

Young talent as the driving force towards a sustainable future

A case study of SAMEEN

Kobert Christiaan Scholten | S4330366

Tel: 0681968589 email: k.c.scholten@student.rug.nl

Supervised by: Prof. Dr. Gjalt de Jong, g.de.jong@rug.nl

Co-assessor: Dr. Emma Folmer

University of Groningen, Campus Fryslân

Wirdumerdijk 34, 8911 CE, Leeuwarden

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the institutional forces that drive the market of sustainable consultancy and find out how these forces can be altered to make young talent front runners in the transition to a sustainable future. It builds off the theory of institutional entrepreneurship in which organizations are able to alter institutional forces in a market. A case study is done on SAMEEN, a company that creates sustainable side jobs for students. Eight senior consultants of different companies are interviewed in a semi-structured manner to ensure an in-depth understanding of the forces. Three main institutional forces are found, namely, the influence of the government on the market, the standards in acquiring new business, and the perception on the role of young talent. It furthermore finds that the ability to change, or act on, institutional forces is heavily influenced by how mature a sub-market is. The research concludes with concrete strategies for SAMEEN on how to deal with these forces and institutionalize their business model. This research gives an answer to different calls from the literature for a more strategy-driven analysis of the impact of the macrolevel concepts that are institutional forces on individual businesses.

INTRODUCTION

The sixth assessment of the international panel on climate change (IPCC) again calls for a drastic reduction in greenhouse gasses (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2021). It is well agreed upon that the youngest generations will be the first to actively see, feel and live with the effects of climate change and the consequences of today's (in)ability to act on it ("Youth for climate action," 2019). The consensus, therefore, states that structural changes need to be made to limit the emission of greenhouse gasses.

As a result, legislation regarding climate change is becoming more ambitious. This makes for a new challenge. The first reaction to the new national government policy accord of the Netherlands was 'Money (and ambition) is not the problem, it's the manpower. Without people with the right qualifications, it's not possible to realize these ambitions' ("Probleem van het regeerakkoord," 2021). The national dashboard supports this statement and shows that personnel in professions relevant to the climate accord are extremely scarce ("Klimaatbeleid—Arbeidsmarkt en scholing," 2021).

An international study on the other hand shows that 59% of youth (between 16 and 25) are very worried about climate change and 84% are at least moderately worried (Hickman et al., 2021). However, a lot of young people are missing footholds to actively participate in coming to solutions other than making personal changes (Gutter, de Jong, & Theelen, 2020).

A start-up in Groningen called SAMEEN aims to be a solution to these challenges. SAMEEN is a student-founded and student-run consultancy/project company focused on sustainability. It is a mission-driven organisation that aims to transform the labour market to be more sustainable from the bottom up, they, therefore, act as a sustainable enterprise (Cohen & Winn, 2007).

SAMEEN does so by offering side jobs to students in which they work with real clients on real sustainability projects. In doing so, SAMEEN views, these students will see and seize opportunities related to sustainability when they later join the labour market and thus contribute to a growing workforce tackling sustainable related challenges. A study by Deloitte (2017) shows that when people work in a sustainable work field they inevitably will extrapolate this into their behaviour. Shifting the workforce towards sustainability from the bottom up might therefore make young talent a driving force towards a sustainable future.

In working towards this mission SAMEEN faces external challenges. For example, the proposed quality and level of consultancy are often doubted by potential clients, and students are seen as mere errand runners due to a lack of experience. These are examples of industry-wide beliefs, or so-called institutional forces (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2010). SAMEEN aims to reshape these forces and therefore acts as an institutional enterprise (DiMaggio, 1988).

This case study aims to identify the institutional forces that SAMEEN faces in the field of consultancy on sustainability topics, which will further be referred to as sustainable consultancy. It additionally gives advice on how SAMEEN can deal with said forces on their way to set a new market standard. The central question is: *How can SAMEEN strategically change or use the institutional forces it faces in setting a new standard for young talent in the market for sustainable consultancy?*

The study employs a qualitative approach in which eight senior consultants are interviewed. In doing so this study gives insight into the influences of the macro-level concepts that are institutional forces on operational processes within an organisation. It therewith answers the call by Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum (2009), Bruton and colleagues (2010) and Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings (2002) for a more strategy-oriented and micro-level analysis of institutional forces.

This paper will first give an introduction to relevant theoretical concepts and their relation to SAMEEN. It will then discuss the used methodology for coming to empirically based insights. The paper will continue with the findings in regards to the research question and it will conclude with advice on what strategies SAMEEN can employ to change or use these institutional forces. Finally, the contributions, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

THEORY

As stated SAMEEN functions as a sustainable enterprise as well as an institutional enterprise. This section will give insight into these concepts and the relevant influences regarding institutional change. It will conclude by linking the theoretical concepts to the case of SAMEEN.

Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Over the last decade, sustainable entrepreneurship has received growing attention and is seen as an important solution to social and environmental challenges (Munoz & Cohen, 2017). Different from the traditional entrepreneurship approach, sustainable entrepreneurship tries to balance economic, social, and ecological goals; the triple bottom line (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Thompson, Kiefer, & York, 2011).

