

The influence of sustainability training programs on organizational sustainability practices

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Abstract

Organizations have gradually begun taking sustainability seriously and setting ambitious goals and targets, yet, their sustainability initiatives often get stuck and fail. To tackle these problems, the transformation of norms and values related to the environment and society is significant. Employee training in sustainability is one of the effective ways to enhance employees' awareness and behavior toward sustainability. It provides employees to clear awareness and a better understanding of the sustainability issues as well as the firm's core values. However, there is little research done on what are the factors for successful sustainability educational programs, and the effect of the training on firms' sustainability performance. The aim of this research is to develop a thorough understanding of sustainability training programs which is perceived as a means of fostering the sustainability behaviors of employees, and how such behaviors enhanced by the training programs can drive organizational sustainability practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become the new strategic imperative in the world. Although there are many phrases of sustainability including corporate sustainability and the “triple bottom line” (Elkington, 1998) all refer to organizations enhancing their long-term economic, social, and environmental performance (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).

Although companies have gradually begun taking sustainability seriously, and setting ambitious goals and targets, their sustainability initiatives often get stuck and are unable to scale. Their sustainability programs unfortunately often fail. The leaders in sustainability need to understand the reasons why the change efforts fail and institute transformation strategies that explicitly solve the rooted problems (Doppelt, 2010). It is significant to alter the organizational culture, more specifically, the transformation of norms and values related to the environment and society. It can happen when managers and employees start to value the environment and communities (Farri, Cervini, & Rosani, 2022).

Employee training in sustainability is one of the effective ways to tackle this problem. It can provide employees with a clear awareness and better understanding of the sustainability issues as well as the firm’s core values (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, according to Nadesan and Arulrajah (2016), employee training in sustainability enhances the firm’s environmental performance though attitude and behavior of employees as they are significant drivers for enhancing corporate sustainability with their behaviors (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). However, there is little research done on what are the factors for successful employee training programs in sustainability, and the effect of the employee trainings on firms’ sustainability performance (Kouno, 2010).

The study constructs emerging patterns by conducting a qualitative, multiple-case study in two distinct contexts. It investigates two specific sustainability training programs implemented by Dutch companies, namely Omrin, a public waste company, and Deloitte, a consulting firm based on the selection criteria such as companies’ sustainability reputation and at least a few years of experience of implementing sustainability trainings (ontwerpers, 2021; “Sustainability and impact at Deloitte Netherlands,” n.d.). The research adopts a thematic analysis approach, which involves an iterative process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting qualitative data patterns (Verhoeven, 2007). This research thus contributes to finding factors for effective sustainability trainings in different contexts as well as in both cases, which in turn, contributes to the development of employee training programs in sustainability.

The aim of this research is therefore (a) to understand both companies’ sustainability training programs for employees, which include identifying the factors of *Tour de Omrin* from Omrin and *The Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability* from Deloitte to promote sustainable employee behaviors and (b) how the sustainability training programs influence on the sustainability practices in both contexts. This enables to gain better understanding of how such employee behaviors take shape in these two different contexts.

Based on this, the main research questions are formulated:

1. *What the factors of sustainable employee behaviors are fostered by sustainability training programs?*
2. *How do the sustainability training program affect organizational sustainability practices?*

THEORY

Corporate Sustainability and Organizational Culture

What is Corporate Sustainability?

There have been much research espousing principles of sustainable development and the need for organizations to pursue sustainability practices (Sharma & Starik, 2003). Although many organizations have conducted or changed the policies, products, and services as well as their operations to address pollution, minimize resource use, and gain better relationships with the community and stakeholders, these implementations are insufficient due to only superficial and not beneficial to sustainability practices in organizations (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).

According to Sharma and Starik (2003), sustainability can be described as the challenges to improve social and human welfare simultaneously while minimizing their environmental impact and ensuring the successful accomplishment of organizational goals. There are a variety of subsequent definitions appeared of sustainability with regard to organizations, which are referred to as Corporate Sustainability (CS).

The definitions differ on the degree to which researchers classify it but one broad concept of CS explains it as the integration of ecological concerns, social responsibility, and corporate economic activities (Taticchi & Demartini, 2021). Van Marrewijk and Were (2003) describe CS as the inclusion of social and ecological concerns in business operations and interactions with all stakeholders. However, they also point out the problems of the vague definition of CS and argue the importance of accepting more specific definitions which fit the development, awareness, and ambition levels of organizations.

