



# Implementing corporate sustainability strategy

A multiple case study of Swedish pharmacy chains, focusing on the sustainability initiative Vålvald

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Degree project/Independent project • 30 credits

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU

Faculty of Natural resource and Agriculture Sciences/Department of Economics

Environmental Economics and Management – Master's programme

Degree project/SLU, Department of Economics, 1526 • ISSN 1401 4084

Uppsala 2023





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**Credits:** 30 credits  
**Level:** Second Cycle, A2E  
**Course title:** Master thesis in Business Administration  
**Course code:** EX0904  
**Programme/education:** Environmental Economics and Management – Master's programme  
**Course coordinating dept:** Department of Economics  
**Place of publication:** Uppsala  
**Year of publication:** 2023  
**Copyright:** All featured images are used with permission from the copyright owner.  
**Title of series:** Degree project/SLU, Department of Economics  
**Part number:** 1526  
**ISSN:** 1401-4084

**Keywords:** Corporate sustainability strategy, greenhushing, organisational communication, motivation, sustainability initiative

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Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences  
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## Abstract

The study addresses the existing literature gap regarding the role of and the relationship between organisational communication and motivation when implementing a corporate sustainability strategy within the specific context of the sustainability initiative Vålvald. The findings of the study are based on the experiences of the Swedish Pharmacy Association, Apoteksgruppen, Apoteket AB and Apotek Hjärtat, all engaged in the Vålvald initiative.

The study aims to contribute to the academic literature by shedding light on the effect that communication and motivation have on the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy. In order to achieve this, the author adopted a qualitative approach and employed a multiple case study design, which involved conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives from the aforementioned organisations.

The findings indicate that organisational communication does play a significant role in influencing motivation, indicating that there is strong communication-motivation relationship. More specifically, the findings suggest that effective organisational communication enables understanding which facilitates employee engagement powered by motivation. The significance of organisational communication in the studied context, highlights its direct impact on employee motivation and by extension the success of the strategy used to implement the sustainability initiative Vålvald.

*Keywords:* Corporate sustainability strategy, Greenhushing, Organisational communication, motivation, sustainability initiative

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# Abbreviations

IPCC	The intergovernmental panel on climate change
PSCI	Pharmaceutical supply chain initiative
SDG	Sustainable development goal
TBL	Tripple bottom line

# 1. Introduction

*The first chapter of the thesis begins by outlining the broader problem background, which is followed by the problem statement that entails the theoretical as well as the empirical problem. Thereafter, the research aim and the research questions are provided. Ultimately, the delimitations of the study as well as the outline of the study, followed by a brief summary of the sustainability initiative Vålvald are presented.*

## 1.1 Problem background

*“If we, the Swedish Pharmacy Association, can ensure that pharmacy employees communicate the sustainability initiative Vålvald correctly and appropriately, then our ability to put further demands on the pharmaceutical industry increases”.*

How can a business achieve sustainable development when the idea of sustainable change is not understood? As will be explained henceforth in this thesis, the question is of paramount importance, considering the profound effect that climate change has on the environment, society and economy. The severity of current climate changes has been emphasised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2021) with the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, stating that it is “*a red code for humanity*”. The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) has continuously emphasised that human exploitation of natural resources, as well as the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere has caused the earth’s temperature to increase at an alarming rate (2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2023). Unsustainable energy and land use, as well as unsustainable patterns of consumption and production has been highlighted as the leading cause for climate change (ibid). Sustainability initiatives such as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 have played an important role in highlighting the importance of mitigating climate change. The more recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, frequently utilised within the realm of business, provides a framework for sustainable development that focuses on mitigating climate change (UN 2015). These initiatives have been implemented at all levels of society and

highlight efforts made to mitigate the multitude effects of current climate change including rising sea levels, ocean acidification, extreme weather conditions (IPCC 2018; IPCC 2022a), some of which we are already experiencing (BBC 2021; IPCC 2023; UN 2021; WMO 2021; WWF 2023). Given the intrinsic sensitive nature of numerous marine as well as terrestrial ecosystems, insufficient mitigation of climate changes may lead to irreversible and potentially disastrous consequences (IPCC 2019b; Lenton et al. 2008; Scheffer et al. 2001).

To mitigate the main impending crises, incorporating sustainability within corporate strategy has gained momentum. At present, a growing number of businesses are recognizing the importance of incorporating sustainability within their corporate strategy as well as practice (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos 2014; Schaltegger & Burritt 2005; Zimek & Baumgartner 2017). By incorporating sustainability into their corporate strategy, companies enhance their ability to remain competitive in the market (Lloret 2016; Martinez-Conesa et al. 2017; Schaltegger & Burritt 2005). The main objective of a corporate strategy is to establish and sustain competitive advantage, as the primary determinant of profit maximisation is competitive advantage (Grant 2021). In line with this, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework has emerged as a widely accepted and utilised approach for companies to address and engage with sustainability (Alhaddi 2015; Savitz 2013; Slaper & Hall 2011). TBL promotes the idea that businesses should not solely focus on the traditional, financial bottom line, but instead also recognize the impact of their business operations on society and the environment (Elkington 1997; Slaper & Hall 2011).

Parallel to this discussion, effective organisational communication and motivation have been suggested as vital elements for driving sustainability efforts (Engert & Baumgartner 2016; Rodrigues & Franco 2019) and thus how corporate sustainability strategizing unfolds in practice. Organisational communication acts as a “social glue” that fosters community, while simultaneously providing adequate work-related information (Alvesson 2012). Effective organisational communication has been highlighted to strengthen employee commitment and trust within the organisation, thus reducing resistance to organisational change (Elving 2005). This is particularly important considering that employees often are regarded as the most valuable asset that an organisation has (Jurburg et al. 2017; Mahapatro 2022; Manzoor 2012) and by extension, maintaining motivated employees is crucial for the success of an organisation (Mahapatro 2022; Osabiya 2015). However, companies frequently find it difficult to motivate employees, often due to inadequate communication capabilities (Osabiya 2015). Motivation plays a key role for the outcome of strategy implementation in organisations as, “*A strategy cannot be implemented without motivated employees*” (Engert &

Baumgartner 2016, p. 831). According to Mahapatro (2022), even the most elaborate and well-planned strategies will most likely fail if the employees are not sufficiently motivated to participate. This view is seconded by Sillince (1999):

“The problem which managers face during organizational change is how to motivate people to see it as desirable and necessary, so that they become willing participants rather than saboteurs...” (Sillince 1999, p. 492)

Against this problem backdrop, this thesis will explore how organisational communication and motivation affect the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy within the pharmacy context. Investigating the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies is particularly important with regards to the pharmaceutical industry, because of the increased scrutiny in recent years, both in academic research (Ding 2018; Hayler et al. 2018; Schneider et al. 2010) and in media coverage (Aftonbladet 2021; BBC 2022; Medical news 2022; The Guardian 2022). While the industry has made significant contributions to society's health, well-being, and quality of life (Milanesi et al. 2020), and plays a critical role in the European economy as well as the global economy (EFPIA 2022), the pharmaceutical production has often come at a cost of environmental degradation and social injustice, complicating the work with mitigating climate change and improving human life (Al-Awamleh 2022; Milanesi et al. 2020). In response to the need for sustainability measures within the pharmaceutical sphere, the pharmacy chain Apotek Hjärtat, launched in 2017 the sustainability initiative “*Välj med Hjärtat*” (Apotek Hjärtat 2023). In 2021 the initiative became the pharmacy marketwide standard, changed name to “*Välvald*” and is now organised by the Swedish Pharmacy Association (Sveriges Apoteksförening). Exploring *Välvald* is particularly interesting due to its pioneering nature within the pharmacy context; it is a sustainability initiative grounded in the collaboration between the pharmacy chains. The initiative has been described as a means to facilitate sustainable development within the pharmaceutical industry, but has been subject to criticism, leading to greenhushing and ambiguity. Consequently, *Välvald* is an interesting point of departure for exploring how organisational communication and motivation affects the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The philosophy of companies throughout history has generally been centralised around profits through value creation (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2011). Naturally, due to the necessity of advantages being a prerequisite for maximising profit generation, industries have become fiercely competitive (Lloret 2016). The emphasis on profit maximisation has traditionally made pursuing other purposes and avenues difficult, mainly because one came at the expense of the other (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2011).

In today's world, pursuing multiple avenues and interests simultaneously as a company is not considered as something out of the ordinary. It is the innovative development of business models that has effectively enabled for an alignment between profit maximisation and such other purposes, particularly social and environmental sustainability (Bocken et al. 2014; Osterwalder & Pigneur 2011). The competitive nature of markets and industries still persists, but gaining competitive advantage now involves exploring other avenues that have effectively been incorporated under the umbrella of profit maximisation (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva 2017; Rodriguez et al. 2002). Companies' ability to incorporate sustainability as a competitive advantage stem from their ability to recognize customer value information and design their strategy accordingly (Rodriguez et al. 2002).

Sustainability entails more than just continuity as it also embodies environmental, social, and economic aspects (Lloret 2016). Failing to acknowledge the significance of such aspects is equivalent to presuming that business decisions are linear, thus ignoring the complexity associated with sustainability (ibid.). A corporate strategy without aspects of all dimensions of sustainability may therefore limit the company's competitiveness and thus its performance (Lloret 2016; Martinez-Conesa et al. 2017; Schaltegger & Burritt 2005). Although the importance of developing a sustainability strategy has been widely recognized, both in theory and practice (Bocken et al. 2014; Engert & Baumgartner 2016; Epstein & Roy 2001; Lloret 2016), it is common for companies to pursue sustainability issues in the absence of a defined strategy (Baumgartner & Ebner 2010; Engert & Baumgartner 2016). This is frequently due to the inability to effectively translate strategy to practise, creating a knowledge gap of how to implement it (ibid.). Furthermore, the existing literature predominantly focuses on conceptual analysis rather than practical implementation of corporate sustainability strategies (ibid.). One of the effects of the focus of existing research, according to Engert and Baumgartner (2016), is that the concept of corporate sustainability offers little to no guidance to businesses who are striving to adopt sustainability into their corporate strategy.

The existing literature has within the field of corporate sustainability strategy investigated drivers of sustainability performance (Epstein & Roy 2001), formulation and implementation (Nathan 2010; Hrebiniak 2006), strategy integration (Baumgartner 2014; Engert et al. 2016; Saltaji 2013), the role of leadership and stakeholders (Simas et al. 2013), governance (Klettner et al. 2014), management of tensions (Hahn et al. 2015) and success factors (Engert & Baumgartner 2016), inter alia. The implementation process of a corporate sustainability strategy has proven to be a challenging task for companies (Engert & Baumgartner 2016; Rodrigues & Franco 2019). Although motivation and communication has been recognized as important success factors, highlighted by Engert and Baumgartner (2016), there is still no research exploring their role and the relationship between them in the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy (Engert & Baumgartner 2016; Rodrigues & Franco 2019).

Communication is argued to be the primary factor for the motivation and performance of employees and is therefore vital for organisational competitiveness (Tariszka-Semegine 2012). As demonstrated by the literature (Pardo del Val & Martinez Fuentes 2003; Waddell & Sohal 1998), resistance to change is commonly inherent in employees and is frequently the cause of sustainability initiative failure. However, effective communication may mitigate such resistance, thus facilitating the implementation process (Daly et al. 2003; Elving 2005; Husain 2013). In addition, management's organisational communication capability is a determining factor for engaging and motivating employees, thereby reducing the resistance to organisational change (Hansma & Elving 2008).

Engert and Baumgartner (2016) identified motivation and communication as crucial factors for the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies. Despite the importance, in regards to the integration of sustainability initiatives, internal communication has only been addressed in a small number of studies (Engert & Baumgartner 2016). This particularly holds true with regard to the communication-motivation relationship (ibid.). Although the existence has been identified, the role of and the relationship between motivation and communication, in the context of corporate sustainability strategy implementation, has not yet been addressed within the literature (Engert & Baumgartner 2016; Rodrigues & Franco 2019). On this basis, the author of this study suggests that the current empirical literature is insufficient, especially regarding comparative studies of the implementation process of corporate sustainability strategy, a view supported by Engert and Baumgartner (2016). Thus, existing frameworks and models do not account for the significant impact of motivation nor communication, meaning there exists a theoretical gap as to

how communication and motivation affects the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies.

“The empirical picture that is slowly emerging indicates that communication process and organisational change implementation are inextricably linked processes” (Lewis 1999, p. 44)

In addition to the current lack of empirical literature and focus on conceptual analysis, the highlighted relevance of communication and motivation appropriately justifies the necessity for examining the role of and the relationship between motivation and communication in the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy.

### 1.3 Research Aim

The aim of the study is to explore the role of organisational communication and motivation in the implementation process of corporate sustainability strategies. By addressing the importance of organisational communication and motivation, in the context of Vålvald, the author aims to shed light on how pharmaceutical chains may improve the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies.

#### 1.3.1 Research questions

**RQ1:** What is the role of organisational communication in the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

**RQ2:** What is the role of motivation in the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

**RQ3:** How does the communication-motivation relationship affect the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

### 1.4 Scope of research and delimitations

The aim of this study is to expand the knowledge of the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies by examining the role of and the relationship between organisational communication and motivation in the context of the sustainability initiative Vålvald. The scope of research for this study is limited to the Swedish pharmacy market as Vålvald is a Swedish sustainability initiative for non-prescription pharmaceuticals. Due to the time limit of a master's project,

three companies were included in this study, Apoteksgruppen, Apoteket AB and Apotek Hjärtat as well as the Swedish Pharmacy Association.

The author of this study recognizes that the findings of this research may be limited to the information provided by a selected a group of participants; Lisa Stern Ödmark (the Swedish Pharmacy Association), Helene Kristensen (Apoteksgruppen), Therese Hansen (Apoteket AB) and Cecilia de Pedro (Apotek Hjärtat). Thus the conclusions made by the author may be limited in terms of their applicableness to the rest of the pharmacy chains engaged in Välvald.