Farny & Binder (2021) summarize their literature review on sustainable entrepreneurship by stating that the overarching objective of sustainable entrepreneurs is the creation of a safe operating space for humanity and that in doing so they strive for institutional change. Chatzichristos and Nagopoulos (2019) show that institutionalizing central parts of the business model, as will be elaborated on further on, is the only way for sustainable enterprises to stay financially healthy without compromising on the mission.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory argues that the resource-based theory as presented by Barney (1991) is incomplete as it fails to include external factors such as culture, legal environment, economic incentives, tradition, and history in an industry. These factors influence and shape whole industries and therewith the individual organizations that operate within the ecosystem of that industry (Bruton et al., 2010).

There are different views on institutional theory. Bell (2013) views an institution as a large-scale social arrangement that is stable and predictable, created and maintained to serve the needs of society, mainly referring to governmental and scholarly organisations. Some theory frames institutions as specific organizations or even practices and requirements within an individual organization (David, Tolbert, & Boghossian, 2019). This paper uses the view as argued by Bruton and colleagues (2010), Dimaggio & Powell (1983) and Scott (2008) who see institutions as the combination of standards created by the incumbents of an industry created to maintain the status quo in which they conduct business. This study, therefore, continues to build on sociological and organizational theory (Bruton et al., 2010).

Institutions consist of the formal rule sets and agreements (regulative measures), the less formal interaction sequences (normative measures), and the taken-for-granted assumptions (cognitive measures) (Bruton et al., 2010; Scott, 2008). These standards are also called institutional forces or institutional logics (Bruton et al., 2010; Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). This paper will use 'institutional forces' as an overarching term for the regulatory, social, and cultural influences that affect the survival and legitimacy of an organization.

Institutional forces have an isomorphic effect. This means, that by continuously following the rules set by the system, all organizations within the system will start to look alike (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). The results of these institutional forces and their

isomorphic effect are industry-wide standards on 'how to do things'. Mandre, Ntayi, Kabagambe, & Kagaari (2021) show that managerial practices and choices are heavily influenced by these isomorphic influences. Institutional measures are therefore not only hypothetical forces on an organizational level but also influence the direct parties involved.

The current literature on institutional theory has a couple of limitations that this paper aims to address. As Bruton and colleagues (2010) state the field of institutional theory has matured on a macro level. In their literature review, they call for a switch to the micro impact these institutions and the institutional forces have on the practices of individual enterprises.

Institutional Entrepreneurship

As stated incumbents aim to maintain the status quo of the field, however, institutions are, though slowly, ever-changing (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007). This begs the question of how this change occurs and how individual entrepreneurs can influence it. DiMaggio (1988) already coined the idea of "institutional entrepreneurs" to identify those individuals who set out to change and disrupt institutionalized beliefs. Though the concept has existed for a while, David and colleagues (2019) state that this is the most recent focus of the theoretical field of institutional theory. There has been a change from describing the processes that create isomorphism, to how institutional change occurs.

In this process, institutional entrepreneurs identify political opportunities, frame issues and problems, and aim to infuse new beliefs, norms and values into social structures (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000). This paper uses the definition created by Bruton and colleagues (2010) following definitions derived from several articles.

“Institutional entrepreneurship represents the activities of actors who have an interest in encouraging particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones (DiMaggio, 1988; Fligstein, 1997; Rao et al., 2000)”

Examples of institutional entrepreneurs in the literature vary from fundamental changes in the matured field of accounting in Canada (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006) to King Crab fishers in Alaska who created a whole new industry (Alvarez, Young, & Woolley, 2015). More examples are shown in the comprehensive literature review of Hardy & Maguire (2017).

Characteristics of an institutional entrepreneur

Common feedback on the theoretical field of institutional entrepreneurship is the ‘hero’ complex in which only organizations that succeeded in creating new institutional standards are researched (Greenwood et al., 2002).

This is shown by research focussing on characteristics of individual entrepreneurs that were successful in setting new institutional standards. Fligstein (1997) states that the most important characteristic of an institutional entrepreneur is social skills. Hardy & Maguire (2017) boil down the years of following research on (successful) institutional entrepreneurs in their literature review to four additional key characteristics, namely, being analytical, reflective, creative, and reflexive.

Multiple authors have criticized this focus and argue that the success of an entrepreneur, and correspondingly its enterprise, is heavily influenced by contextual factors (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy & Maguire, 2017). To answer the call of Greenwood and colleagues (2002) this research focuses on the strategies that an institutional entrepreneur can employ, rather than their attributes.

External influences

Two main factors influence the process of an institutional entrepreneur, the state of the field they are working in and the position they hold (Battilana et al., 2009). There are a couple of factors that influence the state of a field. Its matureness, its stability, and its heterogeneity (Battilana et al., 2009; Fligstein, 1997; Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

Institutional entrepreneurs employ different strategies in emerging fields where institutional patterns are absent than in matured fields in which incumbents aim to maintain the status quo (Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Jayanti & Raghunath, 2018). Stability in a field refers to the certainty with which predictions can be made based on the institutional forces (Battilana et al., 2009). In general, most opportunities exist when a field is instable, or in crisis (Fligstein, 1997; Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

Heterogeneity of the field refers to the variance in characteristics of different institutional arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009). Multiple institutional influences of different markets on one field lead to opportunities for institutional entrepreneurs (Clemens & Cook, 1999).

