marketing communications whereas CPF offers the substance, creating a professional whole.

4.2 Environmental sustainability actions and perspectives in Component Producer Factory

Sustainability is already a value in the GEO corporation and as Hahn et al. (2015) suggest it is defined beyond environmental sustainability. It means working in the benefit of the corporation, well and safe working environment, well-being of employees, environmental sustainability, obeying law and GEO code of conduct. GEO sustainability report from 2016/2017 states that "People make the difference" is part of the company's foundation and their practiced motto throughout the corporation regarding employees, customers and competitors. According to the report, their thinking as a family-business is in the long-haul concerning whole generations rather than a fiscal year. The employees of the parent company and in subsidiaries have been consulted with regards to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in order to understand which ecological, economic and social activities they perform and plan for a sustainable company culture. They conclude that their employees are developing concepts for future, commit to projects and their responsible implementation. They tie their sustainability efforts to the economic and technical success of the company in order to continue their sustainability

development over time and in a healthy manner. They make it possible for their customers to reduce their environmental impact, reward thinking outside of the box within sustainability issues as well as expect suppliers to think and act in accordance with their principles defined in the code of conduct.

Also, the code of conduct shows the guiding principles behind decision making and sustainability at GEO. Their core principles include abiding laws, commitment to the principles of Global Compact Initiative of the United Nations as well as managerial responsibility to base behavior on the code of conduct and act as a role model. Additionally, they emphasize compliance with human rights and ban on child- and forced labor as well as labor rights, employee protection rights, health and safety at workplace, prohibition of any discrimination and tax compliance as an important part of social responsibility and transparent business practices. The core principles also include its own section for environmental protection, where sustainability is said to be a major part of company philosophy. They commit to sustainable environmental protection for today's and the future's generations as an equally important objective of safeguarding the future of the company and workforce. They intend to do this through high quality products, efficient health and safety at work, preventing hazards for the environment, conserving resources as well as basing their actions on ISO 14001 environment protection and ISO 50001 energy management standards. Rest of the conduct states the honorable conduct of business regarding anti-corruption policies, fair competition, conflicts of interest, reporting of misbehavior as well as lawful handling and protection of personal data.

After covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine sustainability also became a part of risk management as well, for instance lowering dependence of fossil fuels. Indeed, sustainability was seen as a meaningful way to differentiate from competitors and strengthen their position as their customers' versatile partner as system provider as well in innovation and maintenance. For some interviewees quality is strongly associated with sustainability, meaning that improving quality often resulted in more sustainable solutions. CPF interviewees feel it is important for sustainability to be a core value of the GEO corporation to receive investment funds to develop their sustainability. Similarly, employee interviewees feel that top and middle management have sustainability as part of their decision making, and many felt that

they individually already consider sustainability in their everyday work. This meant that they want well-argued decisions even if the more sustainable option was not chosen. Many stated that this already occurs and that they feel at ease to suggest investments to sustainability, and they will likely be granted.

“I think of it the same way as quality for example. It is an ongoing work that is done to improve something and bit by bit it develops and improves. It becomes like automation or something that is always present, not just something that is done when we are for example being audited by some authorities.” (Engineer 1, top management position)

Overall, CPF interviewees see sustainability as caring for people and nature, straightforwardness, not placing money as first priority as well as safe working environment and finding solutions that aim on lowering their carbon footprint. Interviewees also felt that sustainability is an opportunity to build CPF's brand. Combined with business opportunities and savings sustainability was seen as very positive change, but overall, sustainability was seen to be connected to everything they do. They also reported feeling freedom to localize and to create their sustainability transformation within some overall framework of the corporation. CPF and whole GEO have made sustainability a part of their values and they engage in various sustainability actions that can be categorized as Vesal et al. (2021) into environmental remediation and economic efficiency. Also, they consider social aspects through work safety and working environment, such as equality amongst employees. Thus, they seem to consider the three independent dimensions of sustainability, environmental, economic and societal, as Hahn et al. (2015) suggest in their critique. For Sales & Assembly Organization, CPF is an essential part of providing concrete sustainability actions and they see CPF's sustainability project in a positive light. Further, they see it as their common project to form GEO Finland's sustainable brand.

Small actions that create a bigger whole was the prominent viewpoint for CPF's sustainability actions. Reflecting the theoretical framework, these small actions were also seen as a way to educate employees about sustainability. Also, CPF interviewees stated they prefer implementing sustainability through actions because they are vary

of the possibility of greenwashing. However, what these actions should be, is still vague. For instance, should they approach the issue from production technology's perspective, or should they first improve things in their working environment, for example, what food is served in cafeterias. In other words, should they improve their daily processes or the product, or some kind of combination. For instance, some interviewees stated that the product itself has little room for improvements and that CPF's opportunities to make a difference is small. Others were eager to find innovations or so-called game changers in their product or solutions regarding sustainability. Then, some employee interviewees saw manufacturing processes as a better target of improvements. Ultimately, daily processes were seen to be an easier starting point and various places for improvement were recognized. Indeed, many interviewees reported that they have done a lot of projects that have improved their sustainability, but they were not recognized as such. Energy efficiency and minimizing usage of material and thus the impact on environment was said to be the main goal of all actions and initiatives, thus falling under the critique of Bocken et al. (2014) stating that industrial sustainability work has concentrated on maximizing material productivity and energy efficiency.

Sustainability actions and decisions in accordance with the literature review were found: putting continuity over profit, adopting a stakeholder perspective and attaching sustainability as part of decision-making (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019), CRM capabilities and dialogue with customers (Vesal et al., 2021), sustainability's integration to business practices (Lunde, 2018), remanufacturing (Sharma et al., 2010), third party certifications (ISO 9001 certificate), energy efficient products, highlighting the benefits of green products, use of recyclable materials as well as gathering information and knowledge from policy makers, scientific sources, society, universities and other companies creating sustainable cultures (Dangelico & Pujari (2010). Also, at CPF, support of top management towards sustainability and acknowledgement of developing trustful partnerships with supply chain partners are contributing to further adoption of sustainability actions (Hoejmose et al., 2012; Abratt & Mingione, 2022). They are planning to acquire ISO 14001 certificate and invest in sustainable equipment like modern energy efficient machine-tools and finding environmentally friendly paint options and solutions like circulation lubrication to allow producing smaller components.

Additional actions were identified: digitalization of virtual meetings and trial runs or inspections, usage of renewable energy, solar panels, recycling, supporting employees with bicycles and hybrid vehicles, utilizing waste heat and creating a safe work environment. Overall, this was said to be a part of their mindset that promotes recycling, maintenance and prolonging the component's life cycle. They also have an idea bank which they utilized during covid-19 pandemic to find solutions for safer working environment. Cross-functional collaboration and a technological development group were seen important to find sustainability actions and improvements. Hiring new people and young graduates as well as hearing their ideas was seen essential to bring up-to-date perspectives and knowledge in sustainability. Interviewees stated that their customers are hiring young people as well, so they need them to understand their customers' changing values and evaluation criteria.

So far their initiatives have been measuring their carbon and volatile organic compound emissions, energy efficiency and other emissions of the factory including waste and recycling. Additionally, they have decided that from the United Nations sustainable development goals clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production as well as climate are the most important ones. Also, they participate in the GREEF-project to measure their carbon footprint, reducing deviations, the aforementioned component efficiency, standardizing component parts, reusing designs, and improving painting systems and moving to water-based paints. Some even stated that all sustainability initiatives go under the GREEF project. Each initiative were reported to be in the very beginning. Continuing, each member of top management group are responsible for one initiative, for which they will eventually have teams from the middle management and employees, some initiatives might have cross-functional teams. Their customers were said to be interested in sustainability regarding logistics, power solutions like solar panels, energy efficient equipment and how they utilize waste heat.

Other actions mentioned in the theoretical framework were not identified, such as green logistics and eco-friendly transportation (Dekker et al., 2012), promoting sustainable lifestyles, considering circular economy and industrial symbiosis, changing institutions and critical assessment of the current capitalist neoliberal

economy (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019; Lunde, 2018; Bocken et al., 2014), environmentally-conscious supply management and replacing legacy systems (Sharma et al., 2010), collaboration for resource usage optimization (Gold, Seuring & Beske, 2010), adapting a green supply chain (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004) or a closed loop supply chain (Dekker et al., 2012), not-for-profit collaboration or hybrid businesses (for profit and non-profit structures) (Bocken et al., 2014), attaching sustainability as part of company culture and mission (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Further, sustainability plan and mission statement, eco-design guideline, extranets for green supplier networks, industry association networks, credible green marketing and energy savings illustrating software, creating incentives or awards for employee engagement (Dangelico and Pujari, 2010) were not identified in the interviews. Also, except for being open to dialogue and true to themselves, the virtues of a conscientious company (Iglesias & Ind, 2020) could not be identified to be fully implemented. Employee interviewees also reported that CPF completely lacks vision regarding sustainability. Thus, value-driven branding with a transformative purpose aiming to contribute to societal transformations (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022) that is an essential part of a sustainable organizations can be identified as absent.

However, both CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization top and middle management stated they have a vision of making sustainable change and focus on need-unifying collaboration with stakeholders, thus setting them to a position where the desired value proposition for GEO Finland can emerge (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022; Lusch & Vargo, 2014). However, connecting environmental sustainability to the managerial paradigm as Halme (2002) suggests and communicating their vision seem to be challenging. For instance, their top priority of creating value for customers every day have been internalized very deeply and many interviewees reported that it easily displaces sustainability in difficult or time-restrained decision making. For instance, sustainability was attempted to be included into their daily management system, but it was reported to sink under all the other themes they need to manage. Similarly, all employee interviewees had difficulties in knowing what sustainability actions CPF had implemented unless they were working on a sustainability related project. Based on the interviews, it seems that everyone has their own project they are well-informed of and excited about, but nobody knows what the others are working on. However, they feel like CPF is capable of making

effective sustainability actions. They found renewable energy, sustainable transportation, waste management, energy efficiency, product innovation, better data collection, finding solutions for their production methods and safe work environment as important sustainability actions. Also, some mentioned certificates to be useful in business relationships and in showing that they are a company that cares about sustainability.

CPF's approach could be described as proactive, since CPF and GEO as a whole have placed sustainability as a strategic area of focus, which enables them to co-create sustainability agendas that reach further than only the immediate business operations and gain long-term benefits besides mere risk-mitigation (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). CPF has found ways to create systemic and ideological change in their industry as well as shape stakeholder behavior, such as dialogue with customers. Aligning with Vesal et al. (2021), this is how CPF and GEO Finland as a whole aim at improving brand image and enhance market performance, thus maximizing their investments in sustainability. However, they have not implemented this through joining forces with other organizations to drive structural change by collective bargaining or showing successful example and becoming a target of benchmarking as Tarnovskaya et al. (2022) suggest. Rather, CPF interviewees stated listed companies as their targets of benchmarking.