A potential conceptual delimitation is the extensive literature within the field of organisational communication and motivation, which may be interpreted differently by the reader than the author of this study. Additionally, sustainability is viewed from the lens of TBL, which in turn may be different to how the reader views sustainability. Further delimitations regarding the chosen methodology will be elaborated upon later in the thesis.

## 1.5 Outline of the study

The structure of this study begins with an overview of the topic at hand and proceeds with a contextual description of the problem background. The aim, delimitations, and research questions are also included in the introduction, along with the problem's theoretical and empirical components. The second chapter, Theoretical framework, begins with a literature review which is then followed by the selected theories and the author's own conceptual framework for analysing the empirical data. Chapter three consists of the methods used when conducting the study as well as a critical reflection of the chosen method and an appropriate ethical consideration. Furthermore, chapter four presents the empirical data which is based on conducted semi-structured interviews. The following chapter, chapter five, analyses and discusses the empirical findings and aims to further identify the connections between them. The final chapter, chapter six, consists of the conclusions made by conducting the study and addresses how the study's aim has been met. Chapter six also includes an elaboration of how the study has contributed to the current literature and further highlights potential areas for future research.



Figure 1. Illustration of the outline (own illustration)



## 1.6 Setting the scene: Swedish pharmacies and the provisioning of pharmaceuticals

Until 2009, the provisioning of medicines was solely managed by Apoteket AB, the government-owned company. However, today, medicines in Sweden are also managed by privately owned pharmacies. In Sweden there are five larger pharmacy chains, three e-commerce actors as well as 40 independent pharmacies (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2018).

All pharmacies are obliged to provide all medicines that are registered, and thereby approved by medical authorities. There is however a difference between prescription medicines, which must be prescribed by a doctor and medicines that customers themselves may purchase straight from the pharmacies to cure minor ailments (Läkemedelsverket 2020). While the former group must be provided true to the prescription, all regulated by law, the latter group gives the pharmacies a wider range of possibilities and they independently decide which brand they provide. Additionally, Swedish pharmacies offer a variety of “regular” merchandise (ibid.).

In addition to offering a wide array of products, Swedish pharmacies have taken steps towards incorporating sustainability, as exemplified by the sustainability initiative Välvald. Välvald, the Swedish pharmacies sustainability initiative that emphasises on transparency, aims to promote sustainability for non-prescription pharmaceuticals. The sustainability initiative builds on the previous Välj med Hjärtat initiative from 2017 (Apotek Hjärtat 2022), which was exclusive to the Swedish pharmacy chain Apotek Hjärtat until 2021, when Välvald became the de facto non-prescription pharmaceutical sustainability standard (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2022). Välvald is an official consumer sustainability guide, funded by the pharmacy chains, that aims to facilitate the consumer's ability to make an informed choice when purchasing non-prescription pharmaceuticals (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2021). Välvald exclusively includes non-prescription pharmaceuticals out of the three product categories that Swedish pharmacies offer: prescription pharmaceuticals, non-prescription pharmaceuticals and "regular" merchandise. The reason being that there are already established sustainability labels within the “regular” merchandise category e.g. Svanen and Eu Ecolabel, and because Swedish legislation restricts the ability to make demands on the procurement of prescription pharmaceuticals (ibid.). The transparency that is promoted through Välvald further reinforces the consumer's ability to exert pressure on the pharmaceutical industry (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2021). Välvald comes with a specific set of requirements for the manufacturers i.e. pharmaceutical companies, regarding the non-prescription pharmaceuticals that

they provide, in order for these products to be able to wear the symbol of Vålvald.

The documented information provided, pertaining to the fulfilment of the criteria, is reviewed by the third party Trossa, which is a consulting firm specialising in sustainable business and operational development. Although the aim is to promote sustainability, specifically through transparency, Vålvalds' symbol does not guarantee that a product has been manufactured sustainably. The symbol solely indicates that the product manufacturer has fulfilled the previously mentioned criteria (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2021). Since the introduction of Vålvald, the criteria have progressed from engaging solely with companies on a holistic level towards also engaging within the product level (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2022). The objective with the development of the criteria has been to eventually become the first sustainability label within the non-prescription pharmaceutical industry (ibid.).

## 2. Theoretical framework

*The second chapter of the study begins by outlining the theoretical framework, which is based on sustainability in business practice, organisational communication, motivation and corporate sustainability strategy. The chapter concludes in a theoretical synthesis, which combines aforementioned concepts and explains how these will be used in relation to each other within the study context.*

### 2.1 Sustainability in business practice - How business strike a balance between the environment, society and economy

#### *Triple bottom line*

The concept of sustainability is complex (Amini & Bienstock 2014) and has been recognized as important for ensuring long term viability and success within business (Alhaddi 2015). The incorporation of sustainability in business provides companies with valuable opportunities related to cost savings (Whelan & Fink 2016), increased competitiveness (Hermundsdottir & Aspelund 2021), innovation (Cooperrider 2008) reputation enhancement (Norman & MacDonald 2004), consumer loyalty (Jung et al. 2020) and retaining and motivating employees (Bonini & Görner 2011). To address the complex nature of sustainability within a business context, John Elkington (1997) coined the TBL framework, dividing sustainability into three different dimensions; *environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability*. By including various dimensions of sustainability, TBL allows for a multidisciplinary approach, which is essential for conducting sustainability related research (Elkington 1997).

Over time, TBL has gained widespread acceptance, becoming a standard for businesses that want to address sustainability (Elkington 2004; Henriques & Richardson 2013; Hubbard 2009). It is a framework outlined for businesses to transform their focus towards including social and environmental aspects in addition to their traditional bottom line by balancing each dimension of sustainability equally (Clarke 2001). In relation to Clark's (2001) assertion, the recognition of balance and interplay between these dimensions is considered

essential for the success of TBL (Hahn et al. 2010; Littig and Griessler 2005). Furthermore, while the intricate process of measuring the performance, particularly the social and environmental dimensions, has a multitude of challenges (Hubbard 2009; Slaper & Hall 2011), TBL remains a valuable tool for understanding sustainability and the interconnectedness between its dimensions (Elkington 1997). Despite the issues associated with the frequent multidimensional, non-monetary and subjective nature of TBL, it continues to be of importance as it allows for a broad perspective that highlights the effects of business operations (Arowoshegbe et al. 2016).

Elkington (1997) argued that organisations and businesses alike ought to include social responsibility and environmental protection alongside the traditional financial bottom line to maintain their long-term viability. In its essence, TBL is used for measuring the performance of business by using three bottom lines, economic, social, and environmental (ibid.). The structure of the framework is designed to facilitate continuous integration between the bottom lines to create a sustainable business (Alhaddi 2015). Although the implementation of TBL may require an initial investment, research has shown that by incorporating TBL, businesses may increase their financial performance in the long run (Bohmholdt 2014).

### *Greenwashing*

The exponential increase of sustainability integration in business has also resulted in the proliferation of the phenomenon greenwashing (de Freitas Netto 2020; Delmas & Burbano 2011). Greenwashing is the practice of providing false or otherwise misleading information to stakeholders about the environmental performance of a company (firm-level greenwashing) or environmental advantage of a product or service (product-level greenwashing) (Delmas & Burbano 2011). While the environmental performance of organisations and companies engaging in greenwashing is typically poor, the environmental performance communication paints an entirely different picture (de Freitas Netto 2020; Delmas & Burbano 2011). According to Du (2015, p. 548) “*Greenwashing means that a firm uses environmentally friendly appearance to cover its environmentally unfriendly substance*”. Organisations engaging in greenwashing often do so in an attempt to capitalise on the increasing demands for environmentally friendly products (de Freitas Netto 2020). Stakeholders' frequent inability to differentiate between sustainable products and greenwashed products, has tremendous negative effects on consumer confidence for sustainable products. The general scepticism towards sustainability efforts that is generated by greenwashing activities, reduces trust towards such actions and thus produces negative market reactions (e.g. decreased sales, increased market competition, inter alia) (Delmas & Burbano 2011; Du

2015). Consequently, greenwashing may negatively impact genuine sustainability efforts as they may receive diminished recognition (Du 2015).

### *Greenhushing*

As indicated throughout previous parts, businesses frequently tend to accentuate their sustainability efforts as it may, among other things, strengthen their market competitiveness (Font et al. 2017). However, businesses sometimes struggle with communicating their sustainability efforts due to the lack of confidence or expertise, which may lead to greenhushing (ibid.). Greenhushing is a recent phenomenon and it is the deliberate withholding of information from stakeholders, regarding the organisation's sustainability performance (Font et al. 2017; Ginder et al. 2021). Greenhushing is the under-communication of sustainability efforts due to the potential fear of being associated with greenwashing (Ettinger et al. 2021). As highlighted by Font et al. (2017) greenhushing is not always the result of poor sustainability knowledge or confidence, but occurs as business attempts at bridging the gap, or reducing dissonance, between the businesses' sustainability values and the expectation from customers. In relation, Ettinger et al. (2021) emphasise that greenhushing may also be due to the fact that customers do not care about sustainability efforts. Furthermore, greenhushing limits the effect to which sustainability efforts have, as stakeholder recognition is impeded. Thus, greenhushing hinders the progression of sustainability as it limits the dispersion of sustainable activities (Carlos & Lewis 2018).

To sum up, an in-depth understanding of how sustainability works in business practice, incorporating TBL, greenwashing and greenhushing facilitates exploring how businesses adapt to the challenges that are accompanied with the progression of sustainability.

## 2.2 Organisational communication

Organisational communication is argued in the literature to be of utmost importance in today's business climate, as it forms the underlying functionality of modern organisations (Baker 2007; Cacciattolo 2015; Rajhans 2012; Tariszka-Semegine 2012; Witherspoon 1997). Within a business context, communication is commonly referred to as the "social glue" that binds organisations together (Alvesson, 2012). Communication is an integral part of organisational change in the sense that it is an important factor for the performance outcome (Husain 2013; Tariszka-Semegine 2012). Effective communication is within a business context considered to directly and indirectly affect team and organisation performance (Alvesson, 2012; Greenbaum & Query 1999), increase motivation (Rajhans 2012;

Luecke 2003) foster positive attitudes (De Ridder 2004), develop trust (Thomas et al. 2009) improve decision making (Tourish 2005) and facilitate organisational change (Elving 2005; Husain 2013; Schweiger & Denisi 1991).

Furthermore, effective organisational communication plays a crucial role for creating a productive work environment (Baker 2007; Rajhans 2012) Effective organisational communication is likely to result in employees feeling more committed and trusting towards the organisation and thereby increase their readiness for organisational change (Elving 2005). There are various forms of organisational communication that can occur within an organisation, each with its own key characteristics (Baker 2007). These include the hierarchical level of the communication, whether the communication is formal or informal, the direction of the communication (vertical, horizontal or diagonal) and if the communication is internal or external to the organisation (Baker 2007; Tariszka-Semegine 2012).

Furthermore, there are two main objectives of organisational communication (De Ridder 2004; Elving 2005; Francis 1987). Firstly, the goal is to inform the workforce of their responsibilities and the organisation's policies. The second goal is to foster community within the organisation, creating a sort of unity. A distinction made by Elving (2005) highlighted that organisational communication can thus be divided into informative communication and communication used to create a community. Commonly, the informative communication initially comes from management and entails information about the purpose of the change and potential work altering information (Elving 2005). By extension, informative communication has therefore a direct impact on the readiness for change (De Ridder 2004; Francis 1987). The objective of creating a community is interlinked with group identity and strives to create a sort of setting that facilitates unity and is aligned with the requirements of the organisation (Elving 2005).

Research has shown that employees receiving appropriate formal information provided through official channels tend to become increasingly committed to their job (Postmes et al. 2001). Additionally, formal communication with higher-level management, as opposed to communication with peers and direct supervisors, results in stronger commitment (ibid.). Hansma and Elving's (2008) research on the role of management for organisational change, concluded that the adaptation to change and the resistance towards it substantially depended on the communication skills of the managers. Related to the study of Hansma and Elving's (2008), Robertson et al. (1993) highlighted the importance of employee acceptance to organisational change. Results indicated that the success of an organisational change is dependent on the organisation's ability to change the individual employees behaviour through organisational communication (ibid.).

Therefore, organisational communication can be seen as a tool that management can utilise to attain organisational goals (Syakur et al. 2020).

Consequently, employing an organisational communication lens allows one to investigate how communication unfolds when organisations implement corporate sustainability strategy.

## 2.3 Motivation

Bartol and Martin (1998) describes motivation as a force that strengthens behaviour and its continuity while simultaneously giving directions to it. Dobre (2013) considered motivation to be the inherent drive that propels individuals to fulfil certain goals. Motivation is thus deeply rooted in physiological and psychological stimulation to achieve goals (Bedeian 1993; Dobre 2013). It is a continuous process of maintaining goal-oriented behaviour (Chowdhury 2007). Kanfer and Chen (2016) argue that an individual's goals are not isolated nor independent, but instead are part of a hierarchically structured network that is directly affected by the relationship between person, situation and epigenetic forces. Motivation is concerned with why people choose to behave in a particular manner, and continue to do so despite arising challenges or issues (Mullins & Christy 2005). Emphasised by Osabiya (2015) and Mullins (2005) is that motivation is not behaviour itself, but rather concerns the internal as well as external forces that affect an individual's decision-making process. Motivation can be classified into two different types of motivated behaviour; intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. While intrinsic motivation refers to the engagement in an activity for the inherent satisfaction or for the personal interest that it brings. Extrinsic motivation refers to the engagement in an activity for the achievement of a separate goal, e.g receiving rewards or to avoid punishment (Ryan & Deci 2000; Vallerand 1997).

Motivating employees is a difficult task, yet it is necessary for managers to understand employees' needs to motivate them effectively (Osabiya 2015). Despite being considered the most difficult aspect for organisations to manage (Osabiya 2015; Rajhans 2012), human resource (i.e. the employees) is regarded as the most valuable asset in an organisation (Manzoor 2012; Osabiya 2015). Although the success of a company, regardless of industry, can frequently be traced to the motivation of employees (Osabiya 2015), numerous organisations fail to recognize its importance (Manzoor 2012). Organisations that mindfully engage and intentionally motivate its employees, are as a consequence of their actions, increasing their ability to attract, retain and develop employees that will further enhance the success of the organisation (Osabiya 2015). As motivation

plays a crucial role for the success of the organisation, the task of understanding human behaviour is of primary concern for any organisation (Mutuku & Mathooko 2014; Manzoor 2012).