The actor's position in the field provides individuals or organizations with institutionally defined interests (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Garud et al., 2007; Hardy & Maguire, 2017) and access to resources (Battilana et al., 2009). Dominant actors in a given field may have the power to force change but often lack the motivation; while peripheral players may have the incentive to create and champion new practices, but often lack the power to change institutions (Garud et al., 2007).

Institutional Strategies

Hardy & Maguire (2017) summarize three overarching strategic options for institutional entrepreneurs to change institutional forces. The first line of strategy is based on the mobilization of resources which focuses on monetary as well as, for example, political resources to strategically motivate behaviours. The second line of theory focuses on the

construction of rationales which revolves around framing desired changes in ways that will generate collective action. The third line of strategies focuses on the forging of new inter-actor relations focused on collaborations, coalitions and alliances. The former two can be used to maintain the latter.

Multiple institutional change strategies to alter or create institutions have been studied over the years. Only a few studies have paid attention to sustainable entrepreneurs and strategies for institutional change (Thompson et al., 2011). Strategies are heavily dependent on the above-mentioned criteria, this literature section will not go in-depth on all the options, for more detailed inspiration see Aldrich & Fiol (1994), Fligstein (1997) and Klein Woolthuis, Hooimeijer, Bossink, Mulder, & Brouwer (2013).

Linking Theory to SAMEEN

This section will link the described theory to SAMEEN's practices. Being a mission-driven company SAMEEN aims to make side jobs for young talent more sustainable, challenging and in line with their prospective profession. This research focussed on identifying what institutional forces affect SAMEEN in setting these new standards in the field of sustainable consultancy.

Even though SAMEEN is a new player in the market there are a couple of signs that show the circumstances are good for SAMEEN to set new institutional standards. For one, the young and ever-refreshing team makes that SAMEEN does not automatically adhere to the institutional forces and allows them to spot new opportunities (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Also, with the growing call for personnel and focus on sustainability as discussed in the introduction one might argue the field is currently in crisis which makes it prone to institutional change (Fligstein, 2001; Munir, 2005).

As shown by Mandre and colleagues (2021) managerial practices are actively influenced by the institutionalized forces that drive isomorphism. Managers are often the decision-makers with which SAMEEN does business. It is therefore relevant to see what institutional forces influence them, and what SAMEEN can do to use or change these forces.

The shown theory is used to identify the institutional forces and to structure strategies for the case of SAMEEN. It therewith answers to the call from Battilana and colleagues (2009) and Greenwood and colleagues (2002) for more strategy-oriented research, and the call from Bruton and colleagues (2010) for a change in focus to micro-level analysis of the impact of institutional forces. This research, furthermore, contributes to the overlapping body of literature on institutional entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship as called for by Thompson (2011).

METHODS

To the best of my knowledge, there was no data available on the specific institutional forces that SAMEEN faces in the market of sustainable consultancy. Even though theory on the general concepts of institutional theory and institutional entrepreneurship is abundant, impacts on an individual company are still nascent (Bruton et al., 2010). This study used general theoretical concepts to make sense of these macro-level concepts in identifying the greater dynamics while allowing for an inductive approach to identifying the influences on a single company (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). This research stemmed from a subjective worldview in which the ability of organizations to affect the system is prominent (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). As the author was involved in the startup parallel to the research, the research has influences from action-based research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

A qualitative approach was chosen to ensure a full understanding of the institutional forces present in the field of sustainable consultancy and how they affect SAMEEN.

Stakeholders in an institutional field have stakes and interpret meaning most aligned with their stakes (Hardy & Maguire, 2017), by using semi-structured interviews it was possible to dig deeper into these interpretations (Adams, 2015).

Sampling Method

An initial group of participants was purposefully sampled based on their knowledge of the field (Bryman, 2008). The selected participants are Dutch senior consultants with expertise in sustainable consultancy and have a better understanding of the field due to management positions or a focus on market development. Additionally, more interviewees were selected based on referrals, as in line with the snowball method (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). Table 1 shows the list of interviewees with additional information in regards to their function and the interview. Interviewee 1 to 5 were purposefully sampled, Interviewee 6 to 8 were selected out of nine referrals as most relevant. No more interviewees were needed as data saturation was reached.

Interviews were conducted over the course of 6 weeks in April and May of 2022. All interviewees were contacted by phone and informed about the topic and purpose of the study. Interviews were scheduled at a convenient location and time for the interviewees as this ensured familiarity (Leech, 2002) and were best suited for their busy schedules. Due to scheduling preferences, three interviews were done online or by phone. As discussed by Chiumento, Machin, Rahman, & Frith (2018) interviewing online has some disadvantages regarding confidentiality, security and reading body language. Due to the non-confrontational topic of the interviews, the first two were not deemed a limitation for this research. Body language can be used to spot confusion with interviewees however the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for further discussion ensured a full understanding of the questions and answers with both parties even when interviewing online or by phone.