As Halme (2002) suggests, these actions have helped in learning their environmental values and beliefs, however, a core issue is that these actions have not been shared within the organization and there is no understanding of what sustainability is, what it means for CPF and how can one include it in their everyday work. However, they do have top management support and trustful supply chain partners enabling the adaptation of sustainability actions (Hoejmose et al., 2012). CPF also has keen interest in participating to customer projects involving environmental sustainability, especially energy efficiency, with the component. They also have collaboration possibilities within GEO network, such as the Scandinavian Innovation Organization. However, wider joint environmental planning and cooperative problem-solving of environmental challenges that is so essential for environmental sustainability (Goodman et al., 2017; Vachon & Klassen, 2008) seems to still have many development possibilities. On the other hand, the corporation's long-term orientation

and trust towards CPF provides a good ground for them to be proactive, co-create sustainability agendas that reach further than only the immediate business operations or even achieve ideological change in the industries they operate in (Tarnovskaya et al., 2022).

In the future opportunities for sustainability development were seen in digitalization, collecting data and finding the places for improvement based on the data. For instance, how to improve product testing, Energy efficiency, sustainable lubrication, remanufacturing and improving the factory's sustainability will continue to have a great emphasis. Especially making the factory modern and sustainable was seen to have great improvement on CPF's brand image and even make them a trendsetter that others follow, creating new norms and modes of operating.

4.3 Brand identity of Component Producer Factory

Following Lawler (2015), the prominent memories, experiences and interpretations were recognized in the evolvement of CPF's status in the corporation. Additionally, the main evolving meanings that constitute their identity (Essamri et al., 2019) were identified. Further, the current brand identity of CPF is reviewed utilizing the CBIM by Urde (2013), focusing on relationship and position (external dimension), competencies and vision (internal dimension) as well as brand core (internal-external dimension). The core is seen to hold organizational purpose as well (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015). So, e.g., how are they influencing external stakeholders, how do they clarify their values, reason to exist and what they are good at as well as how do they decide together what CPF stands for. Also, openness to change, a mediator between the identity core and its environment (Robertson & Arachchige, 2015), can be recognized from all CPF interviews.

Top and middle management interviewees view CPF as a component producer that has deeply specialized knowledge in their field, both the product and its application. One interviewee described them as "state of the art" – factory, awarding it to their level of education and being passionate about what they do. Employee interviewees also highlighted development on the component series and gaining more responsibilities in the corporation as important and that they have become a

prototype factory that can deliver the components others cannot. Further, they see themselves as a hub or an important part of the network for their field of technology, thus bringing their technological expertise in the center of external relationships as well. CPF sees their position as a sort of factory store and design office that is a part of clients' projects and an important piece of the larger GEO network. Many interviewees saw that CPF has gained a foothold in the corporation, even if some only viewed it as one piece of a puzzle or one part of a portfolio. Indeed, CPF is described as growth seeking organization that has potential to find new business opportunities within various products and services, for instance offering larger service packages to meet customer demand of acquiring more services from lesser number of providers.

Overall, gaining their current status has allowed them to feel a sense of belonging and safety. Also, they interpret the investments to CPF by GEO and appearances in the GEO internal magazine as a sign of trust, which further contributes to their sense of safety and stability. The top and middle management interviewees reported that they have started to feel the results of their over 20-year progress and that now CPF is an organization that can fulfill its promises and provide evidence of the excellence of their products and solutions. Many interviewees noted this to have given them a better self-esteem and more cheerful working environment alongside their technological expertise. However, the prevalent thought is that CPF still needs to be able to show and reinforce their role in the corporation to show they are a profitable and independent unit in the network.

Recalling values of CPF was challenging for all interviewees. CPF's values have first been formed after the acquisition of the previous component producer, after which they have been updated twice by the top management. The previous time in 2019 the values between CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization were unified. After the top management workshops, the established values were communicated forwards to middle management and their teams. All managers had their own way of communicating the values forward to their teams. Some had discussions about the meaning of the values in the corporation level and for their team, some discussed how they are present in their everyday work, some had workshops and learning cafes about what ideas and thoughts the values raise. There was no discussion between

departments and employees did not participate in the formation of the values. The values were also said to have been benchmarked or localized from the Central European headquarters and then aligned with CPF's views. They felt they had the freedom to adapt the Central European values within certain guidelines.

"Of course, these values tend to be forgotten in everyday work. Even I had to take a moment to recall what they actually are even though I was one of the people defining them." (Engineer 3, top management position)

Based on the interviews, quality, flexibility or product customization and efficient delivery are their competencies, values and brand core. Further, top- and middle management stated that they are known as a quality brand. These competencies allow them to be more agile and better in customer projects, which is how CPF stands out from others. Whereas passion towards their component and their competencies around it can be seen as constituting their core, however, based on the interviews their purpose is unclear. However, a few top and middle management interviewee stated that their purpose is to offer the best customer service of the market in their industries of choice as well as to be proud of the expertise they have developed over the years. Honesty and going the extra mile for customers' requests were mentioned as well. On the other hand, when asked what CPF personally means, all interviewees reported meaningful work tasks, an environment where they enjoy working and equal treating of all members of organization. Overall, they feel like they are in good company, have become friends at the workplace and feel like their work is important and appreciated.

Top and middle management interviewees recalled the values to be sustainability, quality, efficient delivery and profitability. Some were more customer-oriented in their answer and mentioned the family values of the owners (parsimony, investing for growth and long-term decision making) and customer centricity as the main values. Some mentioned responsibility towards the society and wellbeing of employees. For employees, in addition to the quality, efficient delivery and flexibility they felt that skilled employees and good working environment were their strengths. Central European origin was also raised, and it was seen to correspond to the Finnish character of appreciating quality and punctuality. Employees recall they

review the values in CEO's annual review. Some did not perceive participating in defining the values meaningful and wanted to have a strict focus on their work. However, some stated that employees would want to have more influence but feel like their opportunities to influence were small. Additionally, some had doubts in the middle management's ability to deliver the top management's perspective to the employees as they were intended.

All in all, three value-systems were brought up: the values they formed for CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization, a customer-value system and a system describing their strengths. The customer-value system comprises of the official values (*customer centricity, skilled and motivated work community, continuous improvement, sustainability, global actor*), priorities (*sustainability, quality, delivery, profitability*) as well as of leadership and a shared way of working. Thus, it could be said that CPF has priorities as values. The strength-wheel system puts their technological expertise in the center and describes their strengths around it. However, an older quality system was still in place and the values there were a bit differing: *appreciation towards the customer, mental state that allows having fun at the workplace, profitability as well as open and honest communication*. It also includes a slogan saying, *"I function as a member of a strong and competent community."*

CPF aims to influence other sales organizations through communicating the strength wheel. However, top and middle management interviewees reported that the strength wheel system has not been wholly understood in the organization and it still requires efforts so that everyone can understand what the strengths mean, how they are present in their everyday work and how they are linked to the values of CPF. Thus, it could be said that CPF or GEO Finland has cacophony rather than polyphony (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019) around their values. One top management interviewee discussed possible solutions to be regular staff meetings where they look over customer cases, where they were successful, where not, why the case was given to them in the first place and what feedback they got.

One main ambition for CPF is to be known well by the corporation's sales organizations, trusted by them and that they are aware of their excellent delivery capacity and quality operations. Some had hopes that GEO and GEO Finland would

become widely known in Finland and that they could reach the status of companies like KONE or Valmet. Most interviewees mentioned their worry of finding skilled workers and that their main challenges include making them more known as an employer. Overall, the top and middle management hoped to achieve growth, success and to be an attractive employer, but how that is achieved is not commonly shared. For instance, some interviewees stated that their way to stand out is to provide quality products, deliver them on time and make sure that all customers and end-users are satisfied whereas some have thoughts towards sustainability or their Finnish character as differentiating factor.

Other targets of improvement were recognized by CPF interviewees. According to top- and middle management, inheriting a lot of expertise from the previous Finnish component producer and becoming an important part of GEO's business development early on led them to become an overly pride and closed organization that did not communicate much to other organizations of the corporation or to the headquarters. However, this was also said to be due to their Finnish character of communicating when absolutely necessary. On the other hand, readiness to help in any situation was also mentioned as part of this Finnish character. Overall, now that other organizations picked up on similar technology and made advancements of their own, a clear need for collaboration and open communication between the corporation's organizations was recognized. So, CPF now aims to strengthen their position through developing collaboration with headquarters and other units. Top- and middle management stated that this would strengthen their position in the corporation through gaining access to the forums that discuss the future of their field of business. Top and middle management interviewees also felt that their role as a technological hub in certain industries needed to be made clearer and more known while staying focused on their responsibilities.

4.4 Challenging and contesting identity at Component Producer Factory

As in the theoretical framework and by Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017), the need for change is recognized and the brand identity of CPF can be described emergent. As the meanings of who they are or what is meaningful have been contested (Von Wallpach et al., 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020), an internal discussion of existence, its

meaningfulness and what sustainability's role is has started. Being characterized by conflict between reality and expectations or progress through challenge and tensions, a contest of meanings and a challenge sparked by conflict can be identified from the interviews.

4.4.1 Drivers and conflict

In the past years of CPF the drivers of change were ownership changes, whereas now they face internal and external pressures like competition of talented workforce, changes in values and vision as well as digital developments (Koch, 2014). Now, main drivers of their sustainability transformation according to CPF are a couple of top management employees, customer demand, headquarter pressure and overall change in society. As an example, CPF substantially improved their work safety processes and measures after their customers started to expect them to present their work safety statistics. Also, sustainability was reported to have become a part of routine inquiries from customers and auditors evaluating sustainability, safety and business ethics. Consequently, now all factory visits start with the statement that safety is number one and sustainability number two. Also the younger generation of employees was reported to be a source of sustainability change in CPF. For instance, they initiate conversation in the workplace and show more sustainable behavior like using a porcelain mug instead of disposable paper or plastic cups. One interviewee described it as positive attitude shaping and a factor that increases their understanding of different topics and helps CPF to put focus on the issue. Overall, they are in demand to operate faster, more profitable and with better quality.

The GREEF -project was also stated as one main driver towards sustainability transformation of the organization and acted synonymous to their environmentally sustainable identity creation process. The project was seen as an opportunity to gain resources and knowledge for their sustainability transformation as well as promote the ongoing energy initiatives. Indeed, it is seen as a catalyst of conversation and the top and middle management interviewees reported that people had started to discuss sustainability related matters like carbon emissions and recycling. However, the GREEF -project had been introduced only once in the CEO's quarterly report and then put on the CPF intranet.

However, perhaps an underlying challenge came from Sales & Assembly A that is moving away from the core of their strength wheel value system, the technology, and towards supporting services and sustainability that promote their goal of becoming a long-term partner to their customers. As said, being service oriented, Sales & Assembly Organization's communications and marketing is focused on services, solutions and value they offer. Some stated that they are now known for fast ability to react to customer demands and for being capable of handling the whole life cycle of the customer's equipment. On a more concrete level, they want to systematically develop their customer relations so that they are a partner that contributes to their customer's business. Further, Sales & Assembly Organization interviewees reported sustainability to have gained a great importance for their marketing activities and that it would only grow in importance in the near future. In fact, many stated that it is the only way of securing a future position in their market. For many, sustainability had affected their work significantly and it was even stated to have become a new perspective on their reason to exist and on the ways they act, alongside with providing the best customer service and value.