The relationship between employee satisfaction and the performance of an organisation has been highlighted by (Osabiya 2015, p. 62) “*Unsatisfied employees produce unsatisfactory results...*”. Additionally, ensuring employee motivation increases organisational effectiveness (Dobre 2013) and the alignment of company goals and objectives (Egan 1998; Manzoor 2012). Highlighted by Kalimullah (2010), motivated employees shape their objectives to be aligned with those of the organisation. The findings of Kalimullah (2010) can thus be related to Osabiya’s (2015) statement, that motivated employees may facilitate and promote a non-zero sum game (win-win situation) between the individual employee and the organisation. Furthermore, Alvesson (2012) emphasises that motivation does not exclusively depend on the attribute of an individual, but is also affected by the organisational culture in which they operate.

Examining motivation, in the context of the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy, may enable a better understanding of how such an implementation may be facilitated by ensuring motivated employees.

## 2.4 Corporate sustainability strategy

Similarly to the definition of sustainable development, corporate sustainability has been defined as “*Meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders [...], without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well*” (Dyllick & Hockerts 2002, p. 2). Thus, corporate sustainability strategy is closely aligned with that of sustainable development (Baumgartner 2009).

Corporate sustainability strategies outline how organisations address sustainability issues in practice (Baumgartner & Rauter 2017). Salzmann et al. (2005) argued that corporate sustainability is a strategic and financially driven way of addressing environmental and social issues instigated by the businesses primary and secondary activities. However, the integration of corporate sustainability into strategic management is not considered straightforward, and has been highlighted as difficult for numerous companies (Epstein et al. 2015; Hahn 2013).

Incorporating corporate sustainability into the strategic management of an organisation, requires management to first make decisions and then put them into action (Rodrigues & Franco 2019). The process require changes to company culture, governance, structure as well as daily routines (ibid.).



As businesses recognize the potential that comes with incorporating sustainability into their business operations, such as gaining competitive advantage (Hart 1995; Rodrigues & Franco 2019) and creating long term value (Kramer & Porter 2011), companies are increasingly realising the importance of developing and implementing a sustainability strategy (Epstein & Roy 2001; Rodrigues & Franco 2019). Furthermore, the strategic decision to pursue sustainability may be driven by ethical considerations, economic rationality or a combination of both (Baumgartner & Rauter 2017). Although profit-driven organisations generally pursue sustainability with the key focus of identifying a competitive advantage, e.g., enhanced reputation and brand value, improved employee engagement and improved financial performance (Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010).

According to Baumgartner (2009), corporate sustainability is frequently viewed as something inherently positive especially regarding public relations. However, having a corporate sustainability strategy and an organisational structure in place within an organisation is not enough to ensure that there is practical progress towards sustainability goals (ibid.). Thus, investment is only one part of the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy. To adequately implement a corporate sustainability strategy that effectively progresses the organisation towards set sustainability goals, education of the collaborators, continuous and correct communication and the integration in all of the organisational processes must be integrated into the decision-making (Baumgartner 2009; Epstein et al. 2010). Consequently, implementing a corporate sustainability strategy is a time-consuming process that requires both tangible and intangible resources (Rodrigues & Franco 2019).

Effective communication, internal consensus and the consideration of external factors are all essential components of successful strategic management (Rodrigues & Franco 2019). In addition, Baumgartner (2009) stresses the importance of clear communication in regards to the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy. Baumgartner and Rauter (2017) further mentions that the implementation of a sustainability strategy and the acceptance of organisational change can be either hindered or facilitated by corporate culture. In relation, Engert and Baumgartner (2016, p. 824) argue that “*Corporate sustainability strategy implementation requires management commitment as well as the embedding of sustainability in corporate culture*”. The findings of Epstein et al. (2010), further indicates that leadership and culture are determining factors to the success of a corporate sustainability strategy. Moreover, there is necessity in thoroughly developing a company's corporate sustainability strategy as it is vital for its success (Rodrigues & Franco 2019). The strategy must then be applied throughout all levels of the organisation (ibid).

To improve the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy, managers need to identify important success factors associated with drivers of performance (Epstein et al. 2010). These drivers are related to external as well as the internal factors, including financial and human resources. External drivers are associated with regulations and location and internal drivers are associated with corporate strategy, organisational structure and culture, systems and organisational mission (ibid.). Integrating sustainability into business operations causes changes, particularly to structures and processes, that promote organisational reflection at the management level, thus facilitating an enhanced understanding of the organisation's impact on the world (Rodrigues & Franco 2019). However, these changes must not disrupt the balance between internal as well as external stakeholders needs (Baumgartner & Rauter 2017). Therefore, the strategic planning process has to be adaptable to accommodate varying needs (ibid.). Additionally, organisations ought to consider internal as well as external strengths and weaknesses when attempting to incorporate sustainability into strategic management (Baumgartner & Rauter 2017). To ensure the success of a corporate sustainability strategy, Batista and Francisco (2018) emphasised the importance of adapting and tailoring the strategies to TBL while considering the organisation's unique characteristics. As highlighted by Rodrigues and Franco (2019), globalisation necessitates organisations to be adaptable, resulting in that there is no one-size-fits all corporate sustainability strategy. However, as mentioned by Salzmann et al. (2005) the examination of corporate sustainability strategies in separate industries or separate companies may still prove to be useful. Ultimately, the success of a corporate sustainability strategy is effectively dependent on how well it is formulated, implemented, executed and assessed (Rodrigues & Franco 2019).

## 2.5 Theoretical synthesis

TBL is a framework that has been widely acknowledged and accepted within both practice and research (Alhaddi 2015; Savitz 2013; Slaper & Hall 2011). By incorporating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, TBL may provide a holistic perspective, facilitating an understanding of their interdependencies (Birkel & Müller 2021), while simultaneously highlighting potential synergies (ibid.) and trade-offs (Mitchell et al. 2007). Consequently, by using TBL as a framework for this study, the intricate balance between the various dimensions of sustainability can be examined, thus the framework may serve as an effective tool for evaluating and understanding sustainability within the study context. Furthermore, the environmentally friendly appearance pertained by organisations engaging in greenwashing, providing misleading information, undermines legitimate sustainability efforts, instigating greenhushing (Font et al. 2017).

Organisations have as a result become hesitant to share genuine sustainability efforts, fearing potential backlash from stakeholders who may perceive such efforts deceptive (Ettinger et al. 2021). Exploring the concepts of greenwashing and greenhushing may in turn further shed light on the intricate challenges associated with the present-day business sustainability landscape. Therefore, TBL as well as greenwashing and greenhushing has been deemed an appropriate baseline for understanding the progression of sustainability within the confines of this study.

Clear commitment is argued to be a requirement for effective incorporation of sustainability within an organisation (Johnson Walck 2004). The process of implementing sustainability within business can be considered as a form of sustainable organisational change (Paramanathan et al. 2004), which is facilitated by a corporate sustainability strategy (Engert & Baumgartner 2016). The significance of communication, in regard to implementing such an organisational change, has been emphasised as essential for success (Elving 2005; Husain 2013; Schweiger & Denisi 1991). Research indicates that poor communication is the primary reason why up to 70 percent of initiatives and programs fail (Mutuku & Mathooko 2014). Underlying resistance towards organisational change is frequently identified to be the primary reason for failure of change initiatives (Pardo del Val & Martinez Fuentes 2003; Waddell & Sohal 1998). However, research also indicates that effective communication alleviates concerns and resistance associated with organisational change and facilitates the implementation process (Daly et al. 2003; Elving 2005; Husain 2013).

Communication is a cornerstone to motivation and the performance of employees (Tariszka-Semegine 2012). Given the crucial role that motivation has for the success of a company, as highlighted by Manzoor (2012), Mutuku and Mathooko (2014) and Osabiya (2015), it is pivotal for organisations to understand how to facilitate employee motivation (Manzoor 2012; Mutuku & Mathooko 2014). Consequently, by examining the implementation of Vålvald, the author intends to identify valuable insights and improve understanding of the role and the relationship between organisational communication and motivation in corporate sustainability strategy.

While there is no one-size-fits all when it comes to corporate sustainability strategy, as argued by Rodrigues and Franco (2019), the examination of corporate sustainability strategies of different companies may prove to be useful (Salzmann et al. 2005). In the context of Vålvald, identifying the relationship and the role of communication and motivation, through the lens of corporate sustainability strategy, may further highlight how pharmacy chains can address the difficulties associated with the communication-motivation relationship when implementing a corporate sustainability strategy. Insights gained from the gathered empirical data

will thus offer useful guidance for pharmacy chains, in addition to the potentially broader applicability of the findings, to companies outside of the context of Vålvald. Since the research is limited to the context of Vålvald, the findings may be used as complementary to that of a pharmacy's overall corporate sustainability strategy. Thus the empirical data gathered may solely suffice as a general approach to that of each pharmacy chain, specifically aimed at addressing the organisational communication and motivation, associated with the implementation of Vålvald.

## 3. Methodology

*The third chapter presents the chosen method that has been used in the study and its underlying motivation. The chapter provides an explanation of methodological choices, which the study builds on, followed by the literature review. The choice of multiple-case study and sampling strategy is then elaborated upon, followed by the data collection and the data analysis. The chapter also includes quality assurance, ethical considerations as well as methodological and empirical delimitations.*

### 3.1 Research methodology

The research design of this thesis is inductive in nature and based on a qualitative multiple case study. The overarching goal has been to interpret how organisational communication and motivation affects the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy within the pharmacy context. As highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2017), one of the key characteristics that differentiate qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research is primarily centred on words and descriptions rather than numerical data. The aim of qualitative research is to generate theory from the gathered empirical data, which is referred to as “theory building”. Comparatively, quantitative data instead focuses on testing already existing theories, known as “theory testing” (ibid.). In a more general sense, qualitative research is usually found suitable when the aim is to get a deeper contextual understanding of the research phenomenon (Bryman & Bell 2017). The focus of a deeper, more comprehensive, understanding of context facilitates a nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon (ibid.). Yin (2015) mentioned that qualitative research is an appropriate research methodology when examining social phenomenon that are context specific. Thus, due to the nature of the intended research along with specific characteristics of the research questions, a qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate for this study.

## 3.2 Research philosophy

Yin (2015) addresses the importance of explicitly stating the specific ontological and epistemological position adopted in research, as it may facilitate insight and communication due to the clarity and transparency that it provides. Thus, discussing ontology and epistemology is of particular importance, as it lays the philosophical foundation for the study and helps to guide the research design as well as the method (Bryman & Bell 2017; Marsh & Furlong 2002; Yin 2015). While ontology is described as the philosophical undertone of the study, it reflects the researchers' own perception of reality (ibid.).

This study is based on constructionist ontology, a position which implies that it is the interactions between social actors that through social construction form the outcomes of social entities. This denotes social constructions are not predetermined, but rather continuously affected by social processes (Bryman & Bell 2017). Constructionism recognizes the notion of the existence of multiple realities and perspectives. Individuals may have different understanding of the same reality, thus enabling multiple realities and perspectives of the same phenomenon (ibid.). The constructionist position has also the ability to further highlight the researchers' own biases and assumptions.

Moving on to epistemology, it is described as the nature of knowledge, how we know things and what is to be accepted as knowledge (ibid.). In this thesis, an interpretivist approach was employed, a common point of departure in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2017). This is primarily because, in addition to the ability to generalise that it offers, it enables theories to be grounded in data. An interpretivist position assumes that social reality requires interpretation and is therefore subjective (Bryman & Bell 2017). The theoretical perspective of interpretivism contends that knowledge is shaped by human intention and meaning. Interpretivism asserts that knowledge of a social phenomenon requires interpretation of individuals' experiences and perspectives, thus cannot be obtained using methods that are objective.

The decision to depart from the above explained ontological and epistemological positions were based on the alignment between the author's own personal view of reality along with the recognition of subjectivity that constructivism and interpretivism entails. Moreover, as sustainability is a complex concept (Tainter 2006), an argument for the necessity of a deeper understanding could be made. According to Bryman and Bell (2017) an inductive approach facilitates a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (ibid.). Therefore, an inductive approach may therefore enhance the ability to extract intrinsically niche, yet relevant information, pertaining to the complex concept of sustainability.

### 3.3 Literature review

To conduct a thorough literature review allows one to get a deeper understanding of the researched field and become more familiar with relevant theories (Jahan et al. 2016; Yin 2015). A thorough literature review also provides insight on potential gaps within the existing literature, by extension strengthening the ability to justify the relevance of the conducted research. Yin (2015) and Bryman and Bell (2017) recommend ensuring that the research remains relevant and current, by continuously revisiting the stage of literature review throughout the research process. The iterative nature of this study further underpins this particular literature review process.

It is common within qualitative research for the literature review to be of narrative character (Bryman & Bell 2017). In essence, a narrative literature review is a comprehensive summary of the existing literature within the researched field, providing a holistic view of the current findings in the literature (Baumeister & Leary 1997). A narrative literature review does not adhere to a specific procedure or protocol, and is therefore less of a formal approach (ibid.) It builds on the researchers' own perception of the literature's relevance, and is thus more susceptible to bias than systematic reviews (Jahan et al. 2016). A narrative literature review is seen as appropriate for this research as it facilitates the ability to pinpoint relevant theories and findings regarding motivation, communication and corporate sustainability strategy. In addition, the subjective nature of a narrative literature review, which encompasses the importance of interpretation and personal insight, align with the ontological (constructionism), epistemological (interpretivism) and inductive approach chosen by the author. The author has acknowledged the concern mentioned by Bryman and Bell (2017), that a narrative literature review may potentially become exceedingly time consuming. However, the author also recognizes that limiting the scope of research, to save time, may have negative consequences for the quality of the study. Consequently, the author decided to conduct a narrative literature review, despite the potential time constraints, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the researched field and to amplify the ability to identify relevant theories.