Table 1: Interview information

Interviewee	Experience in the field	Interview circumstances	Date, time, Duration
1	Has worked as a business developer for a big engineering consultancy firm for 11 years on the topic of power & utilities in regard to the energy transition. Is now the director of a traineeship program focused on energy transition.	Face to face on location	April 6 th 2022, 16:00, 62 min.
2	Has 6 years of previous experience as director of a regional branch of the largest environmental advocacy group in the Netherlands. Is now working as a consultant focused on process management in the energy transition and has been doing so for 7,5 years.	Face to face on location	April 28 th 2022, 14:00, 159 min.
3	Is the head of a team focused on the energy transition and innovation at an engineering consultancy firm. Has been a consultant in the construction of large scale solar and wind parks for 8 years. Has additional experience in an advocacy group advocating for more influence for young people in the energy transition.	Face to face on location	April 29 th 2022, 12:00, 105 min
4	Has been a consultant and business developer in energy and heat transition for 4 years at a consultancy firm that does process and project consultancy. Is also a board member of an advocacy group for local participation in energy initiatives.	Face to face on location	May 5 th 2022, 9:30, 94 min.
5	Has previous experience as a provincial executive on transport and energy for 12 years. Is now director of strategy and senior consultant on energy transition and process management at an engineering consultancy firm and has been for 5 years	Online by phone	May 12 th 2022, 7:30, 71 min
6	Has been a strategic consultant for the energy transition for almost 7 years and was referred to me as someone who has a good view of how the market interacts on a strategic level.	Online by phone	May 12 th 2022, 12:30, 49 minutes
7	Has been a consultant on different projects regarding spatial planning and sustainability for 27 years. Was manager of a consultancy firm focused on process consultancy for 13 years. Was referred to me due to his long experience and seniority in fields with narrow links to sustainability.	Online with video	May 16 th 2022, 16:00, 60 minutes
8	Has been a managing partner and consultant in a firm that specializes in process consultancy in regards to spatial planning in sustainability for 7 years. Was referred to me as someone with good understanding of getting policies to practice.	Face to face on location	May 18 th 2022, 15:30, 50 minutes

Interview Guideline

Every interview started with a so-called ‘grand tour’ question about the interviewee’s function to get the conversation started (Leech, 2002). This question was followed up by different questions regarding the state of the field, common practices, and perceived strategies for change. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for elaboration on new insights. All interviews concluded with a question about referrals as in line with the snowball method (Bell et al., 2019). An outline of the general preparation can be found in appendix A.

Prior to interviewing the questions were reviewed by peer researchers and internal SAMEEN personnel to minimize confusion with participants. Revisions were made by using ‘standards’ as a layman’s term for the combination of institutional forces. It is important to note that all interviews were conducted in Dutch and the interview questions were translated accordingly.

Action-based Research

I’ve had a job as an account manager with SAMEEN for the past two years. The data is therefore enriched with data from fieldnotes, as suggested by (Yin, 2014). Field notes were taken during strategic market developing sessions and during conversations with clients. Field notes are separately mentioned in the results when relevant.

As this research has an external focus the bias towards colleagues is not seen as a limitation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Additionally, measures were taken to avoid interpretation bias but also allow for longitudinal influences of action-based research. A summary of the interview was shared with the interviewees to ensure statements were interpreted correctly and, where possible, statements were triangulated with secondary data provided by the interviewees (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded using recorder software by google (Google, n.d.) on a phone and saved directly to a cloud environment from the university to minimize the risk of losing or leaking data. Interviews that were not done face to face were recorded on a secondary device while the primary device was on speaker mode to both capture the questions and the interviewees' answers.

Due to limited time and resources, one interview was transcribed word for word, the other interviews were transcribed using a summarizing approach. Information from the interviews was structured using ATLAS.ti for Windows (*ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2022*). A first line of coding was based on the concepts derived from theory to find overarching concepts and a second analysis was used to find underlying patterns within each of the categories that had a direct impact on the case of SAMEEN (Punch, 2014). Summaries of the interviews to share with the interviewees were made after coding and were a useful addition to the iterative process of data analysis by zooming out and looking at the wider context in which certain information was given.

Ethics

As SAMEEN is an additional service to the existing market a conflict of interest might be present. As can be seen in the interview outline (see appendix A) this, along with the goal of the interview and the rights of the participants, was communicated before starting the interview. To ensure informed commitment a consent document was sent to, and confirmed by, all participants, see appendix B for the used format.

FINDINGS

This research has found three overarching institutional forces that apply to the market of sustainable consultancy. Additionally, it was found that the state of the field differs for

different submarkets which each have their forces in different stages of their growth. First, the overarching forces are discussed, then, insight is given into the process of growth in the submarkets. Lastly the strategies suggested by the interviewees are discussed. The implications on SAMEEN are discussed in the next chapter.

Influence of government

The findings show that the government has an important role in shaping the market of sustainable consultancy with the creation of legislation and with hiring practices. The government has such a prominent role because, as interviewee 5 states, the market does not adhere to sustainability practices by itself and the government represents the societal need for a more sustainable future.

Legislation has an effect throughout the chain, the international climate agreement steers governmental policies from national to local level and sparked the creation of specific legislation on, for example, emission rights for industry. Interviewee 1 reflects on this and states that every time a new law is implemented, a new market for consultants is created. Interviewee 6 confirms that national policies directly dictate the questions that local governments ask. Interviewees 2, 7 and 8 agreed that themes that never received much attention, such as climate adaptation, suddenly are important in all local governments due to national changes. These are the main regulative drivers in the market of sustainable consultancy that dictate what kind of work is needed.