Thus, CPF's brand identity meanings, mainly their technological expertise and passion towards the technology, became contested. Or, within their shared brand the core and its surrounding elements (Robertson & Arachhige, 2015) are less aligned. Also, conflicting roles of an organization or misalignment of perception (how we see us versus how others see us) are a source of conflict (Robertson and Arachhige, 2015), thus their established status or role could be seen as threatened due to the increasing interest on sustainability and services. In other words, Sales & Assembly Organization wants to be a service partner and not a component producer whereas CPF remains a component producer. Also, as Tura et al. (2019) present, a company initiating sustainability activities can trigger tensions between their suppliers that fear of becoming a lower tier supplier if the sustainability criteria are not met, here CPF being a supplier influenced by Sales & Assembly Organization and customers. Sales & Assembly Organization also has the means to develop their shared brand, GEO Finland, thus them shifting the focus out of the core of CPF is pressuring them to make CPF more relevant to Sales & Assembly Organization. However, aligning with the theoretical framework, CPF has recognized this misalignment or conflict as an opportunity.

CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization have more relational than moral motives behind their sustainability transformation. As Lintukangas et al. (2022) suggest, engaging in reducing emissions can make suppliers appear as a more potential partner for long-term relationships, which seems to be Sales & Assembly Organization's main motive. For CPF, answering to this challenge is more of a matter of complying with social norms, and achieving legitimacy in their supply chain to gain long-term relationships. For instance, aiming to lower their carbon footprint or planning efficient logistics are seen simultaneously as aims of improving the overall efficiency and profitability of the organization, ultimately sharing the idea of creating more with less and fulfilling their expectations. Thus, additionally to the underlying motives, their managerial strategic intent of brand identity development (Urde, 2013) can be identified to be maintaining their competitive capabilities and gaining advantage to be leveraged within their stakeholder network. Confirming these motives, as Vesal et al. (2021) present, in industries where environmental damage and resource exploitation are significant issues, achieving environmentally sustainable position regarding brand image can increase sales revenue, profitability and public valuation.

“Here at Sales & Assembly Organization our awakening was due to customers actively approaching with sustainability related questions. They tell about their own sustainability and after that it is easy for them to ask about our sustainability. Now the customers are actually interested and even evaluate suppliers based on their sustainability, now we really have to face it. That has created a clear need for us to elevate our profile and bring up the things we have already done with sustainability.” (Top-manager 3)

“There are many business opportunities for us to create something new and innovative to the market. Sustainability is not charity, there has to be some kind of economic or commercial ground to it. And the starting point is the customer and their needs, which again are coming from the needs of the global society. Two years ago I would have said [about sustainability] “what are they waffling about, we need good products, fast delivery and technological expertise so we can maximize our sales”. But with my current understanding of what our customers are telling us

about sustainability I think it [sustainability] is an incredibly good thing.” (Top manager 1)

However, both seem to be moving towards more moral motives like integrating climate change into the company’s strategy and influencing public policies regarding environmental sustainability. Also, many stated that alongside competitive advantage and creating value propositions sustainability is seen as the only way of securing a future for coming generations.

4.4.2 Engaging stakeholders

As suggested in theoretical framework, mission and challenge of the first stage is to arrange or engage the organization and its most important stakeholders to respond to the initial challenge of sustainability transformation in order to support the co-creation process of environmentally sustainable brand identity. A transition to more sustainable business practices can be identified at CPF, however, structures necessitating a change in corporate strategy and operations (Hahn et al., 2015) are still being developed. For instance, CPF uses lean methods and daily management in their everyday work and in change projects. At CPF, lean is a method for continuous improvement and has substantially changed their work culture. Top and middle management interviewees see lean as a way of reviewing processes together with employees and to find improvements and solutions. They see the person doing their part of the process as the expert of that job and will rather enable them to find the solution together with their team. People doing their jobs are trusted and autonomy is given for them to find the most suitable solutions. Within lean, the managerial role is seen to be enabling and that a manager should ensure that an employee can perform their task efficiently without unnecessary tasks. They have illustrations of their processes, and these processes are led through lean methods, especially daily management. These processes are measured, and they are to make sure that everyone has a shared way of working.

“One of my main principles is that it does not matter so much what I think. Only when I am able to have people think for themselves and with their own brains, independently, can I say I have succeeded. I can say it is important to reduce

emissions, but if the recipient does not grasp the meaning of my words, then the idea is coming from the outside. When people grasp the idea and internalize it, change can start and become permanent.” (Engineer 4, top management position)

The daily management style was reported by the top and middle management to improve collaboration and communication between departments. Investing in a project, collaboration and involving employees in early stages were seen to be the success factor in change management. Practically this means having workshops and creating communication materials together as well as making sure everyone has understood the concept and is able to discuss the topic. Consequently, some employee interviewees felt that internally their collaboration had improved, and development projects or investments decisions were more inclusive of employees. Also, there have been improvements in collecting ideas from employees, for instance, during the covid crisis they were able to improve hygiene through employee proposals.

Indeed, when asked for examples of successful and unsuccessful change processes, the successful ones were given for teams to solve, and it concerns the team's own work. For instance, when a project and its implementation were brought from headquarters, the employees felt it was a failure due to not fitting their needs and consequently set their work back. Overall, during the past ten years they have managed to use lean methodology as a way of including the teams to development processes where they learn, make conclusions and implement the developments. Even though communication between the factory level and office level of CPF had improved, some improvement could still be achieved. Many felt that for change to happen, they should not be told what to do but rather bring the topics into conversations and create the right atmosphere for people to want the change. Additionally, leading by example was deemed effective.

“What has been working so far is that usually one member of the organization has a development idea and takes that as their responsibility. They go through it with the team to find more ideas and to test it until a fitting solution is found. I like that employees are included in this process since they usually know what works and what does not.” (Employee 1)

Also, structures for decision making regarding sustainability was seen as insufficient by the interviewees. An interviewee stated that CPF does not have established standards that limit or guide their decision making. As an example, they explained that there are standards for acquiring safe equipment but no standards that limit acquiring equipment that is unsustainable, calling these limitations “show stoppers”. Having some standards or rules that force to improve processes and actions were deemed helpful, like in the example of work safety development or rules how to recycle. This was also said to contribute to nobody feeling like sustainability would be their responsibility, since nothing requires them to make sustainable decisions.

Even though sustainability was seen as a positive subject of change, some internal conflicts and psychological defenses (Brown & Starkey, 2000) were identified. The aforementioned lack of internal co-creation and communication could be seen to contribute to this. Indeed, as Rodrigues and Child (2008) suggest, internally acknowledged sustainability-based green initiatives influence the firm’s reputation and becomes its identity over time (Rodrigues & Child, 2008), thus internal dysfunctions such as unclear and ineffective internal communications (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022) inhibit their environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation. For instance, a worry was brought up by some employees that sustainability could start interfering with their essential work tasks or lower their productivity. Thus, they hoped sustainability to be made simple or easy and clear methods of operating were wished for. Further, it was hoped that sustainability was more discussed and on display internally, and that everyone could see the results and achievements of their sustainability initiatives.

The most mentioned improvements were clear goals for sustainability and description of actions on how to achieve the goals. Overall, more comprehensive and ongoing communication about sustainability, its goals and achievements were wished for. For instance, the intranet was stated as an option for employees to follow ongoing and upcoming sustainability projects and thus increase overall transparency. The case of work safety was mentioned as an example of good communication and that it encourages employees to notice improvement targets on their own work environment and reach the goals they had set. Aligning with Dangelico and Pujari (2010), employee incentives were mentioned and sustainability incentives in addition

to business incentives were thought of a positive possibility. Indeed, as GEO sustainability report states people are in the center of GEO sustainability ambitions and reward original thoughts or ideas regarding sustainability. Also, having the headquarters push sustainability actions and influencing customers was deemed important and that it would promote sustainability in their organization as well. Top and middle management interviewees felt that they are “pushing with a rope” and that their active participation alone is not enough to make a change in their organization and its network.

The weight of unusual events like the war in Ukraine and covid-19 pandemic were said to have put sustainability initiatives in a lesser position since people feel like they have too much work to do in handling these unexpected events and their consequences. CPF was already facing some issues with having too many improvement projects going on and employees feeling overwhelmed before participating in the GREEF-project, thus resources and capacity to process new demands present a major challenge. Also, stakeholders like customers’ attitudes towards sustainability is a determining factor on how well sustainability initiatives are executed (Vesal et al., 2021), and many stated that the market was not ready for investing in sustainability due to insufficient amount of interest. Some interviewees worried how sustainability investments could be brought up in the price of their products since customers might not be ready to pay for it.

Interviewees thought these feelings of inability and concerns come from the abstractive nature of sustainability and how individuals process these abstract phenomena as well as the feelings they cause. Additionally, the perspectives and ways of processing abstractive topics can be in conflict between individuals. Also, the differing interests of end-user customers and OEM customers pose a challenge. However, educating OEMs about the long-term benefits and marketing opportunities was seen as one solution. Also, providing the proofs of savings and ensuring excellent customer service in projects was seen as a way to have the end-users demand the OEMs to use CPF’s technology and energy efficient solutions.

” These [sustainability] things are not triggers yet. They go to the category ‘nice to know’, but what matters really are delivery time, price and quality. In industrial

markets it [sustainability] is a nice plus, but not pivotal. But, the world is going to the direction that it is our benefit to be able to tell about sustainability. In addition to price and delivery time we could show the carbon footprint of the product and its usage which would be valuable. “ (Top-manager 6)

Overall, active collaboration with customers and especially those with relevant sustainability innovation was hoped for. Aligning with Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008), to engage customers CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization have aimed at recognizing customer values and connecting sustainable values to those in a way that embraces the customer's values as well as demonstrates win-win situations. For instance, educating or helping to understand concrete positive impacts on the environment, the environmental and economic returns on investments to increase trust and confidence to try and purchase green products (Bonini & Oppenheim, 2008) are used by CPF to engage customers. CPF's main argument is that by buying the more expensive but more efficient component the customer could save the purchase price in energy savings as well as save on other purchases needed besides the component since the efficiency allows for smaller supporting components. So, initial investments for customers might be higher but operating costs substantially lower. Indeed, providing proof of concrete financial or other savings in the long run for customers was seen highly effective and meaningful. For instance, end-user benefits were seen more efficient in convincing customers than discussing lesser carbon emissions. Also, discussing sustainability matters with customers even if they are not brought up was seen as a method to reveal customer attitudes towards sustainability and subtly influencing them. All in all, capabilities to educate and communicate about sustainability were seen as a way to influence stakeholder attitudes.

Some attempts to illustrate the value of sustainability internally have also been identified, however, not in the same extent as towards external stakeholders like customers. Still, approaching sustainability through measures of profitability and savings was brought up in almost every interview and it was deemed as something everyone can understand and agree upon. In previous development projects measuring processes and their progress was deemed helpful in understanding current situation and how to proceed and achieving the improvements were seen to positively reflect on their image as well. Also, top and middle management

recognized resistance to change projects like work safety but stated that once the concrete benefits were realized the opposing attitudes were changed. So, aligning with the theoretical framework, it could be said that CPF has the managerial relationship-management skills and goal setting skills to understand external stakeholder requirements and to set meaningful goals with them. However, internally this is lacking. All in all, learning about sustainability and becoming a sustainable organization produced positive feelings as well, as Halme (2002) presents. For instance, some top management employees mentioned feeling like they were ambassadors for sustainability and felt great joy for pushing the organization in its sustainability transformation process.