The identified literature consisted of peer-reviewed articles, published books and news articles. However, important to note is that the news articles were solely used to illustrate the relevance of the topic. The usage of peer-reviewed articles further strengthens the credibility, quality and reliability of the research (Bryman & Bell 2017) The literature was identified using three particular search engines: Web of science, Google Scholar and Primo. The keywords used to identify the literature can be seen in Appendix 1.

### 3.4 Multiple case study

According to both Bryman and Bell (2017) and Gustafsson (2017), case studies are frequently used as a research design in order to generate a deeper understanding of intrinsically complex phenomenon in a real-world context. Although case studies may seem relatively simple, they are often a lot more complex and more difficult than individuals realise (Gustafsson 2017). There is neither a clear-cut definition of what constitutes a case study, or how it should be executed (Solberg Søylen & Huber 2006). Generally, it is described as an in-depth examination of a particular unit, person or group of people and is frequently, in qualitative research, often conducted in the form of an interview (Bryman & Bell 2017). The gathered data is then analysed to eventually conclude in a generalisation for other groups, people or units (Jacobsen et al. 2002). Furthermore, as described by Cousin (2005) and Bryman and Bell (2017), case study as a research design is useful when exploring a particular setting, with the intention to understand and define it.

The author decided to conduct a multiple case study, due to the reasoning that multiple case studies enable a more comprehensive theoretical reflection of the findings, in comparison to single case studies. By extension, it also contributes in creating a theoretical foundation that is more solid (Yin 2015). Multiple case studies are also recommended when the intention of the research is to explore differences between various contexts (Bryman and Bell 2017). The decision of conducting a multiple case study as a research design is further motivated by the intention of this study. As previously described, the intention is to examine differences in the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies at various pharmacy chains, specifically focussing on motivation and communication. However, a potential issue with multiple case studies is the challenge of identifying cases that are sufficiently distinct to enable a comparison that is of significance (Bryman & Bell 2017; Gustafsson 2017). The context of the study; the sustainability initiative Vålvald, addresses this particular concern, ensuring sufficient similarities. Furthermore, the fact that pharmacy chains are individually responsible for the implementation process of the sustainability initiative ensures that there is variance in the gathered empirical data.

### 3.5 Sampling and data collection

Sampling is described as the specific selection process where individuals or cases are chosen out of a larger population (Bryman & Bell 2017). The sampling process is argued by researchers to be an instrumental aspect of case study



research (Bryman & Bell 2017; Yin 2015). The selection process should be tailored towards the cases' or individuals' relevance to the research question as well as the theoretical framework of the study (ibid.). The representativeness of sampling strategy, used to gather empirical data, should be evaluated for potential error and bias. Moreover, snowball sampling has been emphasised by Bryman & Bell (2017) to be a suitable sampling strategy when the aim of the research is to obtain deeper and nuanced information from a particular set of individuals or group, that has specific experience relevant to the research question. Snowball sampling varies from other types of sampling as it is a non-probability sampling method that begins with deliberately selecting a small number of individuals or cases suitable to the research (Bryman & Bell 2017). The already chosen participant is then asked to refer to other individuals that meet the inclusion criterion (ibid.). In the initial stages of this thesis, Lisa Stern Ödmark was identified as an appropriate starting point because of her role as the Chief Strategist and Communications Manager at the Swedish Pharmacy Association, which administers Vålvald and she is its head administrator. The reasoning behind the choice of sampling method was that it was difficult to identify the individuals within the various pharmacy chains who were responsible for implementing Vålvald. As mentioned by both Bryman and Bell (2017) and Yin (2015) snowball sampling is suitable when the participants are either hard to identify or access. This type of sampling strategy may nevertheless impede on the ability to generalise results, as it introduces potential for bias, thus affecting the validity of the findings (Yin 2015). To circumvent the potential bias that the sampling method introduces, as participants may share experiences and characteristics (Yin, 2015), the author of this study has strived to set a clear inclusion criterion. For an individual to be recognized as a potential participant, the participant had to be actively involved and responsible for implementing the sustainability initiative in Vålvald in their pharmacy chain.

Moving on to data collection, Bryman and Bell (2017) describes this process as something that lays the foundation for data analysis; and it is utilised in qualitative research to generate rich data. Choosing an appropriate strategy and approach for collecting data within qualitative research is therefore imperative (ibid.). To be able to capture the qualitative context related data, the author has opted for semi-structured interviews with the motivation as follows:

By combining flexibility and structure, semi-structured interviews provide a balanced approach, enabling the researcher to ask pre-determined questions and allowing for potential follow up questions (Bryman and Bell 2017). The flexibility of follow up questions makes the interview more dynamic and adaptable, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the interviewees' experiences and perspectives (ibid.). The structured undertone of semi-structured

interviews facilitates a degree of standardisation, enhancing the comparability and consistency of the research (ibid.). The strength of semi-structured interviews is that it allows for more of a dialogue or conversation, thus allowing the interviewee to generate responses that are of their own. By creating a less formal atmosphere, making the interviewee more comfortable, semi-structured interviews may invoke responses that are more detailed and accurate. Even though semi-structured interviews have a structured foundation, Yin (2015) notes that the obtained empirical data may end up being increasingly challenging in terms of interpretation and analysis.

The author has followed the self-made interview guide when conducting the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2). The motivation was that the interview guide can provide a structure to the dialogue, ensuring that the conversation remains topic related. In addition, an interview guide is argued to be of critical importance in semi-structured interviews of high quality and guarantees that specific topics are addressed (Bryman and Bell 2017). The accuracy of the gathered empirical data has been facilitated by the fact that all interviews were recorded. Additionally, when the interview is recorded and not disrupted by the researcher taking notes, a natural, less formal conversation may be facilitated (ibid.). However, as addressed by Bryman and Bell (2017), non-excessive note taking, that does not interrupt the flow of the interview, may be critical for capturing impressions and responses from the interviewees that may otherwise go unnoticed in a recording.

As the author has opted for semi-structured interviews, thus gathered primary data, which according to Yin (2015) may impose challenges related to bias. To mitigate this potential issue and to facilitate a more detailed and nuanced response, the author attempted to pose open-ended questions. Furthermore, all of the interviews conducted within the study were initially intended to be held in person. To accommodate the interviewees preferences and unexpected difficulties regarding logistics, three of the interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams, while one was conducted in person.

*Table 1. Interview details*

Interviewee	Organisation	Title	Date	Duration	Form
Lisa Stern Ödmark	The Swedish Pharmacy Association	Chief strategist & communications manager	March 23rd	85 min	In person
Helene Kristensen	Apoteksgruppen	Quality advisor	April 11th	60 min	Microsoft Teams
Therese Hansen	Apoteket AB	Sustainability developer	April 11th	43 min	Microsoft Teams
Cecilia de Pedro	Apotek Hjärtat	Sustainability manager	April 19th	67 min	Microsoft Teams

### 3.6 Data analysis

The richness of qualitative data can at times be one of the major challenges with qualitative research according to Bryman and Bell (2017). Researchers must be critical of the relevance of the collected data, so that the applicability and wider significance of the analysis is not hindered. To develop a more nuanced understanding of the investigated phenomenon, the author chose an inductive approach. The motivation for the decision is partly based on Bryman and Bell's (2017) argument, advocating that an inductive approach is an appropriate approach for exploring complex phenomenon that have not yet been thoroughly understood. In addition, an inductive approach also allows for theory to emerge from data, enhancing the possibility of new insights of the researched phenomenon. The lack of existing literature within the field of corporate sustainability strategy, regarding motivation and communication, further justified the choice of approach. There is a specific set of procedures associated with using an inductive approach within qualitative research (Bryman and Bell 2017; Yin 2015). The iterative notion of an inductive approach facilitates the flexibility, adaptability and improvement of the produced theory by allowing for constant back-and-forth engagement between theory and empirical data (Yin 2015).

Subsequently the empirical data was coded. Findings and results of qualitative research does not emerge by themselves, but rather requires thorough examination in order to identify important aspects (Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019). Coding is referred to as a tool that facilitates the process of converting the raw empirical data into meaningful themes, concepts, patterns and categories (ibid.). By reviewing the empirical data a multitude of times, summarising different portions of it with a code (a word or a phrase), the researcher may highlight significant themes and patterns (Bryman & Bell 2017). The coding, conducted by the researcher, is then used to develop an understanding of the investigated phenomenon Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019. Coding enables the researcher to look beyond the surface-level of data, facilitating a more in depth understanding, while simultaneously remaining grounded in data (Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019).

Therefore, all of the interviews were transcribed in order to further facilitate the ability to analyse the empirical data; more specifically develop themes through iteration between empirics and theories. Important to note is that the transcribed interviews as well as additional notes taken during the interviews, were not immediately translated from their original language (Swedish) to English, but rather later, when the data analysis had been conducted. This was to eliminate any potential risk of losing essential findings that may otherwise be lost in an initial translation process. Moreover, concepts were created by reviewing the collected

and transcribed empirical data. The concepts were thereafter coded with regards to the theories and concepts used in the study, that is sustainability in business practice, motivation and organisational communication and corporate sustainability strategy. Subsequently, the relationships and connections between these categories were thematised. All of the identified themes are presented in chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion. Figure 1, roadmap of the concept-theme analysis, illustrates how the coding was conducted in order to identify significant findings of the corporate sustainability strategies used to implement the sustainability initiative Vålvald.

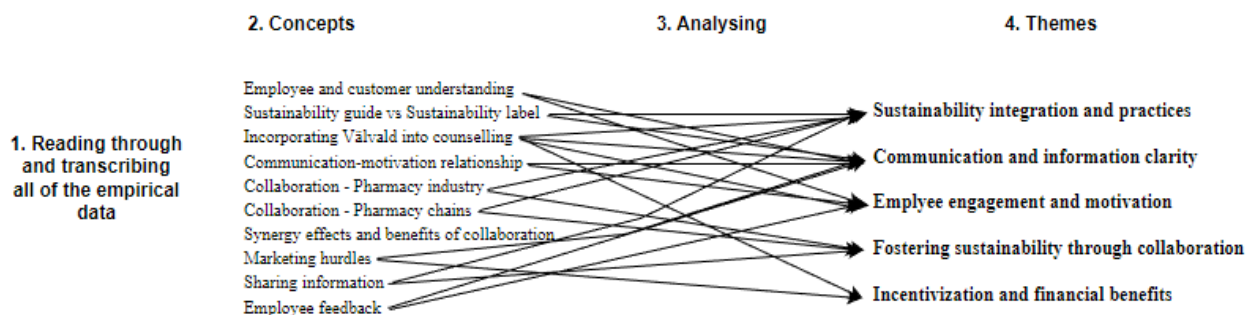


Figure 2. Roadmap of the concept-theme analysis

### 3.7 Quality assurance

According to Bryman and Bell (2017), the quality of research both qualitative and quantitative, can be evaluated by considering reliability and validity. In qualitative research, validity and reliability are used to determine the truthfulness and credibility of the research findings. Reliability of research is necessary as it demonstrates that the research findings are unaffected by the individual researcher, the researchers' approach to gather data and the means of observation (Bryman & Bell 2017). Reliability refers to the research consistency and dependability of the research findings. Validity is necessary in qualitative research as it ensures the accuracy and the authenticity of the research findings and the interpretations made. Validity reflects on the depiction of reality that is made by the researcher and whether it is accurately and appropriately conducted (ibid.). Moreover, triangulation as a method can be utilised to enhance both the reliability and the validity of a study. Triangulation reinforces the accuracy of the depicted reality as it allows the researcher to verify information by double-checking multiple sources (ibid.). The four sub criteria; *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is an alternative to the reliability and validity. The reasoning was that validity and reliability was inadequate in reassuring quality in quantitative research and unable

to fully capture the unique features of quality research (ibid.). Similarly to reliability and validity, the four sub criteria evaluates the quality and trustworthiness of the research. However, it is important to note that these sub criteria are not viewed as standard, but rather as guidelines to ensure the reliability and validity of qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell 2017).

*Credibility* refers to accuracy, thus the acceptance, of the author's depiction of social reality. It refers to the adherence to relevant regulations and guidelines (Bryman & Bell 2017). To reinforce the credibility of the study, the author received guidance and support from Sofia Kälvmemark Sporrang, a professor at the Department of Pharmacy in Social Pharmacy, who provided valuable insights in the initial stages of the research process. The author has critically reflected on potential bias that unintentionally may affect the findings of the study. In addition, the author has clearly described the selection criterion for the participants and carefully considered effects and potential issues associated with the chosen sampling methodology.

*Transferability* relates to the degree to which the research is generalizable, thus if the research is applicable to other similar scenarios. The importance of transferability is emphasised in qualitative research, as it determines the extent to which the research can be applicable on a larger scale (Bryman & Bell 2017). Geertz (1973) idea of generalizability in qualitative research, suggests that thorough descriptions should be provided in order to establish wider relevance of the findings. In order to enhance the transferability of the study, thus facilitating a more comprehensive description of the context, the author has utilised triangulation techniques when gathering data and conducting interviews. Additionally, the author has strived to provide the reader with a thick and detailed description of each of the interviewees' context.

*Dependability* is the third criterion and it asserts that an auditing approach should be adopted by the researcher throughout all stages of the research process (Bryman & Bell 2017). By extension, this means that the researcher should account for and document all aspects of the study. In line with this criterion, the author has consulted with Sofia Kälvmemark Sporrang in order to strengthen the auditing perspective. In addition, the text has undergone continuous review by the author's supervisor, Erik Melin, and has also been subjected twice to peer opposition. The author of this study has strived to provide a systematic and transparent coding process in order to further increase the dependability of the study.

Lastly, *confirmability* entails that subjectivity is inevitable in social research, thus complete objectivity is not achievable according to Bryman and Bell (2017). Even

though the recognition is made, a researcher should nevertheless, strive to maintain as impartial and objective as possible (ibid.). In order to fulfil the sub criterion of confirmability, the researcher has continuously strived to remain as objective as possible. The author has simultaneously prioritised transparency in all stages of the research process. Additionally and as previously mentioned, the research process has been aided by Sofia Kälvemarm Sporrang, an expert within the field of pharmacy, thus highlighting potential bias.