Hiring by the government is a big driver of the market of sustainable consultancy as all interviewees mentioned the importance of the government as a client. Interviewees 7 and 8 however state that in recent years the hiring processes by the government have professionalised with the use of tenders to deal with a potential conflict of interest. Previously the way to get contracts was by sitting down with the client and figuring out the need together, now the government puts a question in the market on which a plan needs to be

submitted. However, interviewees 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 mention that the government has not matured in that role yet, leading to vague questions and poor evaluation of results.

Interviewees 2, 5 and 7 elaborate that it often takes more seniority to, during a project, translate the vagueness of the question to the right results. This ensures seniority is needed in a project even though the work itself might be doable by juniors. Interviewees 2 and 4 both state that this is a shame as a multidisciplinary group of juniors could also well get the job done.

Acquiring business

The second set of institutional forces was found in how sustainable consultancy firms acquire new contracts. Two ways of acquiring new business were found, reactive acquisition and active acquisition.

Active acquisition

Active acquisition is done by senior advisors as interviewees 6, 7 and 8 mention, and by business developers as interviewees 1, 4 and 5 mention. The senior advisors mostly do acquisition on topics they are experts in as they are better at translating the nuances of the client's need. For business developers, it is not only direct acquisition and sales but rather spotting opportunities in the market and seeking to create business out of said opportunity. Interviewees 3 and 6 describe this as creating a leading knowledge position in a market. Creating a knowledge position means developing expertise in order to be trusted with the complications of difficult projects.

Reactive acquisition

Once a successful knowledge position is acquired the findings show that most deals come through reactive acquisition processes. As a leader in the market a firm is, for example, on shortlists for tracks called 'multiple private tendering' in which a select group of firms get

asked to write a plan for a contract, as stated by interviewees 2 and 3, and as observed from fieldnotes.

Additionally, almost all interviewees mention that they get asked for certain work based on referrals. Most often it's the seniors that have a name in the field that get referred to and whose expertise is used to win such a contract. Interviewee 2 mentions never having to do any acquisition due to the fact that people know him and ask him for specific projects. Interviewees 7 and 8 share similar stories.

Furthermore, a lot of deals in sustainable consultancy come via continued collaboration. Interviewee 7 describes that they don't need to do aggressive acquisition as they get asked back for a job well done, similar statements were made by interviewees 2 and 8. From a business development perspective, it's the goal to make the initial contacts and write the offer, the consultants that eventually do the project will keep the contact warm during the project and continue the collaboration.

Young talent

Aside from the processes that influence acquiring business, the field also has standards on how to work with young talent, and what role they should play within projects.

In general a senior within an organization has multiple juniors who are under their supervision. The senior is mostly present to fully unburden the client by making sure the project stays on the right track, and by checking results and deliverables on professionalism. Interviewee 1 calls this the 4-eyes principle and describes that this is also most profitable for the business as a senior can take on extra projects while the bulk of the work is done by juniors.

Juniors are not recruited solely for this type of work, but rather to educate a new generation of consultants. Interviewee 5 words it sharply by saying that young talent doesn't

know anything relevant for their business when they leave university. Interviewees 2, 4 and 8 specify this and state that young talent needs to create a commercial mindset that goes further than their ideology. They need to learn how the field works, what the standard way of working is and what terminology is used. This does however lead to the fact that young talent often receive smaller parts of the large puzzle.

Interviewee 4 describes how the older generations come from industries that work in process steps, instead of a transition mindset. In these process steps, it is logical to make young talent start with the first steps, however, that is hardly enough to understand the integral problems that are linked to sustainable consultancy. Interviewee 2 states that this is a shame because seniority is created the fastest when a junior sees a project as a whole and has the autonomy to make decisions but can ask for advice when needed.

In general, the interviewees all mention similar trades which they look for in new junior co-workers and which would allow more autonomy in projects. Interviewee 4 summarizes this by calling it a T-shaped professional, a term which generally refers to people with a wide and flexible skillset. Multiple characteristics were mentioned but they boil down to three themes, social, eagerness to learn and professional boldness. The social skills are mentioned in the context of being able to work independently but knowing when to ask for help from team members. The eagerness is mainly sought in dealing with challenging assignments. And professional boldness is described in the context of understanding the bigger picture of the project and working from a vision. In general, these are skillsets that are independent of the knowledge someone has from the background of their study.

State of the field

Literature shows that the state of the field is determined by its matureness, heterogenicity and stability, and that it influences what strategies are effective for an institutional entrepreneur. As mentioned, the role of the government is still maturing and so is

the field of sustainable consultancy. In general, the field of sustainable consultancy is seen by the interviewees as a stable field which is growing due to new rules and budgets from the government. Interviewee 8 states that this consistent growth will continue for a while to come. In terms of heterogeneity, it is a field that is heavily intertwined with more traditional fields of consultancy, even leading traditional consultancy firms to struggle to place sustainable consultancy in an appropriate place within their organisation due to the overlap.

For this study, the field of sustainable consultancy was, on purpose, not specified to ensure a full understanding of the field. All respondents however mentioned that they see that sustainable consultancy consists of multiple different themes that should be addressed as individual markets. Examples are hydrogen as an energy carrier, sustainable mobility and sustainable energy production. These markets all have a different state of the field. The findings show three main phases through which a submarket evolves and in which different types of consultancy and standards are present. It should be noted that it's an evolving process meaning that in practice the barriers are not as clear as stated below. Furthermore, all types of consultancy occur in all different stages of the market, this gives insight in what stage of the market they are most prominent.