Goal setting skills were also highlighted as an important factor in engaging stakeholders. At CPF, sustainability goals were identified as a core challenge and all interviewees were hoping for goals to understand sustainability as well as their own progress regarding sustainability better. Most interviewees reported not having any sustainability goals even though they have a lot of information or data, and main cause for this was not having a shared understanding of what is sustainability, what does it mean for CPF and what is the current situation of CPF's sustainability actions or initiatives. For instance, one interviewee said that during the GREEF-project they will determine the deadline for becoming carbon neutral, but first they should understand what is carbon neutrality. For instance, the cost of electricity is easy to grasp but a carbon footprint and its calculation are too abstract and vague. Communicating and educating employees about sustainability was deemed challenging for top and middle management since they could not entirely grasp the phenomenon themselves. Also, approaching customers with sustainability arguments were deemed inconvenient since they could not argue credibly or transparently without first gaining understanding themselves.

“It is hard to give a goal that says let's increase sustainability. We have almost 200 people working here and almost 200 perspectives on what sustainability means. I would want to have key performance goals and indicators for sustainability, it needs to be measured.” (Engineer 1, top management position)

All interviewees said that having clear measures, goals and understanding of current state would be one of the most important things for their sustainability transformation. Indeed, all interviewees reported that sustainability and its initiatives have been excluded to the top management level, further highlighting the lack of internal co-creation. Or as some interviewees expressed, sustainability is on the level of values since they are in the beginning of their sustainability transformation. Also, many sustainability initiatives are currently handled on the global level and tested on certain countries. Consequently, CPF has been left to wait for common goals and standards from the headquarters. Also, employee interviewees thought that sustainability has been defined in the corporation but they just do not know about it. Indeed, many employees stated that sustainability had not been discussed before or after introducing the GREEF-project and it was mainly a part of decision making criteria.

However, some common goals with Sales & Assembly Organization have been set: decreasing carbon footprint, creating clear sustainability indicators, finding the best way to use energy as well as educating customers about energy efficiency. One top-management interviewee also stated that most meaningful metric for their products could be evaluating carbon and water footprints that take into consideration material usage and material recycling. CPF also has a balanced scorecard system in place where their main goals are evaluated and initiatives are gathered in for top management evaluation. Reflecting Hahn et al. (2015), CPF stated that many roads to achieve their main objective of carbon neutrality can be found, and their challenge is choosing the right ones that fit to their budget as well as to the corporation's choices. Also, employee interviewees reported that even if they remember some goals such as the carbon footprint from the launch of the GREEF-project and where to find them in the intranet, they could not understand the concepts used in describing the goal.

4.5 Exploration and reorchestration of identity at Component Producer Factory

Moving towards a clarified corporate brand identity (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017), CPF can be seen to have started to engage in exploration and reorchestration through

interaction with stakeholders. Sustainability activities performed to bring the brand identity into behaviors and routines have been identified in the previous chapters. Additionally, the theoretical framework highlights achieving a common understanding of meanings, solving the identified conflicts, finding relevant information sources for exploring identity, e.g., through answering identity related questions like what we are good at or how do we want to be perceived as well as deciding on the most meaningful outcomes of this learning. Essentially, answering the questions of what we do and promise, how we work to achieve that, why are we engaged in doing so and with whom (Urde, 2022). Thus, CPF is exploring their possible environmentally sustainable brand identity and how their existing brand identity is consequently reorchestrated and aligned. So, they explore questions like what sustainability is, what it means to CPF and its individual members and other stakeholders.

However, theoretical framework highlights collective understanding of the company's vision (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Urde, 2013), active participation of employees to issues such as defining values (Beverland, & Cankurtaran, 2022), inclusive strategies (Tura et al., 2019), internal stakeholder participation and its importance to the success of sustainability initiatives (Urde, 2013; Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016) and overall internal co-creation to produce a meaningful brand identity creation process. In the previous sections this was found absent or lacking, thus co-creation with employees is CPF's challenge to exploration and reorchestration. Indeed, some top and middle management interviewees recognized that employees had not been included in the sustainability work. Also, even though CPF members were seen to be motivated around topics of sustainability, it can be recognized that employees have differing levels of motivation of interest to participate. Thus, aligning with Biedenbach and Manzhynski (2016), different groups of CPF members might need different kind of facilitating in the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process. Nonetheless, involving everyone to the sustainability transformation was deemed important by top and middle management. However, it is unclear how everyone can participate, what their concrete actions and impact would be as well as how do they form a unified understanding of their way to implement sustainability actions.

4.5.1 Learning with stakeholders

Some examples of successful co-creational learning were identified. For instance, social sustainability i.e., work safety, was initially developed through learning with customers and employees. As their customers started to ask for their work safety measures and improvements, CPF drastically managed to improve their work safety through developing measures and means to achieve those. CPF developed their measurement system based on the knowledge their customers had and from acquiring education on the matter since there already are standards for measuring work safety. Then they asked for safety observations from all employees and could find the safety hazards they need to improve and guidelines to follow. It was said to have been a cultural change and formed the way the whole organization works and thinks. Consequently, change was said to be a matter of observation: if they ask observations about work safety people will start to find places for improvement and change their attitudes and behavior. Most motivating was said to be the projects that connect to the employee's own work, seeing results and solving special problems for customers.

"When we ask people for safety observations, they start observing safety. And if we ask for sustainability observations, they will start to observe sustainability related matters. So, we can give people's thinking a direction and that way raise awareness of environmental themes. For instance, why are we not even telling our people that we have a new emissions free electricity contract coming or that we have installed new charging points for electric cars. We have not really discussed these things or had any internal marketing related to these things." (Engineer 4, top management position)

Examples of environmental sustainability were mainly from customer projects where the efficiency was improved. In an example of their lean transformation, having all organization members participate, find the solutions regarding their work by themselves and taking small steps towards the end goal proved to be the key to success. Allowing people to try, iterate and fail was crucial in finding the most suitable solutions for CPF and to engage people in the process of change. The way they organized themselves and their work allowed them to have a successful change process, however with GREEF-project and their sustainability transformation they

have acquired a new project management software which has not been adopted by the management. Indeed, those who were not involved in the GREEF-project were reported not to have changed or added on their views on sustainability. Employee interviewees want to incorporate sustainability as one of their work tasks in order to concentrate on the work they already are passionate about. When asked if this means that the employees and their teams should be allowed to create and implement their part of the sustainability project as they see best, many agreed. However, many stated that the main driver of the sustainability transformation and its initiatives should be from the top and middle management. All in all, employee interviewees stated that everyone should be participating to their sustainability transformation. This does not mean that everyone should be forced to participate, but rather they wished for encouragement and that it was made a mode of operation.

4.5.2 Process for developing environmentally sustainable brand identity

Sales & Assembly Organization is ahead of CPF in their sustainability transformation, thus a process for CPF to benchmark can be identified. Sales & Assembly Organization conducted an analysis of their current state regarding sustainability. This was the aim of an environmental awareness project, which mapped out the current state and found that they are lacking systematic approach to sustainability. So, they had done many sustainability actions, but they were isolated and not communicated in the organization. Identified actions were collected in the analysis of their current state. They placed the sustainability actions on a timeline and consulted external sources for meaningful sustainability indicators. For now, they focus on carbon emissions and energy consumption. From the timeline they could assess what actions have contributed for example to lowering energy consumption. They also defined sustainability in different sections, from which the members in these sections got to define what the sections mean and especially the meaning for Sales & Assembly Organization. This served also as a preparation to their sustainability certification questionnaire.

Sustainability certification processes in Sales & Assembly Organization were said to have been a good exercise from which they got further knowledge about sustainability. Especially having sustainability divided in sections was reported

helpful and more meaningful way of viewing an organization's sustainability. Comparing it to the sustainability certification questionnaire in 2020 when only one person filled the questionnaire it had very little impact on the organization. Reaching a high status from the sustainability certification questionnaire in 2022 made a great statement for the whole organization about the importance of sustainability for Sales & Assembly Organization, which was said to have impacted everyone's mindset about the topic. This also aligns with the theoretical framework where it is presented that measures and assessment of outcomes of brand identity creation or its more concrete initiatives can work as enablers of learning and co-creation, thus enablers of engagement and commitment. Continuing from the initial analysis and sustainability certification questionnaire, they aim to create a roadmap on further sustainability actions as well as make it a part of their sales argumentation, which is also presented as a meaningful source of information to drive sustainability initiatives by Gupta and Kumar (2013). Also, external marketing and communications material have been made.

" We made a new and clear goal to elevate our [sustainability] standards and level. Then, during that journey we noticed that it [sustainability certification questionnaire] is a great way to analyze our current situation. Because everyone had responsibility of their own segment of the questionnaire we were able to truly reflect on what is in a good level and what needs improving. Having an external evaluation brought some real pressure to our goal and drove all of us to reach a successful solution." (Top-manager 8)

Sales & Assembly Organization also wishes for greater support from the government and actively try to influence the directives and regulation on industrial investments so that the investment would have to take into consideration the whole of the project and its life cycle. They want unsustainable and inefficient parts to be prohibited and that the law demands energy efficient solutions. Additionally, they recognized the importance of employees and developing their sustainability internally and not only externally with customers.

They also have an overall process management in place, which they use for various projects. First, the person responsible for a department or function draws out the

process by themselves. Next, it is pondered which actions are crucial to look deeper into in the process. These crucial actions, like quality or safety, are time-bound and thus become goals of the process. The process is monitored through daily management system of the managers, where the idea is that people report on the area of responsibility themselves rather than to a software that managers control. This allows to keep managers and other members of the organization informed, as well as enables learning from each other. Additionally, data is collected for monitoring the process. For instance, the successful work safety project followed this process. Regarding sustainability, this was said to be a possible approach to managing the sustainability transformation process. Sales & Assembly Organization interviewees saw that top management needs to provide the overall guidelines after which projects are established around the desired goals. Additionally, each project should have a project manager and a top management member in it, after which they would continue to educate other managers. Finally, after the managers have fully internalized the topic, they can believably and transparently educate their team members.

Further benchmarking Sales & Assembly Organization, their goal is to increase their internal communication about sustainability. So far, they have been reporting about sustainability projects in general meetings. Additional steps would also be establishing more collaboration with headquarters, Scandinavian Innovation Organization and CPF. From that collaboration they wish for sharing of best practices, space for reflection and other advice.

4.6 Commitment and elucidating to new identity at Component Producer Factory

CPF has not reached the stage of commitment and elucidating, however, some implications, suggestions and benchmarks can be presented. For instance, continuing in the exploration and reorchestration, meaningful brand identity development results can be achieved as knowledge, trust and commitment develops (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). In other words, continuing to invest in organization culture that promotes challenging of existing mental models, continuous learning, self-reflection, development of new visions and internal discussion (Brown & Starkey, 2000;

Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017) and bringing sustainability into the experiences people have with the organization.