### 3.8 Ethical considerations

The protection of the participants within all types of research is considered vital for ensuring that research has been conducted in a responsible way (Yin 2015). Guaranteeing the safety of the participants, the researcher facilitates trust between the participants and the researcher. By extension the trust may encourage the participants to share more detailed and personal information, thus a more accurate and truthful representation of reality can be depicted (ibid.). Uncertainty of what is to be considered as ethical and what is not has been highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2017). As researchers and participants may have different perceptions of what is ethical, ambiguity may come as a consequence, thereby blurring the lines between the two. Implications, caused by ambiguity, may be prevented by adhering to particular guidelines (ibid.). Therefore, the four core principles of ethical considerations to guide qualitative research developed by Diener and Cradall (1978); *harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception*, has been applied throughout the study.

The first principle; *harm to participants* relates to the potential consequences that participants may face when participating in a study. According to Bell and Bryman (2018, p. 135) “*Harm can entail a number of facets: physical harm; harm to participants’ development or self-esteem; stress; harm to career prospects or future employment; and ‘inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts’*”. Yin (2015) asserts that the researcher should take every precaution necessary to ensure that the respondents of the study are in no way harmed. To further protect the participants of the study, the author has chosen to not disclose personal information about the respondents. Using interviews as a method for collecting empirical data may impose stress and decreased self-esteem on the interviewee, as acknowledged by Bryman and Bell (2017). To mitigate the potential negative effects that an interview may have, the author has, prior to the interviews, elaborated on the specifics of study, clarifying any uncertainties. As earlier mentioned, all of the interviews were recorded, but access has been limited to the author himself, and the recordings were deleted at the end of the research process.

*Lack of informed consent* relates to the participants' ability to make an informed decision. To accommodate this particular principle, the researcher should according to Bryman and Bell (2017) provide sufficient information about the research. The information should entail the meaning of their participation, how the data will be used as well as who will have access to the data. The author has adhered to the principle by, prior to the interview, ensuring that the participants understood what they agreed to when consenting to participating in the study (see Appendix 3). In addition, the participants have also had the ability to withdraw from the study during the entire research process.

*Invasion of privacy* is within research considered as unacceptable. It refers to the transgression of privacy and is intertwined with the previously described principle; *lack of informed consent*. Invasion of privacy is based on what informed consent constitutes as it relates to collecting and using personal data. As explained by Bryman and Bell (2017), although participants may not have been directly harmed in the research process, they may still feel deceived by the researcher. This may be due to a lack of respect for the participants' boundaries, or that the researcher has gathered too much data, data that is not relevant to the study (ibid.). In an effort to mitigate the *invasion of privacy*, the researcher solely posed topic related questions. Finally, all the participants have also, prior to the interview, received information that the interviews would be recorded. The participants have also been informed that they were able to decline to answer any of the posed questions.

The final principle, *deception*, refers to that a researcher should not deliberately provide any misleading information or in any way try to manipulate the participants nor the results (Bryman & Bell 2017). The researcher should solely provide truthful and accurate empirical findings. Abiding by this principle is imperative to preserve the integrity of the research findings (ibid.) To maintain the integrity of the research, the author has refrained from using any type of deception to his advantage. The entire research process has, specifically in relation to the participants' involvement, been centralised around transparency. Prior to the interview, the interviewees have been fully informed about what they actually agree to when giving consent, along with information about research goals and methods.

## 4. Empirical findings

*Firstly, chapter four provides a brief summary of each of the organisations examined within the study, including the Swedish Pharmacy Association and the case pharmacy chains. The interviews with the representatives of these organisations are presented in order that they were conducted; the Swedish Pharmacy Association, Apoteksgruppen, Apoteket AB and Apotek Hjärtat. Finally, a summary of the interviews is presented.*

### 4.1 The Swedish Pharmacy Association

The Swedish Pharmacy Association, the trade association of Swedish pharmacies, was created at the same time as the deregulation of Swedish pharmacies in 2009, with the purpose of promoting the interest of pharmacy chains within the industry (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2018). With the exception of Vålvald, the Swedish Pharmacy Association primarily works with prescription pharmaceutical related questions that are not subject to competition between the pharmacy chains. The members of the Swedish Pharmacy Association constitute close to 100 percent of Swedish pharmacies (Sveriges Apoteksförening 2018).

#### 4.1.1 Lisa Stern Ödmark, the Swedish Pharmacy Association

Lisa is the Chief Strategist at the Swedish Pharmacy Association and is responsible for communication and public affairs. Lisa has been at the Swedish Pharmacy Association for about seven years, with a political background and experience of working at a communications agency. Sustainability has been of personal interest for a long time for Lisa and she believes that it is something Swedish pharmacy chains should thoroughly engage in. Lisa acknowledges that it is important for businesses to take responsibility for their impact on the world, emphasising the potential benefits of incorporating sustainability into business operations.



Lisa created a group within the Swedish Pharmacy Association; Miljögruppen (The Environmental Group), with representatives from all pharmacy chains. During the initial stages of the group, the sustainability initiative Välj med Hjärtat, initiated by Apotek Hjärtat, was highlighted as a promising sustainability initiative. However, at that time, the initiative was at somewhat of a standstill, due to the difficulties with making demands as a sole actor. Recognizing the potential, the members of the Miljögruppen prompted the Swedish Pharmacy Association to resume responsibility for the initiative. The process of changing the name of the initiative, Lisa said, was a lot more complicated than expected. Unwilling to use the word sustainability, due to the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, the members of the Miljögruppen eventually settled on the name Välvald. Lisa goes on to mention that greenhushing is something that they have struggled with, that the fear of being accused of greenwashing has hampered the progression of the sustainability initiative Välvald. Lisa then related the issue of greenhushing to the original tagline of Välvald; *The pharmacy's guide for increased transparency*. Lisa argues that it does not necessarily provide sufficient information to either the customer or the employees. Lisa further mentioned that Välvald is not related to competition, but rather offers a choice for the customer. While each pharmacy chain independently chooses how to integrate sustainability into their business operations, Välvald assumes a broad perspective that includes all dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social and economic.

As the initiative was not and still is not a sustainability label, but rather a sustainability guide, the initiative was met with scepticism, suggesting that Välvald essentially was greenwashing. Lisa acknowledges that the initial criteria to be a part of Välvald were moderate; since then they have been revised several times. Despite this, Lisa further emphasises the importance of starting somewhere and making incremental changes. As explained by Lisa *"If the criteria are too low, everyone will meet the requirements and Välvald won't mean anything. If the criteria are set too high, no one will follow them"*. The initial idea with Välvald was to gradually update the criteria to eventually reach the ultimate goal of Välvald becoming a sustainability label; *"It is a journey towards sustainability"*. The criteria has successively been elaborated upon, introducing requirements that stretch beyond the original, purely holistic, company-wide criteria and now also extend to the individual product level. The updated criteria now also require pharmaceutical companies to impose sustainability demands on their suppliers. Välvald has been a time-consuming process, as there is a need to allow pharmaceutical companies to adjust to new criteria. *"To see change, takes time"* Lisa stresses, especially because nothing similar has ever been attempted between pharmacy chains and the pharmaceutical industry. Lisa goes on to mention that Välvald has increasingly been getting more attention from the international stage, with other European countries showing their interest. In addition, the

Pharmaceutical Supply Chain Initiative (PSCI) has also noticed a direct increase in the amount of inquiries received since its membership was implemented as a criterion for Vålvald.

“It is inevitable that the consumer demands that pharmaceutical companies not only save lives, but also take responsibility for the entire process”.

One of the primary concerns that were initially emphasised by the pharmacy representatives, was that customers frequently asked sustainability related questions that the pharmacy employees were unable to answer, due to the lack of available information. Sustainability information, frequently associated with that of pharmaceutical production was and still is classified information. Consequently, the ability to offer advice to customers regarding these questions is limited. The inability to properly or at all answer most sustainability-related questions has indeed been frustrating for employees. The lack of transparency within the industry as a whole is, according to Lisa, the source of this problem. Lisa also elaborates that communicating Vålvald, both to employees and customers, has been difficult. The fact that the current version of Vålvald cannot guarantee that the product has been sustainably produced, but rather guarantees that the pharmaceutical companies have been transparent regarding the production process, complicates the communication. The employees have had issues understanding what exactly Vålvald means and how to effectively communicate it to the customers, which has made it difficult for customers to understand the purpose of the sustainability initiative. Although communicating Vålvald has been difficult, Lisa stresses that it is incredibly important that the information that is provided to the customer and the employees is precise. Lisa believes that the difficulty of understanding Vålvald has had a negative impact on the level of engagement and motivation from both an employee as well as customer perspective.

“If we, the Swedish Pharmacy Association, can ensure that pharmacy employees communicate the sustainability initiative Vålvald correctly and appropriately, then our ability to put further demands on the pharmaceutical industry increases”.

Lisa states that the Swedish Pharmacy Association has developed, within Miljögruppen, mutually agreed upon communications material that emphasises the importance of adequate explanation of the sustainability initiative. The material emphasises that Vålvald is not a sustainability label, but a sustainability guide and that a product with the Vålvald symbol does not guarantee sustainability. However, pharmacy chains have a certain degree of flexibility on how to use the communications material, as the Swedish Pharmacy Association does not engage in micromanaging their usage. In addition, the Swedish Pharmacy Association has also created an education program, with

recommendations regarding Vålvald, which essentially is a template. The pharmacy chains' have then, according to Lisa, been encouraged to implement the education program into their own business models. However, their ability to do so has varied, often due to size differences.

“It has been a challenge to incentivise pharmacy chains to market the initiative, as it does not make them unique.”

Lisa states that whilst there is the possibility to provide feedback for both employees and consumers, it is relatively uncommon. Lisa would like to have employees out in the pharmacies, identifying specific questions that the customers have regarding Vålvald. Neither the association nor the pharmacy chains have, however, had the opportunity to do so. According to Lisa there has been a number of employee surveys related to Vålvald, showing significant variation in the interest in Vålvald across pharmacy chains. One of the reasons for this is that the effects of Covid-19 pandemic have been long lasting, which has complicated the issue of prioritising the communication of Vålvald. Additionally, Lisa mentions that the motivation and commitment of employees regarding vålvald, has been significantly impacted by its relatively complicated nature. The employee's frequent inability to sufficiently clarify what exactly Vålvald is, has also led to confusion among customers.

## 4.2 Apoteksgruppen

Following the deregulation of the Swedish pharmacy market in 2009, a cluster of pharmacies, owned by small business owners formed, creating Apoteksgruppen. Today, Apoteksgruppen is owned by Euroapotheca and is both a pharmacy chain as well as a franchise (Apoteksgruppen 2023). Apoteksgruppen consists of close to 200 pharmacies, 160 of them part of the pharmacy chain and the rest is owned by individual entrepreneurs.

### 4.2.1 Helene Kristensen, Apoteksgruppen

Helene has been at Apoteksgruppen since the deregulation in 2009 and has served as the company's representative in Miljögruppen since its creation three years ago. She primarily works with quality, focusing on regulatory issues, error management and sustainability. Her interest in sustainability has gradually increased over the years, mainly due to her work with Vålvald. *“It is important that companies continue to develop, so that the sustainability aspect is continuously facilitated”*. Helene stresses the need for sustainability initiatives like Vålvald as; *“We do not necessarily know how pharmaceutical companies produce pharmaceuticals from a sustainability perspective”*.

The information provided by the Swedish Pharmacy Association, the communications material as well as the education program, has dictated the way Apoteksgruppen has engaged with Vålvald. Although there are regulations regarding the language of Vålvald, Helene still believes that Vålvald is perceived as relatively unclear and complicated. *“It is tricky to communicate Vålvald, particularly to customers, but potentially also internally, within the company”*. Helene believes that it is because of Vålvald being a sustainability guide and not a sustainability label. The issue of not understanding what a sustainability guide actually entails instigates confusion. Helene recognizes that it is essential that Vålvald is communicated the same way across all pharmacy chains, thus promoting the trustworthiness of the sustainability initiative. However, it is simultaneously important that the language used for Vålvald is adapted to that of the pharmacy chain, which in turn may help to clarify the vague tendencies of Vålvald. Helene also mentions that Vålvald has been subject to strict regulations in terms of language usage. That there has been a constant involvement of lawyers, ensuring that Vålvald is not perceived as greenwashing.

One of the major reasons for why the implementation of Vålvald in Apoteksgruppen strictly has followed the material provided by the Swedish Pharmacy Association, is that due to the company's familiarity with sustainability. Currently, Apoteksgruppen does not have a department devoted to sustainability, thus Helene argues that Apoteksgruppen has engaged with Vålvald in accordance with the conditions they have had. The pharmacy's wide collaboration with Vålvald has been rewarding according to Helene, as other pharmacy chains are now sharing information of their experiences that they otherwise would not. Helene has, in this collaboration, that several of the other pharmacy chains have had more experience engaging with the concept of sustainability, mainly due to pharmacies having different prerequisites. The expertise in sustainability brought by Trossa, the responsible party for reviewing the sustainability documentation, along with the experiences and extensive knowledge of all the representatives of Miljögruppen has made Helene feel confident and secure with the progression of Vålvald. Although other pharmacy chains may be more experienced regarding sustainability, Helene has been able to contribute to the progress of Vålvald mainly through her considerable knowledge in communications and her active part in the development of the education program. Helene's background in quality has been helpful as she has conducted internal audits of Apoteksgruppens' pharmacies, which has facilitated the assessment of Vålvald in the context of Apoteksgruppen. The audits have also enabled Helene to inquire about the employees' knowledge of Vålvald. As with all other pharmacy chains, Apoteksgruppen has also conducted internal surveys, which according to Helene has had a relatively good response rate.

Helene argues that it is difficult incorporating sustainability into the core of the advice that is provided by the pharmacies. *“The information provided by employees to customers, regarding Vålvald, cannot replace the existing advice given on non-prescription pharmaceuticals”*. It is a matter of balancing, Helene argues, emphasising that Vålvald ought to be incorporated into the core of the current counselling provided by pharmacies. Vålvald has also been relatively difficult to market as it needs to fit within a marketing campaign without taking something else’s place.