New markets

As discussed, legislation and projects by the government are a large driver for sustainable consultancy. Most of the work in a new market comes from the government. Interviewee 2 states that new markets, therefore, are often not stable as the public debate about proper solutions switches constantly. This causes instability in funding and projects which in turn leads to smaller and incremental projects. Work in new markets on one hand consists of pilots to figure out what measures work in practice and on the other hand of strategic advice on legislation and how to stimulate the market. An example in sustainable consultancy is the market of hydrogen as an energy carrier.

A new market mainly consists of two types of consultants. First are experts of adjacent fields who use their knowledge of project processes to become experts in the new field. Interviewees 2, 5, 7 and 8 state that these experts choose such a field based on personal interest and belief in its role in the transition towards a more sustainable world. The second is strategic advisors which, as interviewee 6 states, see this as one of the themes in which their expertise in strategic advice can be employed.

Interviewee 3 states that the pilots are often done with smaller budgets and are also an investment of the consultancy firm to create a leading knowledge position in this new market. Young talent in new markets is generally found in strategic consultancy where, as interviewee 6 states, they tag along with most of the strategy sessions and are in charge of taking notes and writing first drafts. Or, as fieldnotes show, in internship projects in which they support an expert.

Developing markets

The findings show that once a market has passed its initial stage of creating legislation and doing pilots the market begins to develop. Projects start to scale up and a translation of legislation to practice is being made. This field is still dictated by governmental policies and projects but more projects funded by the private sector start to occur. An example, according to interviewee 1, is sustainable mobility.

Developing markets are relatively stable as the initial influences of other fields have been tested on pilots and the working ones are kept, while others are replaced by new standards. Interviewee 1 discusses that the main disruptions are dictated by fast-growing players in the field that create new institutional forces.

In this phase, a market mainly consists of consultants that have used the pilots to create an initial knowledge position which they use to continue working on bigger projects.

The amount of strategic advisors shrinks. Consultants that are specialists in translating policy and vision documents to projects start to take a more prominent role in speeding up the process of getting more projects started by informing decision-makers. Interviewees 3 and 5 state this is also the time in the market where the larger consultancy firms that did not take an initial leading knowledge position in a new market decide whether to start acquiring external expertise to take part in a market or not.

These markets are still too complex to standardise. Partly this is driven by the fact that questions by clients have often not matured. Most seniors score extra points by being proactive and looking further than what the initial contracts suggest. Interviewees 2, 7 and 8 give examples of how they often have more freedom within a contract to get better results, and that the budgets are present to be flexible. Subsequently, young talent in this phase of the market gets more freedom in discovering how such processes work in collaboration with experts.

Mature market

In a mature market the role of the government has changed from initiator to facilitator and controller. A matured market has large private projects that are heavily dictated by governmental standards that have been set during the process of development. Interviewees 1 and 3 mention the field of solar and wind energy as an example.

The consultancy organisations that were present during the pilots have established a name for themselves as experts in the market. Renowned and bigger consultancy firms that thought the market was promising have taken their share by acquiring expertise and using their experience in bigger projects. Most deals are won by having a leading knowledge position in the market, however, most of the work in a mature market is standardised and done by junior consultants. Interviewees 6 and 8 name this a commodity market in which

more standard products are developed and employed and in which consultancy mainly focuses on project management and risk management.

This is the largest market in which most work is to be done. Young talent in this market only does a small snippet of a project. Therefore one of the main challenges in this market is keeping personnel due to the abundance of choice in jobs that feel more rewarding and challenging.

Strategies

It is not uncommon in the market of sustainable consultancy to change institutional forces. Interviewees 2, 5 and 6 all state consultants play an important role in shaping rules and legislation and standard practices in the market. Findings also show how interviewees use these forces in their advantage, or how they would change them. This section highlights the three main strategies.

Use governmental development programs

As mentioned the market for sustainable consultancy is highly driven by governmental money and policies. Strategies mentioned by the interviewees in this regard are not aimed at fundamentally changing this institutional force but focus on making better use of the available governmental development programs. For example, interviewee 5 mentions the procurement rules by the government on SROI and the lobby by a group of consultancy firms to widen the scope of these rules to include training of higher educated personnel. Interviewee 3 mentions that there are budgets from the government which allow companies to cover personnel costs to invest in innovation in new markets, and therewith create a leading knowledge position.

Make choices for certain markets

A different strategy that was used and recommended by most interviewees is making choices for specific markets. If a company makes name in a certain market they will also set

new standards in that market. A couple of criteria were mentioned by the interviewees to keep into account when selecting a market.

The first criterion is that a market needs to be financially interesting. This mainly refers to the potential of the market to become a mature market in which more repetitive work is needed and where the potential will arise to create products that are scalable and duplicable, as mentioned by interviewees 1 and 3. Interviewee 3, for example, mentions the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) growth-share matrix which they use to weigh the potential growth of a market to their position in that market (Henderson, 1970).

As a second criterion most interviewees select new markets that are in line with their expertise and interest within the company. Expertise in adjacent fields is used to create a leading knowledge position. Interviewee 8 mentions that they not only evaluate what kind of expertise a market asks for but also what stage a market is in and what type of work is most present to determine how that reflects on their business model.