4.6.1 Outcomes of the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process

Ideally, CPF reaches a collective understanding of value and meanings to which they can commit to, meaning they have found e.g., what sustainability and environmental sustainability mean, what is the value of the process and reaching its goals and what sustainability means for the organization as a whole but for individuals and their network as well. Further, they have found alignment of individual and organizational purpose, which is connected to the capabilities of the organization and to strategic decision-making (Ind, 2022). Additionally, they constantly reassess how stakeholders respond in interactions thus keep the brand identity co-creation ongoing. The meanings and value to which CPF has committed to helps managerial decision making and provides internal clarity to further engage in co-creation (Iglesias et al 2022). Possibly, as a result of higher level of coherence, clear customer focus and collective understanding of what is important, resources can be better allocated, and communications designed to be more effective and appealing. So, there would be a defined core of the environmentally sustainable brand identity that's interpretation or communication are subject to the process of learning, co-creation and gradual adjustments to stakeholders' responses.

As they possibly establish a strong position in their domesticated market while simultaneously keeping an eye on emerging market opportunities (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017) they also have reached a strong brand as the result of a successful brand identity co-creation process. Following Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) as well as Abratt and Mingione (2022), having a stakeholder-unifying aim to the future, CPF can signify distinctiveness due to their environmentally sustainable brand identity in addition to their current attributes of quality and trustworthiness. Encouraging further joint environmental planning and cooperative problem-solving of environmental challenges (Goodman et al., 2017; Vachon & Klassen, 2008), their strong brand invites other actors of the ecosystem to join and take part in developing the sustainability of the organization and its ecosystem. They could also be able to shape

markets towards sustainability, i.e., inform and educate stakeholders such as OEM's, end-user and policymakers due to the strong brand, its narrative and consistent delivery of meaningful value for stakeholders (Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Urde, 2022).

In the industrial context this happens through long-term cooperation in buyer-seller partnerships where emotional and functional qualities, trust and credibility of the strong brand encourage taking part in sustainability initiatives (Webster & Keller, 2004; Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). In addition to the personal relationships that are characteristics to the industrial context, Sales & Assembly Organization hope that CPF would start using the same software as the corporation's other organization do and thus bring the factory, its offerings and other relevant information more available to them. This means that they want CPF to have an interface from which their offerings, contact personnel and other information can be found. In other words, to digitalize their knowledge, offering, brand and products. Without that a Central European factory can be closer than CPF even if CPF is geographically closer. Thus, CPF can continue to communicate and co-create their environmentally sustainable brand identity in the personal and digital channels where they can realize the results of their strong brand but to also have their brand identity challenged further. In other words, CPF can use these channels to bring the brand identity into the experiences of stakeholders and communicate or further develop their brand identity and its narrative. This narrative or signature story co-created within CPF communicates and encapsulates their past, present and future as well as their what, how, why and with whom (Urde, 2022), to which all stakeholders add their perspectives and reactions (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

Finally, Sales & Assembly Organization wants to produce formal documentation in form of a sustainability report or a sustainability guidebook. Overall, they want their idea or mindset of sustainability to radiate from all the members of the organization and their everyday work rather than having mere marketing and branding efforts as an output. Based on the analysis of their sustainability actions and its current state, they have recognized certain themes (staff wellbeing, work safety, environment and ethics) that will be utilized in communications and marketing. The meanings of these themes are explained and the concrete actions promoting the themes are collected. Then, the products and services that support the customer's sustainability are

presented. Additionally, they want sustainability communications and marketing to reflect their other values as well. Sales & Assembly Organization interviewees stated education, keeping up with topical sustainability themes and ongoing discussion in teams essential to upkeep the process.

“I hope that we get the whole image and its meaning internalized in the organization so that it becomes our own way of act. Also, that we become interested in the sustainability of our customers and open to creating new services, solutions or even innovations for them. It means that everyone understands why being part of sustainability transformation creates value and growth. We still need to communicate this and strategically place sustainability in the focus of our operations.” (Top-manager 8)

Sales & Assembly Organization is still working on learning what is important for their customer to further develop their sustainability communications and marketing. So far, they have concluded that they see reciprocity and reciprocal communication as a solution to develop sustainability with all customers. This means being interested in the customer’s sustainability but also showing the customer their own sustainability plans and actions, ultimately ending up with shared sustainability plans and actions. Their external sustainability communications and marketing happen on their website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube accounts as well as in collaboration with industry associations. Both CPF and Sales & Assembly Organization share the aim of quantifying and communicating their sustainability achievements to their customers in order to gain competitive advantage and to further their role as a partner. Both also share the perspective of needing concrete actions and achievements before publishing sustainability marketing activities.

Since the sustainability practices of CPF have created a strong foundation that empowers its members to act in a sustainable way (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022), in the continuing brand identity development co-creation process the ideals of a conscientious brand can be aimed for. So, after elucidation and commitment to the outcomes of the current environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation a next challenge can come from conscientiousness and value-driven branding with a transformative purpose, i.e., being true to themselves, open to dialogue, willing to

submit their decision for the public and incorporating sustainability in their culture which is lived by all stakeholders (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Thus, CPF's goal is to co-creatively and cross-functionally determine the reason for their existence in a manner that the organization's members have experienced successful in previous change projects in addition to tying it to their passion of technological expertise. Ultimately, sustainability can become an equal part of their core or is added to their core that is their technological expertise.

4.6.2 Communicating the environmentally sustainable brand identity

Opportunities and structures to communicate the possible brand identity can be identified in the empirical research. CPF's goals for their marketing or branding efforts are maintaining their competitive capabilities and gaining advantage to be leveraged within their stakeholder network, becoming a trendsetter and creating new norms and modes of operating within the corporation, to be known well by the corporation's sales organizations, trusted by them and that they are aware of their capabilities, become widely known in Finland and more known as an employer, clarifying their role as a technological hub, making CPF more relevant to Sales & Assembly Organization, appear as a more potential partner for long-term relationships and achieving legitimacy in their supply chain. They see sustainability as a meaningful way to differentiate from competitors and strengthen their position as their customers' versatile partner. Theoretical framework recognizes value-driven branding with a transformative purpose (Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022) as essential for sustainability communications.

Their means and ways to implement the goals can be recognized as internal communications towards employees, internal intranet, CEO's annual review, personal contacts with customers, showrooms, CPF tours, stakeholder education, external communications through Sales & Assembly Organization as well as through sales support functions to other sales organizations, workshops and creating communication materials together, ensuring excellent customer service in projects and digitalizing their knowledge, offering, brand and products. All happens within the established quality brand that is shared with Sales & Assembly Organization as well as mostly within the domesticated market environment.

Their message can consist of the following: sustainability being connected to everything they do and part of their values, sustainability actions and their initiatives and achievements (e.g., United Nations sustainable development goals, GREEF-project, carbon footprint measures, other actions), CPF's technological expertise, knowledge and strengths (excellent customer service and around-the-clock availability, success in delivering products and their maintenance, "state of the art" – factory) and passion towards their component. Integrating sustainability could consist of showing providing the proofs of savings, business opportunities, risk management and savings, highlighting customer interests such as logistics, power solutions like solar panels, energy efficient equipment and how they utilize waste heat, energy savings illustrating software, certifications, sustainability roadmap and sustainability report or guidebook and their signature story. Thus, CPF can signify distinctiveness due to their environmentally sustainable brand identity in addition to their current attributes of quality and trustworthiness. Benchmarking Sales & Assembly Organization, sustainability can be presented organizing their sustainability into themes, explaining them and their concrete actions and achievements as well as sharing which products and services that support the customer's sustainability.

Also, CPF can communicate their possible clarified purpose, which is currently associated with best customer service, being proud of the expertise they have developed over the years, honesty and going the extra mile for customers' requests, meaningful work tasks, an environment where they enjoy working and equal treating of all members of organization and feeling like their work is important and appreciated. A set of questions to help clarifying their purpose were identified for CPF to answer: what sustainability is, what it means for CPF, its stakeholders and how can one include it in their everyday work, how do they clarify their values, reason to exist and what they are good at, internal discussion of existence, its meaningfulness and what sustainability's role is, what we do and promise, how we work to achieve that, why are we engaged in doing so and with whom, how can everyone participate, what their concrete actions and impact would be, how do they form a unified understanding of their way to implement sustainability actions as well as how are they influencing external stakeholders through their environmentally sustainable brand identity.

4.7 Enablers, actions, mediators and inhibitors of Component Producer Factory's environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process

Reflecting the theoretical framework, many enablers, actions and their mediators, as collected in Appendix 1, can be identified in CPF's brand identity co-creation process. The identified enablers are external co-creation, continuous learning with stakeholders, utilizing opportunities of conflict as well as strategic partnerships, collaborative ecosystems and adopting a proactive approach. Mediators of these enablers were recognized as well: managers adopting a facilitating role, long-term oriented transformational leadership, challenging existing brand identity and mental models, bringing new resources to relationships, acknowledging the challenge of psychological defenses, recognizing relationship-building activities, viewing stakeholders as strategic partners, influencing stakeholder attitudes and encouraging a more favorable response to one's sustainable brand identity, autonomy of the participating stakeholders and understanding customers' decision-making processes.

Engaging stakeholders and internal co-creation fall into a category of in-between. For instance, internal co-creation is lacking in some ways as in the example of values but can be found in other examples as in the projects lead with lean methods. For instance, some interviewees felt that the employees are heard, but not listened to, which further contributes to cacophony around meanings and value. For employees, this meant that they feel cared for by the top and middle management, however, the way they care misses the way employees want to be cared for. Enablers that were not present are sustainability as part of organization's culture and transformative purpose. Whereas some of the actions of the enabler (e.g., remanufacturing, gathering information from other organizations creating sustainable cultures and putting continuity over profit) are completed at CPF, most of the mediators except from top management support cannot be identified.

The mediators value-driven moral motives, investing in creating an organization culture which promotes learning, self-reflection and internal discussion regarding identity and using the business as means to drive sustainable change in society, environment and competitive landscape can be recognized as emerging or developing. Interestingly, some of the enablers and their mediators are supported by

Sales & Assembly Organization. For instance, CRM capabilities and dialogue with customers in addition to marketing communications are implemented and developed at Sales & Assembly Organization. Thus, Sales & Assembly Organization becomes an enabler itself as a strategic partner that develops CPF's environmentally sustainable brand that is based on CPF's brand identity and sustainability actions.

Absent mediators were the following: the complete focus and genuine commitment of the entire organization, radical transparency of sustainability impact, cultivation of brand heritage, value-driven branding, holistic sustainability philosophy, management of experience ecosystems and experience centric co-creation, embracing identity as a learning organization, recognizing relevant data sources for describing and defining identity, recognizing dominant narratives, relying on a shared vision, high level of shared values, basic norms of behavior and executing brand-related actions together, developing internal processes that communicate the sustainability initiatives and practices, developing governance models that engage stakeholders in strategic decision-making processes, recognizing key actors' characteristics, values and expectations, goal-setting skills, developing the brand's emotional qualities, designing the identity co-creation experience, leadership that promotes adaptive and critical reflection on identity, managerial role as negotiator who orchestrates diverse voices, joining forces with other organizations to drive structural change by collective bargaining, showing successful example and becoming a target of benchmarking.