In the initial stages of the sustainability initiative, Vålvald was continuously brought to light internally within Apoteksgruppen during meetings. Additionally, Apoteksgruppen had a small division of people, whose primary task was to ascertain how to effectively communicate Vålvald as well as to identify how employees may best access the information. Over time the engagement in Vålvald during meetings has faded out, partially because of the situation with Covid-19. The internal communication, regarding Vålvald, has mostly been done through the company's intranet, where Vålvald has its own page. Employees also have the ability to directly provide feedback through the intranet. Prior to the implementation of Vålvald, all of the employees were to engage in the material provided on the intranet. Helene goes on to mention that the intranet is the main communications channel for all types of changes, including Vålvald. Information regarding changes throughout the company are also communicated to managers, specifically through “management letters”, which contains the same information as provided on the intranet. Helene acknowledges that you can not always guarantee that every employee has read all of the information provided on the intranet, even though it is the responsibility of the employee to engage with the material.

Helene has through the surveys been able to conclude that the employees' responses to Vålvald has generally been positive. Although, the responses also highlighted that employees find it difficult and complicated to talk about Vålvald. The main reasoning being that there is no simple way of communicating the sustainability initiative. In addition, due to the importance of using the correct words to describe Vålvald, it has been hard to appropriate its meaning and make it personal to the individual customer. Helene also believes that employees are not inclined to engage in questions which they do not know how to answer. However, Helene does not necessarily assume that it is a consequence of Vålvald not being sustainability label, as customers frequently do not know what sustainability labels actually entail, or what the true implications of such certifications are. To accommodate the need for increased knowledge of sustainability Helene suggests further incorporation of sustainability into the education of pharmacists, either at

university level or at the individual pharmacy chains. Employees are generally, within pharmacies, not directly familiar with the field of sustainability, which further increases the difficulty of communicating Vålvald.

## 4.3 Apoteket AB

Apoteket AB is the only state-owned actor on the Swedish pharmacy market and has around 3000 employees (Apoteket AB 2023). Currently, Apoteket AB has almost 400 pharmacies and is responsible for all of the 600 pharmacy agents, which are independent businesses conveying prescription medicines to customers and also are authorised to sell a selection of non-prescription pharmaceuticals on behalf of Apoteket AB.

### 4.3.1 Therese Hansen, Apoteket AB

Therese has been at Apoteket AB since 2010 and primarily works with strategy, management support, reporting and coordination. Sustainability has constantly been important for Therese, and she believes there has been a change over the years in the way companies approach sustainability; *“Companies are nowadays incorporating sustainability into their business model, demanding sustainable practices from suppliers and ensuring that they are not releasing pollutants”*.

Apoteket AB uses the commonly accepted approach of dividing sustainability into three parts, although appropriating them to the context of the pharmacies; healthy planet, healthy people and healthy business. Therese further mentions that the pharmacy chains are aware that the production of pharmaceuticals frequently occurs at the expense of the environment as well as people and that this particular issue encapsulates perhaps the most difficult challenge that the industry is facing. Apoteket AB, views sustainability from the perspective of risk, with emphasis on understanding the impact of business operations by focusing on the value chain. Therese explains that the impact that Apoteket AB has on sustainability is relatively small, although significant. However, with almost 1000 suppliers, each with their own suppliers, Apoteket AB has a complex supply chain that comes with potential risks which may be difficult to influence for Apoteket AB. Therese states that it is one of the reasons for why Vålvald, an industry wide collaboration, can have a larger impact than a company acting alone.

Therese further mentions that, beside the material provided by the Swedish Pharmacy Association, Apoteket AB is providing additional information about Vålvald through their intranät, digital monitors and QR-codes in the pharmacies. Previously, there were also brochures about Vålvald available at the pharmacies. However, due to a lack of interest, Apoteket AB has discontinued distributing the

brochure. The main issue that has been brought to light regarding Vålvald is that it has been difficult to explain, not only to the customer but also to employees. A common question from employees has been *“How can we easily explain what Vålvald is to the customer?”*.

Therese explains that the pharmacy chains were initially hesitant to share information about Vålvald to competitors, fearing it would damage their competitive position. Additionally, there were also some concerns regarding the name change of the sustainability initiative. Due to concern of being labelled as greenwashing, the initial tag-line for Vålvald was rather ambiguous and unclear. In turn, this made it harder to understand the purpose of Vålvald, both for consumers and employees, with its original tagline *“The pharmacies' guide for increased transparency”*. This was later changed to *“Pharmacies' demand for responsible pharmaceutical production”*, as a consequence of the progression of Vålvald, something that has made the pharmacy chains and the Swedish Pharmacy Association more courageous in their communications. According to Therese, the most difficult challenge of Vålvald has thus been communication related. The customer may be lost due to Vålvald sending an unclear message, partly because it is a sustainability guide, rather than a sustainability label. The fact that even if you use a product with the symbol of Vålvald, you do not necessarily consume sustainably. *“If the employees do not understand what Vålvald is, then it is impossible for them to explain it to a customer”*.

Furthermore, Therese also mentioned that Apoteket AB have recently also included Vålvald into *“Medvetna Val”* (Conscious choices) within their customer club, where customers receive bonus points when they purchase a product with the Vålvald symbol. The concept has been tested previously on other products within Apoteket AB, resulting in an increase in sales of the particular product. *“It is a way of incorporating Vålvald into business operations”*.

Meetings regarding Vålvald were initially common and frequent, in part because there was a substantial risk of Vålvald being associated with greenwashing. Currently, Vålvald is primarily communicated through Apoteket AB's own intranet. The ability to provide feedback for the employees is also possible through the company mailbox and on the intranet. The amount of feedback received regarding Vålvald has been limited because of the moderate commitment, which according to Therese is because employees have not really understood what Vålvald entails. *“If Vålvald is not necessarily better for the environment or people, what is the point of it?”*. Therese suggests highlighting real-life examples to help demonstrate the negative consequences of unsustainable pharmaceutical production practices to employees. By doing so, she thinks it is

possible to illustrate the need for Vålvald and increases the commitment and motivation amongst employees.

Therese believes that the collaboration between the pharmacy chains and the Swedish Pharmacy Association has been fruitful, emphasising the willingness to share experiences of various initiatives and ways of incorporating Vålvald into business operations. The competitive aspect is avoided thus promoting the unanimous goal. Although, Therese explains that the creativity has been somewhat limited to the agreed upon texts and material. According to Therese, the fact that Trossa assesses the information from the pharmaceutical companies is a crucial aspect as to why Vålvald has been successful. By having a third party reviewing the information, concerns of the pharmaceutical companies are alleviated, resulting in an increased willingness to provide production related information.

## 4.4 Apotek Hjärtat

Apotek Hjärtat is Sweden's largest pharmacy chain and consists of close to 400 pharmacies, with over 4000 employees (Apotek Hjärtat 2023). The pharmacy chain was created in 2010 and is currently owned by the Ica-group.

### 4.4.1 Cecilia de Pedro, Apotek Hjärtat

Cecilia has been at Apotek Hjärtat since 2014, and was its first environmental manager. Apotek Hjärtat has ever since had the intent to make sustainability related demands, which 2017 concluded in the sustainability initiative Välj med Hjärtat. Sustainability is and has been the core of Cecilia's worklife, but it is also deeply important to Cecilia on a more personal level. Cecilia thoroughly believes that collaboration is essential for the progression of sustainability. *“To drive the development of sustainability forward, collaboration is needed between civil society, private sector, legislation and research, which is complex and necessitates major resources”*. Cecilia goes on to mention that finding appropriate incentives is also highly relevant, if we want to change the current global structures.

Sustainability has become a core focus for Apotek Hjärtat, emphasising the responsibility to protect the environment, promoting accountability throughout the supply chain. Apotek Hjärtat views sustainability from the perspective of *public health, social responsibility and quality, environment and climate, workplace development*. Cecilia mentioned that Apotek Hjärtat has implemented a range of sustainability initiatives, including encouraging suppliers to sign SBT (Science Based Target), utilising electric trucks and collaborating with suppliers to make



lifecycle analyses, inter alia. The wide variety of various sustainability initiatives, facilitates Apotek Hjärtat ability to holistically account for their business operations according to Cecilia.

The collaboration and involvement of the Swedish Pharmacy Association has increased the quality of the work related to Vålvald. In addition, the expert support from the third party Trossa has indeed been a determining factor for the development of Vålvald. Cecilia has throughout the collaboration advocated for the importance of recognizing the main goal; driving sustainable development forward, thereby emphasising the need for disregarding the competitive nature of the market in the instance of Vålvald. The collaboration regarding Vålvald has, according to Cecilia, been fruitful. Pharmacy chains are now also beginning to collaborate on other sustainability related initiatives, primarily related to distribution and packaging. *“Dialogue leads to synergy effects in other areas”*. The synergy effects that Cecilia has witnessed is something she believes other industries could learn from. Overall, Cecilia has a positive attitude towards the collaboration of Vålvald, as it has reinforced the impetus of the sustainability initiative. Working together with other actors on the market enables the ability to put further demands on pharmaceutical companies. There is however, a lot of leeway and people are hesitant to set high demands, which is unfortunate according to Cecilia.

Cecilia admits that there are some internal interests within Apotek Hjärtat that would have wanted to keep Vål med Hjärtat within the organisation. Although Vål med Hjärtat was creating goodwill for the company, Cecilia recognizes that it did not create sufficient goodwill for the customer. The decision to collaborate within the market has mitigated potential confusion for customers as well as pharmaceutical companies. Prior to the decision to collaborate, there was more of a significant incentive to promote Vål med Hjärtat, as pharmacy chains tend to want to communicate what makes them unique on the market.

The rather rigid communication of Vålvald, is a consequence of the necessity of unanimous communication. This is something that has made Apotek Hjärtat feel restrained and that has limited both the employees' and customers' motivation to engage with Vålvald. Cecilia notes that there is no way to briefly and concisely explain Vålvald, which would enhance the ability to understand the initiative.

“When it's difficult to determine what you are allowed to say, the message becomes ambiguous, leading to the loss of engagement”.

During the initial years of the sustainability initiative (2017-2019), when it still was Vål med Hjärtat, the initiative was met with immense pride within the

organisation by both management and employees. The people at Apotek hjärtat were proud of the original sustainability initiative, which Cecilia believes to be the main reason for the initial high level of motivation and engagement amongst employees. During Välj med Hjärtat, Apotek Hjärtat were also more inclined to take risks, which made it easier to communicate. Cecilia has since then noticed an indirect decrease in interest, in both employees and customers of the sustainability initiative. Cecilia believes the reason is a combination of the shift from Välj med Hjärtat to Välvald and also, the Covid-19 pandemic. Cecilia also stresses the issue of marketing, as Välvald does not add to the competitiveness of a pharmacy chain. Consequently, pharmacy chains are not incentivized to invest in marketing campaigns.

Apotek Hjärtat has recently started to measure the share of sales of Välvald. Recommending products with the symbol of Välvald would increase the sales of such products, and thus incentivise pharmaceutical companies to become a part of Välvald. Cecilia believes that relying solely on possible legislative changes is insufficient and needs to be complimented by appropriate financial incentives. Sustainability needs to become financially beneficial, which also has been advocated for by the pharmaceutical companies. That there needs to be a balance between profitability and legislation to facilitate a more sustainable industry. Cecilia believes that it is crucial that pharmaceutical companies are incentivised to become a part of Välvald. Cecilia suggested charging the pharmaceutical companies a fee for Välvald so that pharmacies can push the sale of these products. *“It is the reason why a fee has to be charged for the symbol of Välvald in the future”*.

Cecilia notes that the fact that Välvald is not yet a sustainability label has limited the potential foothold of Välvald. Employees would have an easier time to understand and communicate the details of Välvald if it was a sustainability label. A sustainability label would enable the simple explanation that Välvald is an environmentally-friendly alternative. Cecilia emphasises that there is a need to find ways to effectively maintain information, to continuously communicate Välvald, so that both employees and customers remain engaged. Cecilia states that the effect of greenwashing has limited the development of Välvald, as neither pharmacy chains nor the Swedish Pharmacy Association want to be accused of greenwashing. As the nature of pharmacies is based on research, pharmacies are not prone to take risks. Consequently, Välvald has not been able to take certain developmental steps.

Currently the ongoing dialogue within Miljögruppen has not yet addressed the subject of how to motivate employees to engage with Välvald, which is something Cecilia would like to see in the future. Cecilia suggests that competitions could be

useful to find innovative ways to initiate a dialogue about välvald. For example, pharmacies could create engagement competitions or communication competitions, related to Välvald, both internally and between the pharmacy chains.

All of the communications material provided by the Swedish Pharmacy Association, regarding Välvald, is adapted to the internal standard of Apotek Hjärtat. The information is then redistributed primarily through their own intranet, which also provides the ability to directly contact Cecilia with feedback. Employees also have the ability to provide feedback regarding Välvald through the “idea box”. All types of feedback, including that related to Välvald, is reviewed on a monthly basis by the support office. Additionally, Apotek Hjärtat has also created tests and quizzes that the employees use to test their knowledge. Cecilia strongly believes that the information and communication of Välvald needs to be further incorporated into daily routines, which she also argues emphasises the need to tailor Välvald to each pharmacy chain. Cecilia has the hope that eventually, legislation is going to raise the bar, enforcing further demands on the industry. Hoping that Välvald is going to become a standard for all products that the pharmacies offer, so that sustainability no longer is a choice, but instead a requirement for all products.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

*The fifth chapter presents both the analysis and the discussion of the study. The presented analysis and discussion is based on chapter 4 Empirical findings, as well as the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2. The chapter is structured according to the theoretical framework of the study.*

The following themes were identified by analysing empirical data; Fostering sustainability through collaboration, Sustainability integration and practices, Communication and information clarity, Employee engagement and motivation, Incentivization and financial benefits (see figure 1. Roadmap of the concept-theme analysis). The presented themes will be discussed and analysed throughout the following chapter. Examples of how each of the themes that were identified is provided in Appendix 4.