An additional strategy that is mentioned is to start in a niche market. The findings show that companies that succeed in a niche market can rapidly grow. The large consultancy firms can't cover those niches which allows new companies to create specialism and a leading knowledge position. Interviewee 2 gives an example of a company that had such a trajectory and now is strategically advising the government on that niche, interviewee 1 gives an example of a company that quickly grew to 100 FTE.

Finding right partners

Virtually all interviewees mention the importance of young talent to the market of sustainable consultancy and their business as the business case of a consultant revolves around a knowledge position and they can educate them to maintain that knowledge position. Interviewee 2, 5 and 6 mention that finding partners that realise this are more willing to work

with young talent. Examples of strategies are to create a group of ambassadors which are willing to work with young talent, or a group of freelancers that have a lot of knowledge but miss the personnel. The strategy suggested is to take this into consideration in the communication and use the partners for educational purposes.

DISCUSSION

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to find the institutional forces that drive the market of sustainable consultancy and to give advice on how SAMEEN can use or alter these forces in creating new standards for side jobs for young talent. Three main institutional forces were found, namely, the influence of the government on the market, the standards in acquiring new business, and the perception of the role of young talent. Of the institutional forces that were identified one directly influences the core business of SAMEEN, which is the perception of young talent in projects. The other two forces amplify this force by making it harder to acquire business without seniority in the organization due to the lack of matureness of the government and the market in asking questions, therefore making it harder to make an impact on a large scale. This research concludes with advice on how SAMEEN can change the institutional force that influences the perception of young talent and how they can make better use of the institutional forces that influence acquiring business.

Changing the perception of young talent

The main institutional force regarding young talent in the market is the thought that they still need to learn a lot. SAMEEN as a business claims to be able to handle all challenges, but the belief that young talent still has to learn a lot to become independent professionals makes this challenging. The maturity of a submarket heavily influences SAMEENs ability to change this force.

The advice given by the interviewees gives footholds on how to deal with this perception in markets that are developing or have matured. This mainly focuses on fast-tracking the process to becoming professionals. The main challenge for SAMEEN is to create a learning track that creates the T-shaped professionals who are proactive, work independently, know when to ask for advice and work with a vision on the broader project. This can be done by working narrowly with a group of ambassadors to which young talent can ask questions or by creating an onboarding track that specifically focuses on developing these skills. When this learning track is developed the rationale should be created that young talent can do a lot more, a lot faster, when given the right challenges and support.

If SAMEEN wants to fundamentally shift perspective, a new market is the place to set new standards. In that case, they should look for a new market that is close to the strengths of young talents and the strength of the company. The leading knowledge position that is created allows for the creation of new standards in which young talent are given full responsibility.

Using standards in acquiring business

The biggest takeaway in dealing with standards in acquiring business is that SAMEEN should better strategize what markets they want to conquer and what markets are less relevant. This research finds that markets in different phases of growth have different standards and should be met with different projects and ways of working.

In a mature market, it is wise to adhere to the standards in the field and create a product or service that tackles the biggest challenge in such a market, namely the unchallenging nature of standardised work. The ever-refreshing team of SAMEEN could make sure that this work is still challenging and could be used in combination with the onboarding training that focuses on making them ready as T-shaped professionals.

For developing fields the biggest changes are made by upcoming consultancy firms that are deemed experts in the market. Finding this firm and collaborating with them could tackle the lack of expertise and put young talent in a challenging environment.

New markets are most relevant for SAMEEN to fundamentally change standards. SAMEEN should use the fact that these markets are heavily steered by governmental hiring and legislation to their advantage by looking at the legislation that is pending on different levels of government to find out what markets are relevant to move into. In that stage, it is important to invest in doing pilots and using those pilots to create a leading knowledge position.

Additionally, SAMEEN could make better use of the standards in the market with regard to the reactive acquisition. Their junior consultants have a natural disadvantage over the professional seniority of competing consultants, however by training the project consultants to better carry out the mission and spotting opportunities they could play a central role in creating reactive business through continued collaboration.

Contribution

This study has a very practical implication for the business case of SAMEEN as it helps to further institutionalize their business case. The literature section showed that doing so is the only way for a sustainable enterprise to stay financially healthy without compromising on the mission. The insight in standards and strategies in the market of sustainable consultancy can also help similar organizations, or consultancy firms, better make sense of the struggles they face in positioning young talent.

Additionally, having young talent play an active role in the transition to a sustainable world could be the two-edged sword needed to accelerate the transition. By having them play an active role in sustainability they will also on a personal level take it more seriously as

discussed in the introduction. This research, if implemented in practice, could therefore also have a societal impact by making young talent the driving force towards a sustainable future.

On a theoretical level this research has made a first step in an analysis of the effects of institutional forces on a single company, as asked for by Bruton and colleagues (2010) and has done so with a strategy oriented view rather than an attribute oriented view as suggested by Greenwood and colleagues (2002). It has also given a very practical insight in new strategies for sustainable entrepreneurs, which is in line with the call of Thompson and colleagues (2011).

Limitations of research

Though some interesting and relevant information was found and the research was designed in a way that is appropriate for its goal, all research has its shortcomings and this research is no different. There are some things that could have been done differently.