Also, inhibitors of the process were identified. For instance, whereas activity that is essential for identity and its change in attitudes and routines were identified, the essential factors for the brand were found absent. Looking at the process of corporate brand building, internal engagement, corporate communications and managing brand experiences were lacking even if stakeholder involvement, internal acceptance and relationship building were recognized. This reflects the partial absence of the internal co-creation and engaging stakeholders enablers. Further inhibitors as according to the theoretical framework could also be identified: silos, internal dysfunctions (unclear and ineffective internal communications) and psychological defenses (e.g., feelings of inability and feeling overwhelmed by work tasks or change). Inflexibility or getting stuck as well as most dysfunctions (misbehavior of owners, board members

or managers, toxic leadership, misleading ideology or lack of real ambition or interest) were not identified.

Additional enablers to the theoretical framework were identified: psychological or emotional enablers (feeling comfortable with change or prior experience of change projects, accepting the concept of sustainability, recognizing opportunities of sustainability, genuine interest on being a part of change, feeling capable of making effective sustainability actions, sense of belonging, stability and safety, trust towards the corporation, joy for pushing the organization in its sustainability transformation process, feeling at ease to suggest investments to sustainability). Its mediators are resources and capacity to process new demands, receiving investment funds from the corporation and gaining more responsibilities in the corporation.

Additional mediators to the enabler Strategic partnerships, collaborative ecosystems and adopting a proactive approach were identified: capabilities to influence OEMs, gaining access to forums that discuss the future of the industry, reciprocity and reciprocal communication. Additional mediators to the enabler Sustainability as part of organization's culture and transformative purpose: long-term business orientation by the corporation, sustainability as a value in the corporation and sustainability radiating from all the members of the organization and their everyday work. Additional mediators to the enabler Internal and external co-creation and continuous learning with stakeholders: lean and daily management systems, sustainability certification processes, benchmarking, allowing people to try, iterate and fail, keeping up with topical sustainability themes and ongoing discussion in teams.

Additional mediators to the enabler Engaging stakeholders: good working environment, adding sustainability to evaluation criteria, freedom to localize and to make own sustainability decision within corporation guidelines, leading by example, reaching a high ranking from sustainability certification process, bringing sustainability into the experiences people have with the organization, tying sustainability to the organization's passion competences, approaching sustainability through measures of profitability and savings, digitalization of environmentally sustainable brand identity as well as its offerings, promises and knowledge, recognizing the ways employees want to participate, allowing teams to find solutions

by themselves, incentives: rewarding original thoughts or ideas regarding sustainability, sustainability projects that connect to the employee's own work, seeing results and solving special problems for customers. Additional mediators to the enabler Utilizing opportunities of conflicts: hiring new people and young graduates as well as hearing their ideas and bringing sustainability into conversations.

Additional inhibitors to the theoretical framework were also found: abstractive nature of sustainability, nobody feeling like sustainability is their responsibility, outdated or inadequate software, unfavorable customer buying criteria, differing interests of end-user customers and OEM customers, not finding suitable employees, weight of unusual events and employees feeling overwhelmed, inability to communicate sustainability vision, top priority of creating value for customers displacing sustainability in difficult or time-restrained decision making, difficulties to integrate sustainability into daily management practices, difficulties embedding sustainability in the managerial paradigm, employees feeling like their opportunities to influence are small, unclear purpose, doubts in the middle management's ability to deliver the top management's perspective to the employees as they were intended, organization's members not internalizing values, excluding sustainability and its initiatives to top management level, not understanding the concepts used in describing sustainability goals, no established sustainability standards that limit or guide decision making, inadequate headquarter support, employees worrying that sustainability could start interfering with essential work tasks or lower productivity.

Additional actions were also identified: revealing and influencing customer attitudes through discussion about sustainability, collaboration within the corporation (sharing of best practices, space for reflection and other advice), investing in sustainable equipment, digitalization of virtual meetings and trial runs or inspections, collecting data and finding the places for improvement based on the data, usage of renewable energy, solar panels, supporting employees with bicycles and hybrid vehicles, utilizing waste heat, creating a safe work environment, regular staff meetings, collecting ideas from employees, quantifying sustainability achievements, observation, collaboration with universities or other public organizations to gain resources and knowledge as well as to promote ongoing initiatives, influencing

directives and regulation on industrial investments, acquiring external education. Additional drivers of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation were identified as well: routine inquiries from customers and auditors evaluating sustainability, safety and business ethics, younger generation of employees who initiate conversation, customer demand, headquarter pressure and service-orientation of the industrial market.

Considering the complicated structure of CPF's domesticated market and overall network of actors, some responsibilities of the main actors' contribution to CPF's brand identity process can be recognized. The headquarters responsibilities can be seen to include providing guidelines, common goals, standards and support, influencing customers and policymakers, co-creating the corporation's common sustainability value proposition and vision as well as communicating their vision, findings, results and initiatives with the corporation members. Sales & Assembly Organizations' responsibilities include taking a lead on marketing and communications, cooperation with factories such as CPF and other corporation organizations, localizing the headquarters vision, providing guidelines to their organization's members such as employees, influencing customers and policymakers and constantly reassess how stakeholders respond in interactions.

CPF's responsibilities include providing the technological expertise and other capabilities that Sales & Assembly Organization can utilize in their marketing and communications. Also, they include localizing the headquarters vision within CPF but with Sales & Assembly Organization and constantly reassessing stakeholder responses in interactions. Managerial role is providing guidelines to their organization's members such as employees, recognizing how employees want to learn and driving the environmentally sustainable brand identity process, whereas employees' responsibilities are initiating conversation, observation, participation, independent reflection on brand identity and participating to find the solutions within their teams. Together they create internal and external sustainable networks, where CPF or GEO Finland can influence through their strong environmentally sustainable brand identity and becoming a target of benchmarking due to their expertise and strong brand.

4.8 Summary of the empirical findings

The chapter presented CPF's brand in an industrial context, environmental sustainability and CPF's perspectives on sustainability, the brand identity of CPF and its meanings. Also, CPF's environmentally sustainable brand identity was analyzed in the stages of challenging and contesting, exploration and reorchestration as well as commitment and elucidating, from which the enablers, inhibitors and actions were identified. Additional drivers, enablers, actions, their mediators and inhibitors were also identified. Further, the responsibilities or roles of the main actors (headquarters, Sales & Assembly Organization, CPF and employees) were identified from the empirical research.

To conclude, Figure 2 presents a process of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation that complements Figure 1 in the theoretical framework. As stated in the theoretical framework, sustainability and its collaborative implementation become an ongoing learning process requiring stakeholder interaction on the same level with ongoing brand identity co-creation, thus intertwining them together. So, the process model in the theoretical framework is complemented with the empirical findings that illustrate the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context.

First, co-creation is internal, and the goal is to establish understanding of sustainability, what it means internally for the organization and its members, finding a shared sustainability vision and understanding the current state of the organization's sustainability. This stage is described as learning and raising awareness of sustainability internally. Second, the stage of exploring and internalizing meanings and value of sustainability, illustrates collaboration with stakeholders both internal and external as well as establishing strong sense of sustainability, its goals, measures and ways of achieving them. In this stage the organization has structured themselves to integrate sustainability into their mode of operations all the way from values and strategy to actions and attitudes. Finally, the third step of external sustainability marketing and communications focuses on communicating the strong environmentally sustainable brand identity while continuing learning with stakeholders.

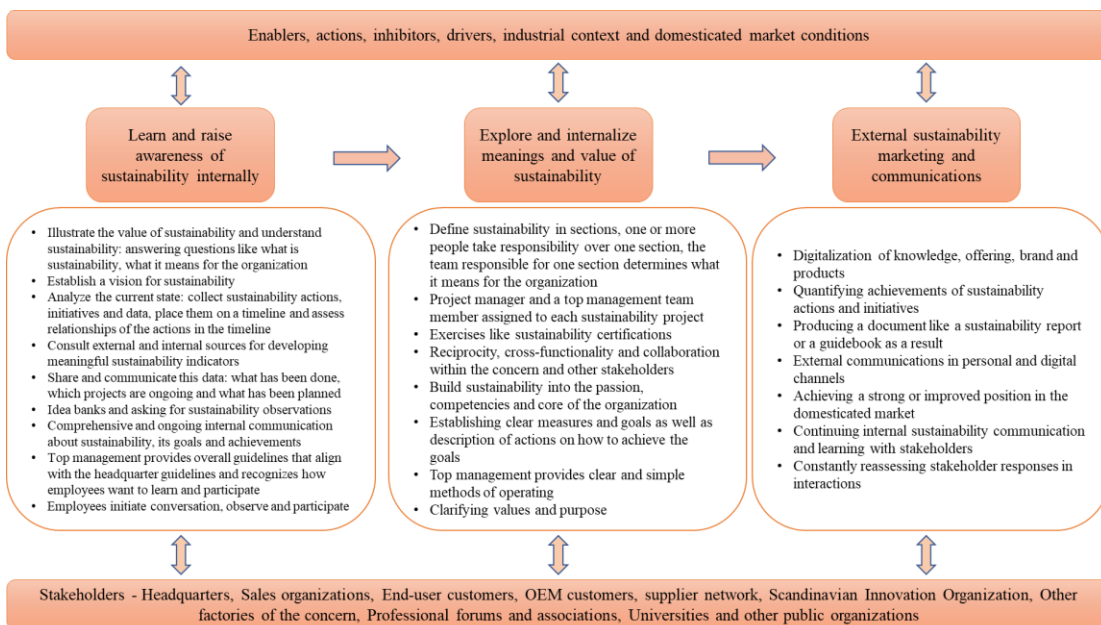


Figure 2. Co-creating the environmentally sustainable brand identity in an industrial context

5 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion chapter presents answers to the research questions, after which theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed. Finally, limitations of research and suggestions for future research are presented.

5.1 Answers to research questions

The thesis research focuses on environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context. Especially, how an organization can become sustainable by putting sustainability in its core focus, essentially creating a sustainable brand identity. Thus, the main research question is “*How is an environmentally sustainable brand identity co-created?*”. Two sub-questions to support the main research question were also used: “*What is the process of co-creating environmentally sustainable brand identities?*” and “*What are the actions, enabler and inhibitors of this process?*”. Answers to the research questions were studied through a literature review, which forms the theoretical framework of the thesis. Then, empirical research that consisted of 18 semi-structured interviews and secondary data acted as complementing to the theoretical framework. As the thesis research is abductive, both theoretical framework and empirical research were mutually guiding of each other. Finally, the theoretical framework was updated with the empirical findings.

The process of co-creating an environmentally sustainable brand identity is outlined in the theoretical framework as a three-step process. First, challenge and contesting describe recognizing the need for change which is characterized by the emergent corporate brand identity. Then exploration and reorchestration describe the exploring of the brand identity and finding new meanings. This stage is characterized by the clarified corporate brand identity. Commitment and elucidating describe the momentary end of the process where the new or adjusted corporate brand identity had been formed. The empirical research further illustrated the more detailed process of co-creating an environmentally sustainable brand identity in an industrial context. The three-stepped model corresponds to the three-stepped model of the theoretical framework and they are presented together on Figure 3, the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation in an industrial context.