### 5.1 Triple bottom line

TBL is a widely accepted framework both within research and practice (Alhaddi 2015; Savitz 2013; Slaper & Hall 2011). It is a framework that focuses on balancing each of the three dimensions of sustainability equally; that is, *environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability* (Clarke 2001; Elkington 1997). As highlighted by Elkington (1997), even though the primary intention with TBL is to measure a company's performance, TBL can also be used to understand sustainability and the interconnectedness between the three dimensions. Based on the empirical data, all of the pharmaceutical chains indicate the integration of sustainability in business requires a broad and holistic perspective, emphasising the necessity of transparency. Although Apoteket and Apotek Hjärtat have adapted the name of the dimensions of sustainability into the pharmacy and company context, the two pharmacy chains have both integrated the concept of TBL into business operations. Apoteket AB defines sustainability as *healthy planet, healthy people and healthy business*, whereas Apotek Hjärtat defines sustainability on the basis of four dimensions; *public health, social responsibility and quality, environment and climate, workplace development*. Furthermore, all of the interviewees agreed that the current production of

pharmaceuticals, which pharmacies are directly tied to, frequently results in negative environmental and social consequences. Despite the differences in familiarity of TBL, all interviewees also indicated a common understanding that sustainability requires a balance between environmental, social and economic aspects. Thus, the interviewees recognized that the interplay between the three dimensions is essential for success, as asserted by Hahn et al. (2010) and Littig and Griessler (2005). It was also noted by both Lisa and Cecilia in the interviews that the pharmacy chains' sustainability efforts with regards to Vålvald, have been limited by the initiative's financial viability. More specifically, marketing Vålvald has been of concern as pharmacies do not necessarily gain a competitive advantage by incorporating Vålvald in their marketing campaigns. Additional concern was also highlighted by Helene, who stated that it was difficult to include Vålvald within current marketing campaigns without taking the place of other products. Thus, there is currently insufficient incentive, i.e. perceived financial benefits, of incorporating Vålvald into market campaigns.

Due to the economic dimension being a prerequisite for long term viability and the future success of the sustainability initiative, it is worth highlighting financial conditions as pointed out by the interviewees. Vålvald is currently funded by the pharmacy chains engaged in the sustainability initiative, thus Vålvald has required an initial investment from the pharmacy chains. As noted by Bohmholdt (2014), incorporating sustainability may require an initial investment, but could, in the long run, lead to increased financial performance. Although Vålvald has required initial financial investment, an argument could be made that Vålvald will not increase the financial performance of the pharmacy chains, but instead increase the financial performance of pharmaceutical producing companies that are a part of Vålvald. By becoming a part of Vålvald, the pharmaceutical companies are initially faced with demands to fulfil certain criteria that also requires an initial financial investment. However, by pursuing avenues that are not solely financial, the pharmaceutical companies may effectively incorporate environmental and social sustainability aspects under the umbrella of profit maximisation, thereby gaining a competitive advantage over other market actors.

## 5.2 Organisational communication

As highlighted by Husain (2013) and Tariszka-Semegine (2012) organisational communication is considered an integral part of organisational change and affects the performance outcome. As evidenced by the empirical data, communication has been the foremost challenge throughout the implementation of Vålvald. Lisa specifically mentioned that communication of Vålvald has been significantly impacted by the fear of association with greenwashing, which, according to her,

has led to greenhushing. Unable to use specific terms associated with sustainability, the administrators of Vålvald have indirectly felt forced to use terms that lack clarity. This directly relates to Ettinger et al. (2021) assertion, that greenhushing is the under-communication of sustainability efforts due to the potential fear of being associated with greenwashing. The effect to which greenhushing has had on Vålvald has limited the development and progression of Vålvald, thereby affirming Carlos and Lewis (2018) argument that greenhushing limits the effect of sustainability efforts, as stakeholder recognition is impeded. Moreover, all of the interviewees mentioned that the core of the difficulty communicating Vålvald is due to the fact that Vålvald is a sustainability guide rather than a sustainability label. Lisa pointed out that the limitations that have come with Vålvald being a sustainability guide has severely hampered the effect of the sustainability initiative. Helene noted that although difficult to understand and communicate, the trustworthiness of Vålvald has, however, been facilitated by the communication guidelines implemented by the Swedish Pharmacy Association.

Furthermore, there are two main objectives with organisational communication: firstly, to inform the workforce of their responsibilities and the organisation's policies; and secondly, to create unity through fostering of a community (De Ridder 2004; Elving 2005; Francis 1987). Organisational communication can thus be divided into informative communication and communication used to create a unity (Elving 2005). Based on the empirical data, the communication regarding Vålvald has solely been centred around that of informative communication, leading to the second objective to be missed or ignored; or that this stage of communication has not yet been reached. Although the literature distinguishes between informative communication and communication intended to foster community and unity, the analysis suggests, interestingly enough, that the collaboration in the creation and implementation of Vålvald seems to have produced a sense of community and unity between the pharmacy chains, despite its primary focus on informative communication. More specifically, this collaboration has fostered trust and encouraged the sharing of experiences, leading to synergy effects as emphasised by Cecilia de Pedro. As a result, pharmacy chains are now beginning to collaborate on other sustainability initiatives. Thus, the empirical data support the argument made by Alvesson (2012), that communication acts as a “social glue” within the organisational setting. By extension, an argument could be made that the empirical data would then also suggest that “social glue” is relevant in the context of informative communication. Thereby indicating that communication acts as a “social glue” in the organisational setting, even in the context of informative communication. Important to note however, this argument solely applies to the communication and relationship between the pharmacy chains. There is no evidence within the

empirical data suggesting that the internal communication in the pharmacy chains has facilitated the fostering of a community in the context of Vålvald. Thus, the empirical data suggests that the two objectives of organisational communication are seemingly interconnected, as the empirical data implies that informative communication facilitates building a community. In turn, the two objectives of organisational communication may perhaps be more interconnected than previously indicated within the literature, i.e. that informative communication may play a significant role in facilitating a community.

Moreover, in relation to the previous line of thought, i.e. building a community, the original version of the sustainability initiative; Vål med Hjärtat, needs to be highlighted. Cecilia de Pedro noted that the transition from Vål med Hjärtat to Vålvald has resulted in more rigid communication of the sustainability initiative, as a direct consequence of the necessity of unanimous communication. Cecilia also noted an indirect decrease in the engagement of Vålvald by employees. The empirical data provided regarding Vål med Hjärtat highlights a sense of pride that came with the introduction of the sustainability initiative. While it could be argued that the original sustainability initiative created a sort of unity, it is uncertain if it was due to the effect of internal organisational communication.

Effective organisational communication plays a vital role for creating a productive work environment (Baker 2007; Rajhans 2012), frequently resulting in increased employee commitment and trust, as well as increasing their readiness for change (Elving 2005). In the context of Vålvald, several aspects have impacted the level of effectiveness in the organizational communication. As previously highlighted, the constant perceived fear of greenwashing, resulting in greenhushing, has severely impacted the organisational communication effectiveness. Consequently, the organisational communication has been partially suboptimal, thus clarity has been reduced, as emphasised by Lisa regarding the original tagline of Vålvald. The effects of greenhushing were also mentioned by Cecilia, stating that Vålvald has been developmentally limited by the effects of greenhushing. Additionally, Lisa stated that customers frequently asked sustainability related questions that the pharmacy employees were unable to answer, due to the lack of available information. In turn, the inability to provide accurate information further suggests that the organisational communication has not been optimised. It also suggests that there is a knowledge gap due to the inefficiencies associated with pharmacy chains' current organisational communication.

### 5.3 Motivation

As highlighted by Manzoor (2012), countless organisations fail to recognize the importance of motivation. The empirical data suggests that there have been certain limitations, especially related to that of greenwashing and by extension greenhushing, to the communication of Vælvald. As a direct consequence of the need to adapt the communication, the message has become ambiguous and seemingly hard to understand, thus infringing on employee engagement.

As described by Rajhans (2012) and Husain (2013), communication is key when it comes to employee motivation and performance. Throughout all interviews, communication was also indicated to be the primary challenge with Vælvald. Helene explained that it is difficult to communicate Vælvald, while Lisa pointed out that the complexity of Vælvald has significantly impacted the motivation and commitment of employees. Lisa also noted that employees' inability to clearly communicate Vælvald has negatively impacted the customers' ability to understand what Vælvald is. According to Helene, there is currently no simple way of explaining Vælvald, which was similarly noted by Cecilia saying that there is no way of briefly and concisely explaining Vælvald, which also was mentioned by Therese: "*How can we easily explain what Vælvald is to the customer?*". Therese also mentioned that Vælvald has attracted moderate commitment as employees have not really understood what it entails. In addition, Lisa pointed out that employees have had difficulties understanding Vælvald and how to effectively communicate it, which in turn has negatively impacted the level of engagement and motivation from both an employee as well as customer perspective. Vælvalds' seemingly complicated nature has limited employees' ability to understand the purpose of Vælvald and how to effectively communicate it. As pointed out by Cecilia, "*When it's difficult to determine what you are allowed to say, the message becomes ambiguous, leading to the loss of engagement*". Consequently, the interviews revealed that communication has been the main challenge with Vælvald. While Vælvald seems regarded as a generally successful sustainability initiative, the empirical data indicates that further efforts are needed to simplify the message and clarify the purpose of the initiative to employees and other stakeholders. The current inability to sufficiently clarify what Vælvald is, both to employees and, by extension, to customers, has negatively impacted Vælvald's progression. By addressing the issues regarding the complexity of the communication, employee motivation and engagement may be facilitated as indicated by Rajhans (2012) and Luecke (2003).

While motivated employees are argued to be crucial for the success of a company (Mathooko 2014; Manzoor 2012), motivating employees is at the same time regarded as a difficult task (Osabiya 2015). Therefore, it is vital for managers to



understand employees' needs to motivate them effectively (ibid.). The empirical data suggests that the motivation regarding the sustainability initiative Vålvald is a consequence of the general appreciation of sustainability efforts, rather than employees being motivated by the actual sustainability initiative, thus indicating that the employees have been motivated by intrinsic motivation; the engagement in an activity for the inherent satisfaction or for the personal interest that it brings (Ryan & Deci 2000; Vallerand 1997). However, Cecilia explained that during the time of Välj med Hjärtat, there was a sense of pride that later faded out when the sustainability initiative no longer solely belonged to Apotek Hjärtat. By enabling other market actors to take part in the sustainability initiative, the motivation and engagement of the employees within Apotek Hjärtat regarding the sustainability initiative declined. The transition from Välj med Hjärtat to Vålvald is therefore important for the understanding of what motivates employees, and how.

## 5.4 Implications for corporate sustainability strategy

This section offers an analysis and discussion of the implications for corporate sustainability strategy, based on the findings relevant to sustainability in business practice, organisational communication and motivation with regards to greenwashing and greenhushing.

Existing research literature as well as the empirical findings of the study, indicate that organisational communication is key for motivation. However, the empirical data of this study indicates a series of challenges associated with organisational communication and motivation in the context of the implementation of Vålvald. These challenges further complicate and hinder the progression of Vålvald, thereby reducing the overall efficiency of the sustainability initiative. Addressing these challenges may in turn highlight difficulties with integrating corporate sustainability into strategic management.

The integration of corporate sustainability in the context of Vålvald has not been straightforward, as highlighted by the empirical material. The fear of greenwashing has led to greenhushing, severely limiting the ability to communicate, resulting in unclear communication. Unclear communication, in addition to the lack of general sustainability knowledge has then made it difficult for employees to understand Vålvald. Inadequate understanding of the sustainability initiative has then also affected the level of engagement, thus the motivation of employees.

The existing under-communication, evident in the empirical data, is also likely to partially be a result of the inability to plainly and concisely explain Vålvald;

which in turn is associated with Vålvald being a sustainability guide rather than a sustainability label. This is particularly interesting in light of Font's (2017) assertion, i.e. that greenhushing not necessarily is the result of poor communication or confidence, but sometimes occurs when businesses attempt to bridge the gap or reduce dissonance between the businesses' sustainability values and the expectation from customers. The occurrence of greenhushing, as expressed by the interviewees, may thus also be an attempt at circumventing customer expectation, as customers may associate a sustainability guide with the guarantee of product sustainability.

As noted in the literature, companies frequently tend to accentuate their sustainability efforts in order to enhance their market competitiveness (Font et al. 2017). However, due to Vålvald being rooted in collaboration rather than competitiveness, it is possible that the already unclear communication is augmented by and through greenhushing. Such exclusion from competition results in the lack of financial incentive for pharmacy chains and thus negatively impacts the organisational communication. As suggested by Cecilia, a possible solution would be for pharmaceutical companies to pay a fee that would in turn finance the pharmacy chains' marketing campaigns. By financing the marketing campaigns, the pharmaceutical companies may further promote sustainability as a competitive advantage, thus differentiating their products on the market, while simultaneously preserving the collaboration between the pharmacies regarding Vålvald.

Moreover, in relation to the experienced lack of communication clarity and difficulty understanding Vålvald, both Baumgartner (2009) and Epstein et al. (2010), highlight the importance of continuous and correct communication. The inability to clearly and frequently communicate Vålvald to the employees and customers, limits the ability to understand the sustainability initiative. As mentioned by Baumgartner (2010), continuous and correct communication is vital for the development and implementation of corporate sustainability strategy. All of the interviewees argued the limited understanding of Vålvald originated from the fact that it is a sustainability guide rather than a sustainability label. Although the information provided is correct, the limited understanding of what a sustainability guide entails diminishes Vålvald's potential to make an impact, primarily because products included in Vålvald are not necessarily sustainable. This particular concern was seconded by Therese: *"If Vålvald is not necessarily better for the environment or people, what is the point of it?"*

Research indicates that effective communication alleviates concerns and resistance associated with organisational change and thus facilitates the implementation process (Daly et al. 2003; Elving 2005; Husain 2013). The presented empirical data does suggest that Vålvald has been met with partial

resistance from the employees. The resistance is showcased in employees' unwillingness to engage in conversations with customers regarding Vålvald. The findings suggest that employees are generally positive or neutral about the initiative, but inadequately equipped to clarify and communicate what Vålvald entails. The highlighted communicational inefficiencies, as described by all interviewees, related to that of the pharmacies organisational communication, may thus, if dealt with appropriately, further facilitate the implementation of Vålvald. Having a corporate structure and a sustainability strategy is not considered to be enough to ensure that progression can be made towards sustainability goals (Baumgartner 2009). Education of the collaborators, continuous and correct communication and the integration in all of the organisational processes must also be integrated into the decision-making of corporate sustainability strategy as indicated by (Baumgartner 2009; Epstein et al. 2010).