Distinction in types of consultancy and submarkets

This research has identified different types of consultancy which are present in different submarkets. No distinction was made between these types of consultancy nor the submarkets in the research design. Though data saturation was reached on the general question, the research could have been improved by interviewing an increased number of participants. Interviewing more participants from each type of consultancy could further specify the specific forces that drive that type of consultancy and subsequently the phases of a market in which they are most prominent. Interviewing more participants in a specific submarket could give insight in the specific forces that drive that submarket. Doing so on multiple submarkets would allow to compare results and further define strategies that are broadly applicable and strategies that are submarket specific.

Inductive vs deductive nature of identifying standards in the market

For this research, on one hand, there was a lot of information about the categories which are applicable to institutional entrepreneurs. There was however little to no information found on standards in the field of sustainable consultancy. This created a research in which the theoretical concepts were used in a deductive manner while the search for information was inductive. The interviews were therefore aimed at further specifying the theoretical concepts specific for the field of sustainable consultancy. This research has given a first insight in these specified concepts, however, this research could be improved by using these results as an initial sample size and rewriting the questions based on the findings to further specify the roots of these forces.

Further research

Aside from how this research could be improved, there is also further research. This research has shown, on a general level, the standards that are present in the field of sustainable consultancy and the hypothetical strategies that SAMEEN could employ to deal with them. With that it has set a first step to give answer to the call by Battilana and colleagues (2009), Bruton and colleagues (2010), and Greenwood and colleagues (2002). for a more strategy-driven and micro-level analysis of institutional forces. However it has not been researched what the impact of each of these forces is on the business, and how an individual company deals with such forces. A longitudinal case study in which a researcher follows the company to better identify how the institutional forces influence the company in practice, and see how the company deals with these influences would therefore be an interesting addition to literature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview outline

An outline of the general structure of the planned interviews is given.

Kick-off

- Thank interviewee for participation
- Mention the interview will take approximately 1 hour
- Make interviewee aware of the informed consent form and his/her rights
- Mention the goal of the interview, and the potential use for SAMEEN to avoid confusion about conflict of interest
- Shortly introduce SAMEEN and institutional standards

Questions

Grand tour question

- Could you describe what your job as .. entails?
 - o How long have you worked in the field?
 - o How does your job interact with the field?

Questions matureness

- How mature would you describe the field of sustainable consultancy?
 - o How many things are standardized in your line of work?
 - o What are the biggest rules in the field?
 - Legislative rules?
 - Normative rules?
 - Cognitive rules?

Questions stability

- How stable or dynamic is the field of sustainable consultancy?
 - o What are the biggest (potential) destabilizers of the field?

Questions Heterogenicity

- What fields influence your work?
 - o What do you take from that field?

Questions strategy

- We have talked about different standards in the field, what strategy would you employ to change them?

Literature shows three types of strategies

- First is mobilization of resources, what resources do you think SAMEEN should mobilize to create change?
- Second is changing the rational, in your opinion, what rational should SAMEEN use to change the standards?
- A third category is collective action, what parties should SAMEEN collaborate with to create change in the standards?

Questions referral

- Who do you know that also has an interesting insight in these standards?
 - o Would it be oké for me to contact them?

Closing statements

- Thank interviewee for answering questions
- Again, state the goal of the interview and the intention with the data
- Mention the interviewee will receive a summary of most important points

Appendix B: Informed consent

I (name participant)

hereby consent to be a participant in the current research performed by

Kobert Christiaan (Bart) Scholten

I have agreed to take part in the study entitled

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. I have the option to withdraw from this study at any time, and I also have the right to request that my responses will not be used or to decline answering particular questions. The researcher is responsible for a safe storage of the data and will do so in the protected environment provided by the University of Groningen. For questions about privacy protection: mr. A.R. Deenen (privacy@rug.nl), data protection officer of University of Groningen).

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The goal of this interview is to provide a better understanding of institutional forces currently present in sustainable consultancy, how they influence players in the market and how they can be altered.
2. That due to the background of the researcher and the company he is affiliated with a conflict of interest might be present, and that this research will be used to give strategic advice to the company. This strategic advice will focus on how SAMEEN

can integrate its business case in the sustainable consultancy market and is not focused on outcompeting any specific businesses. Due to the nature of work that SAMEEN does it might however lead to competition (or collaboration) on certain types of consultancy.

3. The interview will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. This also includes the right to be quoted verbatim.
4. The duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes.
5. My responses will be treated confidentially and ensuring my anonymity is an option if preferred. If so, my responses cannot be identifiable and linked back to me as an individual.
6. The researcher (or the contact person) will answer any questions I might have regarding this research, now or later in the course of the study.
7. The researcher provides the opportunity to correct, review and approve the interview by sending a summary of the interview to the interviewee.
8. The people with access to the non-anonymized data include the researcher as well as the supervisor dr. prof. Gjalt de Jong.

Date:

Signature researcher:

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Date:

Signature participant:

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Contact information in case of any additional questions:

Bart Scholten - Researcher: +31681968589 – k.c.scholten@student.rug.nl

Dr. prof. Gjalt the Jong – supervisor: g.de.jong@rug.nl

Niels Peper – Director SAMEEN: Niels@sameen.nl