Answering the second sub-question, five enablers, 35 mediators and 70 actions in the environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process were recognized from the literature review and collected to Appendix 1. The empirical research found a myriad of additional enablers, mediators and actions as well as drivers of the brand identity co-creation process. The inhibitors of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation recognized from theory were inflexibility, siloed organizations, internal dysfunction, psychological defenses and getting stuck at static outcomes. The empirical research found 20 additional inhibitors.

The sub-questions help to answer the main research question “*How is an environmentally sustainable brand identity co-created?*”. Environmentally sustainable brand identity is co-created with multiple stakeholders that initially trigger a need for change through challenge and contesting with other drivers within the industrial market environment. The organization then begins learning and raising awareness of sustainability internally as well as recognizing the conflicts that initially lead to recognizing the need for change in addition to the conflicts that follow from initiating change. This prepares the organization and its members to engage in exploring and reorchestrating the brand identity through activities which ultimately result in internalizing new meanings and value of the environmentally sustainable brand identity.

Finally, the organization can commit to the new or adjusted environmentally sustainable brand identity and lift focus towards external sustainability marketing and communications while simultaneously assessing stakeholder reactions in interaction. This way, the brand identity evolves from emergent brand identity to adjusted and clarified brand identity. In this process, stakeholders are co-creating their own identities while contributing to the organization’s brand identity. Also, enablers, actions, inhibitors, drivers and context influence the brand identity co-creation process and outcomes. Additional enablers, actions and their mediators are collected to Appendix 3. To conclude, Figure 3 combines Figure 2 of the empirical findings and theoretical framework Figure 1 of the interactive process of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation that is progress-oriented and focuses on brand identity evolution.

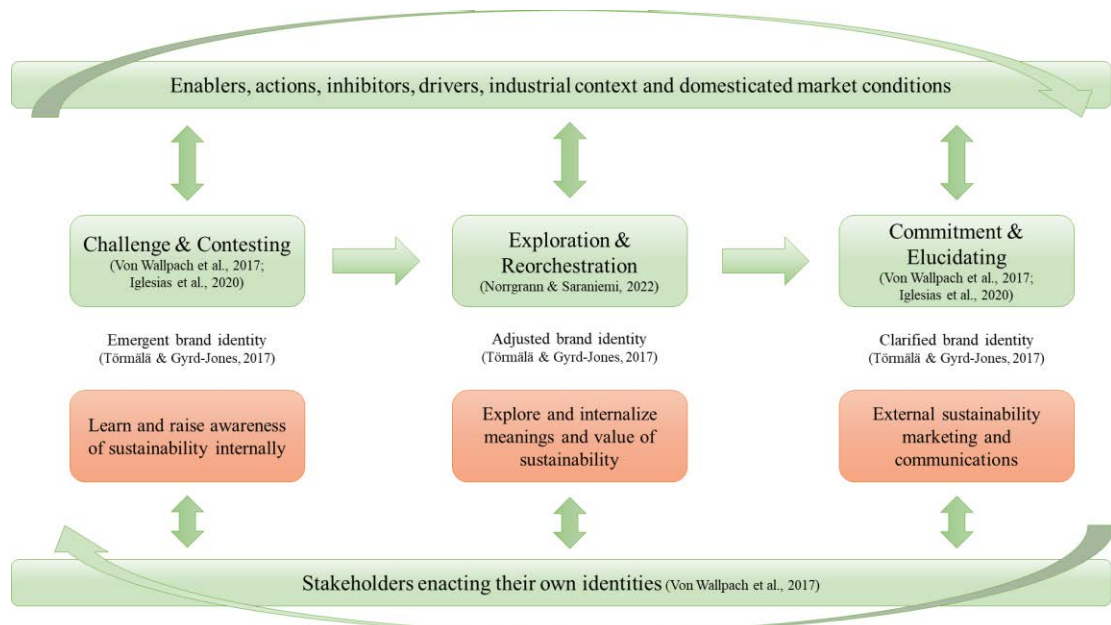


Figure 3. Theoretical framework complemented with empirical research

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to industrial sustainability and B2B branding literature by providing understanding on how industrial companies can become sustainable on a processual level but also on a more concrete level of activity. The findings of this study, the process of brand identity co-creation in an industrial context, answers to the research gaps recognized (Lahtinen & Närvänen, 2020; Seyedghorban et al., 2016; Iglesias & Ind, 2020) and especially to the absence of sustainability and branding studies in the industrial B2B field (Vesal et al., 2021). Taking a multi-stakeholder and co-creational perspective with a focus on internal stakeholders, the study also contributes to further understanding of sustainable industrial networks in which the individual organizations implement their brand identity co-creation. Also, this study contributes to research on sustainability branding within domesticated market conditions.

Overall, the study combines the themes of sustainability and brand identity into a coherent entity that furthers the understanding on how profound sustainability transformation of companies can happen. So, whereas industrial marketing, branding, sustainability and brand identity have been separated phenomena or mainly focused on consumer markets as in the case of sustainability, this study combines them to a

unique whole. The study also sheds light on the relation of activity and marketing communications when presenting external communications of sustainability as the last step that is based on the activity of previous steps. Highlighting cross-functionality, collaborative problem solving and multistakeholder approach alongside individual actors and actions this study provides a holistic approach to sustainability and provides means for credible and transparent sustainability branding. Also, the study shows how brands can have myriad of ways and channels to leverage sustainable brand identities and their co-creation in customer relationships. To conclude, this study contributes to industrial sustainability and brand co-creation research by increasing understanding on how companies learn to be sustainable, act sustainably and become observed or experienced as sustainable.

5.3 Managerial implications

Environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation requires the whole support and commitment of top and middle management. Thus, certain managerial skills and leadership skills are required: humble, curious, open, accepting and empathetic mindset as well as adopting a facilitating role that encourages and invites stakeholders to participate and have their voice heard. These managerial skills create the learning organization with a self-reflective culture where individuals are ready to challenge the brand identity's meanings, mental models and understandings to find a more meaningful collective understanding of what is important or who they are. Thus, the managerial role is to be an emotionally intelligent leader that creates the conditions where individuals and groups are enabled to flourish and form the collective understanding of how sustainability is perceived and implemented in their organization. This inclusive, reciprocal and co-creational approach that recognizes stakeholders as valuable strategic partners starts already at the strategic level. In other words, managerial role is to listen and learn from stakeholders. The managerial challenge is to coordinate the ongoing identity co-creation process and analyzing the enablers, inhibitors and mediators of action that take place or are lacking.

To discover information and data, unpack it and utilize it in the identity co-creation process managers have a role in engaging multiple stakeholders in various exercises that discover new meanings and value of the brand identity. Various exercises have

been presented in the study, such as CBIM, scenario planning, creating roadmaps, certification processes, and narratives. Since the role of history or heritage was also highlighted, additional exercise could be clarifying the organization's timeline as a tool for understanding the history, present and future, which also contributes to other exercises such as the narrative. However, managerial responsibility is understanding how their stakeholders such as employees want to learn and finding the right ways to explore the brand identity. This implies challenges in establishing dialogue and stakeholder engagement, conflicts of differing perspectives and their alignment and the risk of cacophony. In other words, key managerial challenges are relationship management, conflict management, goal setting and measurement capabilities and learning a collaborative and long-term oriented empathetic leadership style. Another managerial challenge is to decide which information and data to use, how to process information that is derived from stakeholder interactions as well as which information to utilize and how. Figuring out which exercises to use and how to conduct them will require competent managerial skills or external facilitators.

5.4 Proposals for further research

It is proposed that further research is conducted to understand how industrial organizations can develop ecosystems of stakeholders where their sustainable brand identities are co-created. In other words, how can industrial purpose-led networks or ecosystems be co-created. Additionally, how markets can be shaped towards sustainability and how sustainability metrics are developed within the firm and its ecosystem. Also, it is proposed that further research is conducted on how industrial companies can communicate their sustainability externally and utilize their sustainability achievements in their marketing activities.

In the B2C literature digital spaces have also become a source of identity-building (Swaminathan et al., 2020), which should be relevant but less researched theme for B2B brands as well. In the empirical research digitalization as means of communicating an environmentally sustainable brand identity was brought up as crucial, thus the opportunities of industrial branding in digital spaces or facilitating sustainable brand identity co-creation in digital spaces is a relevant proposal for further research. History and heritage are also mentioned a couple of times, and it

would be beneficial to research further on how industrial companies that often have a long history can or should use it in their sustainability transformation. For instance, Iglesias, Ind and Schultz (2020b) present that history can be instill change, motivate in problem solving, engage to enacting strategies and inspire future corporate brand identity. As this study discusses stakeholders, co-creation and collaborative problem solving, the role of stakeholders could be further researched. For instance, Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) discuss roles in joint problem solving, and Goodman, et al. (2017) elaborate on stakeholder roles in sustainability-oriented innovation.

5.5 Limitations of the research

Analysis on the limitations of the research is an essential part of scientific research. Limitations can be evaluated through validity and reliability. Reliability refers to the requirements of repeatability. Validity on the other hand measures if the work is logical and uncontradicted. (Koskinen et al., 2005.) Dubois and Gadde (2013) argue that construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability are not relevant for evaluation of deep-probing qualitative case studies, however, an effort of reflexivity is needed to allow for the flexibility of abduction and systematic combining. Thus, reflection on the research is presented to maintain its integrity, reliability and generalizability. The chosen research method is aligned with the goals of the research which improves this research's validity. For instance, abductive approach is suitable for the research since the aim is to discover something new, other variables or other relationships, in the researched phenomenon (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Research questions, interview questions and interviewees have been carefully selected to be able to further understand environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation. Literature review has been formed in an orderly manner with various perspectives to the researched phenomenon through quality resources of references. The review could be more parsimonious to avoid a case research pitfall of "describing everything and as a result describing nothing" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), however, the literature review has been kept precise enough to make a strong claim on the researched phenomena. For instance, certain parts of first literature review have been left out since they were no longer serving the purpose of the research,

however, provided important learnings for the researcher's initial understanding of the phenomena.

Other limitations of the research are the problems of generalization due to the empirical research being a case study. Having only one case organization in a specific context makes generalization of research results difficult. Further, conducting a case study is challenging and the researcher can fail by losing their focus and letting ambiguous evidence or biased views influence findings and conclusions (Yin, 1994). However, it can be argued that in-depth case studies are most efficient to understand the interaction of a phenomenon and its context and has thus become a common method in various scientific disciplines. Especially, the abductive nature and utilizing systematic combining allows the case study to provide in-depth insights of empirical phenomena and their contexts to contribute to developing theory. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002.)

“Studies focused on processes have to come to an end, whereas the processes in the real world continue” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, s. 557), implying a time constraint as a limitation for the conclusions of the research. However, this issue has been addressed through making future oriented suggestions on what possibilities the further environmentally sustainable identity co-creation process for the case organization can look like, based on theory and empirical evidence. Extending the understanding of the case organization's timeline all the way to 1930's also allows a deeper understanding of the current state of their environmentally sustainable identity co-creation process. Thus, the extended timeline and abductive research style allow making in-depth insights of the phenomena and its context that contribute to existing theory as well as future research.