In order to further facilitate the progression of Vålvald, one potential solution would be to effectively incorporate Vålvald into the counselling that is provided by employees to customers. Helene argues that further incorporation of sustainability is needed within the education of pharmacists, either at university level or at the individual pharmacy chains. Cecilia, on the other hand, draws attention to the need to further incorporate Vålvald into daily routines. According to Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010), the integration of corporate sustainability into the core of the business presents numerous opportunities, including employee engagement and through this motivation. Although different perspectives, Cecilia and Helene both, brought to light possible solutions to better integrate the sustainability initiative. However, as highlighted by the empirical data, it is vital that such integration of Vålvald must not impede on, or at all affect the current counselling. Integrating sustainability into daily routines may facilitate the general understanding of sustainability and thus increase the understanding of Vålvald. As stated by Helene, employees are not inclined to engage in discussions that raise questions which they do not know how to answer. Consequently, by increasing the understanding of sustainability and therefore Vålvald, employees may become more willing to engage in the sustainability initiative. Ensuring motivated employees increases their alignment with company goals and objectives (Egan 1998; Manzoor 2012). Thus, an argument could be made that internal consensus, which is considered an essential component of successful strategic management (Rodrigues & Franco 2019), is interconnected with such an alignment. Arguably, such an alignment requires a shared agreement and understanding among employees regarding the organisational goal, strategy and direction. Consequently, the motivation of employees can be directly linked to internal consensus, that motivation can promote internal consensus. Therefore, integrating sustainability into the core of business operations may also promote a workforce

that is better motivated as it allows employees to become more familiar with the organisation's goals in regards to sustainability.

To sum up, in order to facilitate the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy and effectively address and anticipate the challenges associated with the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy, organisations may consider taking the following recommendations into account. It is vital to integrate sustainability throughout the core of business operations and into daily routines. This approach, when combined with clear and effective organisational communication enables sustainability understanding and familiarity. Thus, establishing sustainability as an integral part of the organisation ensures employee understanding which facilitates employee engagement powered by motivation. In turn, ensuring motivated employees facilitates the alignment with company goals and promotes internal consensus.

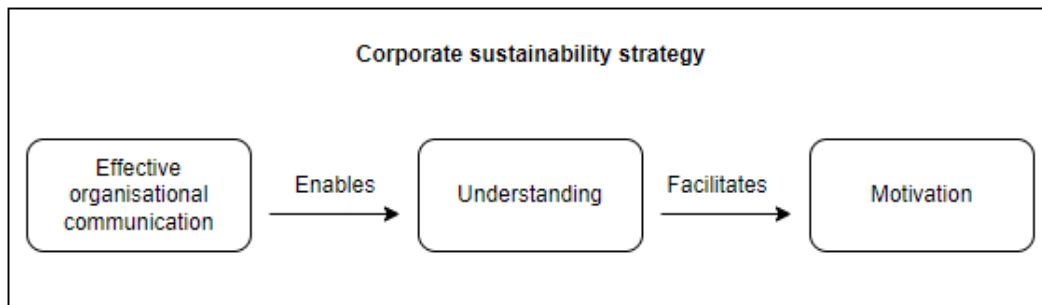


Figure 3. Facilitating the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy (own illustration)

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of the study has been to explore the role of organisational communication and motivation in the implementation process of corporate sustainability strategies. By addressing the importance of organisational communication and motivation, in the context of Vålvald, the author aims to shed light on how pharmaceutical chains may improve the implementation of corporate sustainability strategies. The research questions that guided the research were:

**RQ1:** What is the role of organisational communication in the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

**RQ2:** What is the role of motivation in the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

**RQ3:** How does the communication-motivation relationship affect the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy?

The findings of the study reveal that organisational communication is critical to the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy. The findings highlight that the unsatisfactory ability to understand sustainability-related information, which is provided through unclear organisational communication, resulting from the phenomenon of greenhushing, hampers the effect to which a corporate sustainability strategy may have. However, the perceived unclarity of the communication may be a consequence of limited prior knowledge of sustainability in combination with the lack of continuous communication.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the success of the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy does not intrinsically depend on motivation, but rather is facilitated by it. It is evident that current employee motivation of Vålvald stems from the general appreciation for sustainability efforts, rather than the actual initiative.

The findings indicate that organisational communication does play a significant role in influencing motivation, indicating that there is strong communication-motivation relationship. More specifically, the findings suggest that effective organisational communication enables understanding which facilitates employee engagement powered by motivation. The significance of organisational

communication in the studied context, highlights its direct impact on employee motivation and by extension the success of the strategy used to implement the sustainability initiative Vålvald.

Ensuring employee understanding through clear and continuous communication practices, that encourages employee engagement and motivation, are essential for organisations to overcome challenges associated with greenwashing, and effectively implement a corporate sustainability strategy. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the increased emphasis that should be put on the importance of understanding in relation to the implementation of a corporate sustainability strategy. In practical terms, this study may encourage organisations to adopt strategies focused on enabling employee understanding in order to address the challenges associated with the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy.

## 6.1 Future research

As indicated by the empirical data, Apotek Hjärtat, faced challenges in making demands as a single pharmacy chain. This suggests an implication regarding the original sustainability initiative; Välj med Hjärtat's ability to further promote change without broader collaboration. Important to mention however is that the former version of the sustainability initiative; Välj med Hjärtat, did not include a review from an objective third party, which may have significantly impacted the initiative's success. While this issue does not directly apply to the current version of Vålvald, it still remains relevant for future research on the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy i.e the impact of collaboration versus competition.

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## Popular science summary

Historically, the primary focus of corporations have been on making profits, leading to intense competition within industries. Over time the focus has shifted, and in today's world, it is common for corporations to also include social and environmental aspects, thus integrating the concept of sustainability. Corporations often integrate sustainability because it may give them an edge over their competitors and improve their overall performance. Although corporations recognize the potential advantages sustainability brings, they often find it challenging to develop a strategy for its implementation. Inability to create a clear strategy for the sustainability implementation frequently leads to sustainability efforts failing. Corporations sometimes pursue sustainability with bad intent, intentionally misleading customers through false information about their sustainability efforts i.e. greenwashing, making it hard for customers to distinguish genuine sustainable corporations. As a result, sustainability efforts are now met with increasing scepticism, leading corporations to fear accusations of greenwashing, causing corporations to deliberately withhold information about sustainability efforts i.e. greenhushing.

Although people are generally unwilling to change, effective communication and motivation may facilitate a smooth implementation of corporate sustainability by encouraging individuals to embrace the necessary changes it brings. Communication and motivation have been identified as vital for the implementation of sustainability strategy, the specific impact of such strategy implementation has however not yet been examined.

The sustainability initiative Vålvald, which is based on the collaboration between Swedish pharmacies, aims at making the production of non-prescription medicines more sustainable. Vålvald promotes sustainability through transparency, showing how the medicines were produced. By sharing production information, customers are now able to make more sustainable purchasing decisions. This thesis examines the impact of communication and motivation on corporate sustainability strategy implementation, as well as the relationship between them in the context of sustainability initiative Vålvald. Representatives from the Swedish Pharmacy Association, Apoteksgruppen, Apoteket AB and

Apoteket Hjärtat were interviewed to gain further insight of the corporate sustainability strategy implementation process. By understanding how communication and motivation impact the implementation of sustainability strategies, we can improve strategies for a more sustainable future.

The findings reveal that the success of the sustainability initiative Vålvald is negatively impacted by employees' limited understanding of the sustainability initiative. The communication efforts regarding Vålvald towards employees has been insufficient, due to limited prior sustainability knowledge and the presence of greenhushing. The results suggest that effective communication enables the understanding of sustainability efforts which in turn facilitates employee motivation.



## Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude towards my supervisor Erik Melin, who has continuously provided excellent feedback and guidance throughout the study process. I truly do appreciate your help!

I would also like to thank Sofia Kälvemarm Sporrang, for her valuable insight and advice, which greatly contributed to the progression of the study.

Additionally, I would also like to express my appreciation to all the interviewees for taking the time to participate in the study; Lisa Stern Ödmark, Helene Kristensen, Therese Hansen and Cecilia de Pedro.

Johan Hägg  
Uppsala, 2023

## Appendix 1. Literature search

*Appendix 1 shows the words and the combinations of them used in the literature search.*

1. “corporate strategy” **AND** “sustain\*” **OR** “sustainability in business” **OR** “TBL” **OR** “Triple bottom line”
2. “corporate strategy” **AND** “Organisational change” **OR** “organisational performance” **OR** “strategic management”
3. “corporate sustainability” **AND** “Pharmacy” **OR** “Pharmacy industry”
4. “organisational communication”
5. “employee motivation” **OR** “engagement”
6. “greenwashing” **OR** “greenhushing” **AND** “ drivers” **OR** “sustain\*”

## Appendix 2. Interview guide

*Appendix 1 shows the utilised interview guide in the study.*

Description aim of the study.

Quality of assurance, anonymity, recording

### **Presentation**

- Tell me about yourself, who are you and what position within the organisation?
- How long have you worked here?
- What is your personal view of sustainability?
- Tell me about the pharmacy chain/the Swedish Pharmacy Association
- Can you describe how the pharmacy chain/the Swedish Pharmacy Association works with sustainability? What is it that motivates the sustainability work?
- Could you tell me about välvald?

### **Triple bottom line**

- How does the pharmacy chain/the Swedish Pharmacy Association define sustainability?
- Is sustainability divided according to TBL? (Environmental, social and economic)
- With regard to the sustainability guide Välvald, what guides your sustainability work? What works well? Are there any limitations?

### **Organisational communication**

- How is information regarding Välvald communication communicated internally/to the pharmacy chains?
- How does the sustainability information flow in the organisation? Is it communicated by management? Are there opportunities for employees to provide feedback?

### **Motivation**

- Is there an active effort to motivate pharmacy chains/employees to take part in the sustainability work? If so, how?
- What responsibilities in regards to välvald do the employees have?
- How do employees in different positions work with Välvald?

### **Finishing question**

- Looking ahead, what does the future look like for välvald? How will Välvald develop?

# Intervjuguide

Beskrivning av arbetets syfte.

Kvalitetssäkring, anonymitet, inspelning

## **Presentation**

- Berätta lite om dig själv, vem är du och vad har du för position?
- Hur länge har du jobbat här?
- Hur är din personliga syn på hållbarhet?
- Berätta om apotekskedjan/Sveriges Apoteksförening
- Kan du beskriva hur apotekskedjan/Sveriges Apoteksförening arbetar med hållbarhet? Vad är det som motiverar hållbarhetsarbetet?
- Berätta om välvald.

## **Triple Bottom line**

- Hur definierar företaget/Sveriges Apoteksförening hållbarhet?
- Delas hållbarhet upp enligt TBL? (Miljö, samhälle och ekonomi).
- Med relation till hållbarhetsguiden Välvald, vad styr ert hållbarhetsarbete? Vad fungerar bra? Finns det begränsningar?

## **Organisatorisk kommunikation**

- Hur kommuniceras information om Välvald internt/ till apotekskedjor?
- Hur flödar information om hållbarhet inom företaget? Kommuniceras den från ledning ut vidare i företaget? Finns det möjlighet för anställda att ge feedback?

## **Motivation**

- Försöker man aktivt motivera apotekskedjor/anställda att ta del av Välvald? Hur?
- Vilket ansvar har anställda gällande Välvald?
- Hur har välvald mottagits av de olika apotekskedjorna?

## **Avslutning**

- Om vi blickar framåt, hur ser framtiden ut för välvald? Hur kommer välvald att utvecklas?

## Appendix 3. Written consent

*Appendix 3 shows the written consent that was signed by all of the interviewees.*

**Institutionen för ekonomi**

**Samtyckesblankett**

2023-03-23

### Samtyckesblankett: Personuppgiftsbehandling i studentarbeten

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Underskrift

Plats, datum

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Namnförtydligande

## Appendix 4. Examples of each of the identified themes

*Appendix 4 shows how each of the themes were identified in the study.*

Participant	Transcript Excerpt	Code(s)	Analysis	Theme(s)
Lisa	Unwilling to use the word sustainability, due to the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, the members of the Mijögruppen eventually settled on the name Vävald.	Greenwashing (GW1)	Lisa acknowledges concerns that Vävald may be interpreted or perceived as greenwashing.	Communication and information clarity
Therese	<i>"Companies are nowadays incorporating sustainability into their business model, demanding sustainable practices from suppliers and ensuring that they are not releasing pollutants"</i>	Triple bottom line (TBL1)	Therese recognizes that businesses are increasingly taking responsibility for their impact on the world.	Sustainability integration and practices
Cecilia	<i>"When it's difficult to determine what you are allowed to say, the message becomes ambiguous, leading to the loss of engagement"</i>	Organisational communication (OC1)	Inability to understand Vävald as a consequence to unclear communication leads to the lessening of employee engagement and motivation	Employee engagement and motivation
Therese	Therese explains that the pharmacy chains were initially hesitant to share information about Vävald to competitors, fearing it would damage their competitive position.	Organisational communication (OC2)	The shift of pharmacy chains approach to sharing information How pharmacy chains now are willing to share information that they previously would not.	Fostering sustainability through collaboration
Lisa	<i>"It has been a challenge to incentivise pharmacy chains to market the initiative, as it does not make them unique."</i>	Corporate sustainability strategy (CSS 1)	There is not enough financial incentive to market Vävald.	Incentivization and financial benefits

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