Organizational culture

According to Jigjiddorj *et al.* (2021), organizational culture (OC) plays a crucial role in human resource management and has a significant impact on a company's success and long-term viability. Within an organization, culture refers to the distinctive aspects that make an organization unique. These include shared beliefs and values that were originally established by the founders and are conveyed through various means. This cultural framework influences how employees perceive and behave within the organization, as well as the guiding principles that govern its members. OC can be observed at several different levels, where a level means the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible. The three major levels of cultural analysis are introduced by Schein and Schein (2016), namely a) observable artifacts - specific elements within an organization that can be seen and experienced, such as attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, and features like dress code, stories, rituals, and special ceremonies. Also, structural elements for instance charters, formal descriptions of how the organization works, and organization charts also belong to this level. These elements are unique to the organization and reflect its identity; b) supported values - values that leaders actively promote and are likely to be demonstrated in the behavior of employees. These values serve as a guiding framework for members of the organization, influencing their actions and decisions in different situations;

c) basic assumptions or perceived situations - fundamental beliefs or interpretations that shape collective behaviors within the organization, which are developed over time through long-term practices and are instinctively valued by all members. These assumptions create a sense of community and contribute to a shared understanding of how things should be done.

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) argue that OC is a significant factor in sustainability performances in organizations while also it is the primary reason for the failure of implementing an organizational change program. The successful implementation of culture change for CS is substantially determined by the cultural underpinnings and ideals of an organization's culture, and in turn, they affect how CS is implemented and the outcomes they produce (Jarnagin & Slocum, 2007). Cultures are very complex and deeply rooted in organizations, and change can be very difficult. It is unlikely to alter culture when merely changing technologies or improving management systems. Successful change toward sustainability needs the transformation of norms and values regards to the environment and socioeconomic well-being. Change is achieved when managers and employees begin to gain perspectives and values such as care for the environment, society, and stakeholders (Doppelt, 2010).

The firm's mission can affect the formal corporate settings. It enables the firms to guide, direct, evaluate and monitor the activities of the employees. Moreover, the mission can offer a path for employees regarding environmental strategy. Sharing the mission and vision of environmental strategy with their employees has a big impact on its implementations and is a key OC for improving environmental practices. The researchers argue that having a clear vision gives employees directions and understand the OC in a better way. To add this, the culture that is internally consistent helps establish environmental practices when the firm's leadership actively supports and promotes these practices, leading the company towards sustainability (Bakhsh Magsi, Ong, Ho, & Sheikh Hassan, 2018). Thus, to make advances in corporate sustainability more, the transformation of norms and values related to the environment and society is significant. Thus, implementing educational programs and embedding organizational mission and values of sustainability in the programs are important.

Employee Training Programs in Sustainability

Daily and Huang (2001) consider CS requires culture transformation for successful implementation and one of the effective ways is to utilize education and training for its employees. The study noted that changes in managers' and employees' values and beliefs that emphasize the significance of corporate environmental management initiatives are required by the adoption of corporate sustainability principles. In order to do so, Fietz and Günther (2021) argue that it is important to create a learning environment within the organization, which are facilitated by guidelines and employee training that can adapt to changing conditions. They also described environmental values and goals must be integrated into and actively pursued by all departments to achieve CS. According to Galpin, Whittington and Bell (2015), providing training in sustainability processes encourage employees to gain a better understanding of the firm's sustainability strategy, values, and implementations. Additionally, the researchers argue

that investments in employee training and education are essential to implement sustainability innovation (Ketata, Sofka, & Grimpe, 2015).

Employee training program in general refers to improving the employees' performance and bridging the gap between the current and the desired performance of employees, and the different types of training programs give an employee who actively interacts and participate in the jobs, hence improving organizational performance (Elnaga & Imran, 2013). Daniels (2003) showed that there are various forms of sustainability employee education such as lectures, workshops, e-learning, observations, experience, volunteer, symposiums, and factory visiting. Furthermore, changing employees' perceptions and values can also be achieved by establishing a core team of experts (called black belts) coordinating a group of sustainability catalysts and ambassadors within the units. This small, cross-functional team supports sustainability projects with all business units (Farri et al., 2022).

According to Nadesan and Arulrajah (2016)'s systematic review of literature, employee training in the environment enhances the firm's environmental performance though attitude and behavior of employees. Furthermore, Kouno (2010) focused on the quantitative research of environmental education programs in Japanese manufacturing organization and revealed the promoting factors of employees' behavior for environmental sustainability, which refer to internal factors such as individuals' ambitious, attitudes, and motivations and external factors such as firm policy. The researcher also pointed out the importance of the relationship with nature, and later identified embedding nature experience into the training program enhances the behaviors (Kouno, 2016). Although organizations perceive training as an effective tool for employees to educate and raise awareness, there are little few theoretical studies on what are the effective sustainability program for corporate sustainability, more specifically the relationship with the training programs and sustainable employee behaviors.

Antecedents of Employee Behavior in Sustainability

According to Ahuja *et al.* (2019), employees are significant for promoting sustainability as they can enhance CS with their sustainable behaviors.