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Appendix 1

Enablers, mediators and actions of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process

ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
<p>Internal and external co-creation & continuous learning with stakeholders (<i>Törmälä and Gyrð-Jones, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2010; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Lawler, 2015; Robertson & Arachchige, 2015</i>)</p>	<p>Managers adopting a facilitating role; humble, empathetic and participatory leadership style or mindset; emotionally intelligent and long-term oriented transformational leadership</p> <p>Management of experience ecosystems and experience centric co-creation</p> <p>Embracing identity as a learning organization</p> <p>Recognizing relevant data sources for describing and defining identity</p> <p>Recognizing dominant narratives</p> <p>Relying on a shared vision, high level of shared values, basic norms of behavior and executing brand-related actions together</p> <p>Developing internal processes that communicate the sustainability initiatives and practices</p>	<p>Constant reassessment as reflection on how stakeholders respond to the brand in interactions</p> <p>Involving customers in service or product development</p> <p>Routine dialogue where desirable future identities can be discussed</p> <p>Having employees take part in creating brand promises</p> <p>Creating and answering identity related questions</p> <p>Exercises: scenario planning, play and games, CBIM analysis</p> <p>Support and confirm the motivated employee groups' perceptions of the brand or its identity</p> <p>Offering unmotivated employee groups relevant initiatives addressing their perspectives</p> <p>Hiring the right people and establishing activities to experience the brand identity</p>

ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
<p>Engaging stakeholders (<i>Mühlbacher, 2022; Abratt & Mingione, 2022; Argenti, 2022; Lintukangas et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2022</i>)</p>	<p>Developing governance models that engage stakeholders in strategic decision-making processes</p> <p>Value-driven moral motives and instrumental motives behind environmental sustainability</p> <p>Recognize key actors' characteristics, values and expectations</p> <p>Goal setting skills</p> <p>Developing the brand's emotional qualities</p> <p>Designing the identity co-creation experience</p>	<p>Help to understand concrete positive impacts on the environment, the environmental and economic returns on investments and tracking savings</p> <p>Connect sustainable values to customers' values in a way that embraces the customer's values and demonstrates win-win situations</p> <p>Credible green marketing, energy savings illustrating software</p> <p>Creating incentives or awards for employee engagement</p> <p>Measuring and illustrating the benefits internally and externally</p> <p>Assessing the organization's ability to capture available opportunities</p>
<p>Utilizing opportunities of conflicts (<i>Hahn et al., 2015; Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022; da Silveira & Simões, 2022</i>)</p>	<p>Leadership that promotes adaptive and critical reflection on identity</p> <p>Challenging existing brand identity and mental models, comparing, negotiation</p> <p>Bringing new resources to a relationship</p> <p>Acknowledging the challenge of psychological defenses</p> <p>Managerial role as negotiator who</p>	<p>Development of a brand's offer and value proposition</p> <p>Managing change and the asynchrony of stakeholders' adaptation to desired change</p> <p>Organizational dialogue to develop new perspectives and routines</p> <p>Strategic discussion about the organization's reason to exist, core values, what inspires it, what</p>

ENABLERS

MEDIATORS

ACTIONS

	orchestrates diverse voices	it promises and what it stands for
<p>Sustainability as part of organization's culture & transformative purpose (Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022; Kemper & Ballantine, 2019; Bocken et al., 2014)</p>	<p>Complete focus and genuine commitment of the entire organization; top management support</p> <p>Invest in creating an organization culture which promotes learning, self-reflection and internal discussion regarding identity</p> <p>Bringing sustainability into the experiences people have with the organization</p> <p>Value-driven branding</p> <p>Holistic sustainability philosophy</p> <p>Using the business as means to drive sustainable change in society, environment and competitive landscape</p> <p>Cultivation of brand heritage</p> <p>Radical transparency of sustainability impact</p>	<p>Green logistics, eco-friendly transportation, remanufacturing and recycling, green product innovation, resource-constrained product development, adopting a green supply chain or a closed loop supply chain</p> <p>Certifications, third party audits, sustainable procurement policies and processes, sustainability performance reporting systems, ethical code and sustainability plan</p> <p>Identifying investments, educative labels, performance-oriented roadmaps, mission statement, eco-design guideline, regulation and government incentives</p> <p>Use of recyclable materials, adoption of life cycle perspective, cross-functional collaboration in product development</p> <p>Gathering information and knowledge from policy makers, scientific sources, society, universities and other companies creating sustainable cultures</p> <p>Promoting sustainable lifestyles, demarketing, putting continuity over profit, changing institutions and critical assessment of the current capitalist neoliberal economy, replacing legacy systems</p>

ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
		Cradle-to-cradle design, industrial symbiosis, de-materialization and green chemistry, ethical trade
<p>Strategic partnerships, collaborative ecosystems & and adopting a proactive approach (<i>Tarnovskaya et al., 2022; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014; Hoejmoose et al., 2012; Cortez et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2022; Bocken et al., 2014; Rivera et al., 2016; Rodrigues & Borges, 2015; Muniz et al., 2019</i>)</p>	<p>Joining forces with other organizations to drive structural change by collective bargaining</p> <p>CRM capabilities</p> <p>Recognizing relationship-building activities</p> <p>View stakeholders as strategic partners and operant resources</p> <p>Influencing stakeholder attitudes and encouraging a more favorable response to one's sustainable brand identity</p> <p>Autonomy of the participating stakeholders</p> <p>Understanding customers' decision-making processes, identifying right internal stakeholders and gatekeepers</p> <p>Showing successful example and becoming a target of benchmarking</p> <p>Customer's own attitude towards a brand, integrity, moral virtues and cultural environment</p>	<p>Performance reports, pro-environment campaigns, training workshops, advertising, sales force and labels</p> <p>Working with customers that possess positive attitudes towards sustainability and highlighting the benefits of green products</p> <p>Green Supply Chain Management: Development of trustful partnerships with supply chain partners</p> <p>Joint environmental planning and cooperative problem-solving of environmental challenges</p> <p>Real-time sharing of emission data with other network actors, collaboration for resource usage optimization, extranets for green supplier networks, industry association networks</p> <p>Operations and business regulation based on ecosystem emissions as legitimizing and trust creating practices, not-for-profit collaboration or hybrid businesses</p> <p>Interaction between employees and stakeholders</p>

Appendix 2**Outline of interview questions**

IDENTITY

1. From what is CPF known for and what are its strengths?
2. How would you describe the operating environment of CPF? For instance, market environment and competition. How do you differentiate yourself in this environment?
3. Who are your main partners? What sort of cooperation do you have with them?
4. What is the role of CPF in the GEO corporation?
5. How would you like CPF to stand out in comparison to other companies within the corporation? Do you already stand out somehow?
6. What are your values and purpose? How were they created, who participated in the creation?
7. What does CPF mean for you?
8. What sort of changes have you experienced in CPF? Could you tell examples of historically significant event or turning points?

SUSTAINABILITY

9. What does sustainability mean to you?
10. What do you think about CPF's aims of creating an environmentally sustainable brand or identity? Have you heard of this initiative?
11. Who should participate in this change project?
12. How will this sustainability change affect your job? What expectations do you have for it?
13. What is the role of sustainability in CPF everyday work and decision making?
14. Which sustainability goals do you have?
15. Why is the project in CPF relevant now?

SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS

16. Which concrete actions do you have to improve CPF sustainability? Where do the ideas for these actions come from?
17. What are the challenges of improving sustainability? What are the enablers?
18. How can you affect your relationships like customer relations with improving sustainability? Why would sustainability be important for customers?
19. Is there something you would like to add?

Appendix 3

Additional enablers, mediators and actions of environmentally sustainable brand identity co-creation process

ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
<p>Psychological or emotional enablers</p>	<p>Capacity to process new demands</p> <p>Receiving investment funds from the corporation</p> <p>Gaining more responsibilities in the corporation</p>	
<p>Strategic partnerships, collaborative ecosystems & and adopting a proactive approach (<i>Tarnovskaya et al., 2022; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014; Hoejmoose et al., 2012; Cortez et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2022; Bocken et al., 2014; Rivera et al., 2016; Rodrigues & Borges, 2015; Muniz et al., 2019</i>)</p>	<p>Capabilities to influence OEMs</p> <p>Gaining access to forums that discuss the future of the industry</p> <p>Reciprocity and reciprocal communication</p> <p>Influencing directives and regulation on industrial investments</p>	<p>Collaboration within the corporation (sharing of best practices, space for reflection and other advice)</p> <p>Collaboration with universities or other public organizations to gain resources and knowledge as well as to promote ongoing initiatives</p>
<p>Sustainability as part of organization's culture & transformative purpose (<i>Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Biedenbach & Biedenbach, 2022; Kemper & Ballantine, 2019;</i></p>	<p>Long-term business orientation by the corporation</p> <p>Sustainability as a value in the</p>	<p>Investing in sustainable equipment, digitalization of virtual meetings and trial runs or inspections, collecting data and finding the places for</p>

ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
<i>Bocken et al., 2014)</i>	<p>corporation</p> <p>Sustainability radiating from all the members of the organization and their everyday work</p>	<p>improvement based on the data, usage of renewable energy, solar panels, supporting employees with bicycles and hybrid vehicles, utilizing waste heat, creating a safe work environment</p>
<p>Internal and external co-creation & continuous learning with stakeholders (<i>Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2010; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Lawler, 2015; Robertson & Arachchige, 2015)</i>)</p>	<p>Lean and daily management systems</p> <p>Sustainability certification processes</p> <p>Allowing people to try, iterate and fail</p> <p>Keeping up with topical sustainability themes, ongoing discussion in teams</p>	<p>Collecting ideas from employees</p> <p>Employee observation</p> <p>Acquiring external education</p> <p>Benchmarking</p> <p>Revealing and influencing customer attitudes through discussion about sustainability</p>
<p>Engaging stakeholders (<i>Mühlbacher, 2022; Abratt & Mingione, 2022; Argenti, 2022; Lintukangas et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2022)</i>)</p>	<p>Good working environment</p> <p>Adding sustainability to evaluation criteria</p> <p>Freedom to localize and make own sustainability decision within corporation guidelines, leading by example, reaching a</p>	<p>Regular staff meetings</p> <p>Quantifying sustainability achievements</p>

ENABLERS**MEDIATORS****ACTIONS**

	<p>high ranking from sustainability certification process</p> <p>Bringing sustainability into the experiences people have with the organization, tying sustainability to the organization's passion and competences, recognizing the ways employees want to participate, allowing teams to find solutions by themselves</p> <p>Approaching sustainability through measures of profitability and savings, seeing results and solving special problems for customers</p> <p>Digitalization of environmentally sustainable brand identity as well as its offerings, promises and knowledge</p> <p>Incentives and rewarding original thoughts or ideas regarding sustainability, sustainability projects that connect to the employee's own work</p>	
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ENABLERS	MEDIATORS	ACTIONS
Utilizing opportunities of conflicts (<i>Hahn et al., 2015; Norrgrann & Saraniemi, 2022; da Silveira & Simões, 2022</i>)	Hiring new people and young graduates as well as hearing their ideas Bringing sustainability into conversations	