When investigating the impact that any employee can have on sustainability, the most common studies on sustainable behavior are pro-environmental behaviors and Employee Green Behavior (EGB) (Katz, Rauvola, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2022). Pro-environmental behavior is defined as behavior which consciously aims to minimize the negative impact of a person's actions in the natural and in the built world (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). According to traditional thinking, it is commonly held that individuals undergo a behavioral transformation when they possess a profound understanding of the environment and its challenges. As a result, this awareness is built from knowledge which motivates responsible action and facilitate the development of pro-environmental behavior (Cheng & Monroe, 2012; Hungerford & Volk, 1990).

Whereas Employee Green Behavior (EGB) is seen in organizational contexts, described as actions and behaviors that employees engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from the shared organizational goal of promoting environmental sustainability (Ones and

Dilchert, 2012a). Ones and Dilchert (2012b) point out that EGB is a crucial element of corporate environmental sustainability.

Organizational scholars have developed a number of conceptual models of EGB, partially based on social and environmental psychology theories. For instance, the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) has often been employed as a theoretical framework to comprehend why people engage in pro-environmental behavior in general and in EGB specifically (Norton, Zacher, Parker, & Ashkanasy, 2017). TPB suggests that employees' attitude, norms, and perceived behavioral control predict behavioral intentions, which, in turn, predict behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Katz *et al.* (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of a TPB-based model of EGB and found that the positive impact of employees' pro-environmental attitude, norms, and perceived behavioral control on their intentions to engage in pro-environmental behaviors resulted in a positive effect on EGB. Additionally, the path model analysis revealed that attitude, norms, and perceived behavioral control had significant indirect effects on EGB through the mediation of intentions. Besides, the study noted that EGB is influenced by individual differences (e.g., openness, conscientiousness, moral reflexiveness, self-efficacy) and employees' perceptions of their work and organizational context, including their job attitudes and the level of environmental sustainability concern demonstrated by their organization and supervisor.

Furthermore, Norton *et al.* (2015) proposed a theory-based conceptual model that considers factors contributing to required and voluntary EGB at different levels - institutional, organizational, leader, team, and individual. The researchers identified contextual factors which include regulatory, normative, and cognitive-cultural pressures at the institutional level, attitude, activities, policies and norms at the organizational level, leadership style, leadership activities (i.e., a range of supervisor support behavior), environmental attitudes and leader's own EGB at the leader level, and attitude, norms (i.e., group-level climate), behavior, belief and activities at the team level. Personal factors are divided into between-person (e.g., environmental attitude) and within-person (e.g., motivation and affect) factors. Motivational states serve as the means by which behavior is influenced by both contextual and personal factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Zacher, Rudolph and Katz (2023) developed an integrative conceptual model of EGB, investigating how EGB is associated with antecedents and consequences at different levels. In addition to work performance dimensions such as EGB have three direct determinants which are knowledge, skills and motivation, this framework suggested that these three factors are thought to mediate the indirect effects of more distant determinants, such as attitudes, motivational and attitude states, abilities, personality, values and contextual factors. According to this model, these individual differences in pro-environmental attitudes positively affect EGB through motivation, whereas training in environmental sustainability could affect EGB by enhancing knowledge and skills. In addition, Bhattacharya *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that corporate purpose can drive the sustainability behaviors of employees by influencing them to take their psychological ownership of sustainability. They show that the impact of purpose on enhancing sustainability is more significant when employees perceive a greater level of autonomy in carrying out sustainability actions and when moral values play a more central role in their self-identity. Despite a large body of research on antecedents of employee behavior especially in environmental

sustainability, few studies have examined associations between educational training programs, personal factors and employee behaviors. Moreover, there are very few studies focused on the quality of training programs and how it affects employee behavior in sustainability.

Sustainable Behaviors of Employee and Sustainable Performance

Many other constructs developed and measured related to environmentally sustainable behaviors can be categorized into the five dimensions proposed by (Ones & S. Dilchert, 2012). First, the transforming dimension involves changing work products and processes to enhance environmental sustainability. For instance, task-related pro-environmental work behavior, which refers to completing work tasks in environmentally sustainable ways, falls under this dimension (Bissing-Olson, Iyer, Fielding, & Zacher, 2013). Second, the conserving dimension includes behaviors aimed at resource preservation and waste reduction, such as reducing usage and recycling (Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart, 2017). Third, the avoiding harm dimension focuses on reducing negative environmental behavior and mitigating environmental damage, such as pollution prevention. It encompasses environmental management activities that address emissions reduction and identify solutions for environmental issues within a company (Cantor, Morrow, & Montabon, 2012). Fourth, the influencing others dimension involves promoting environmental behaviors among others through education, training, and other means. This dimension includes coworker-directed organizational environmental citizenship behavior, eco-helping, and work group green advocacy (Alt & Spitzeck, 2016; Boiral & Paillé, 2012; Kim et al., 2017; Robertson & Barling, 2017). Fifth, the taking initiative dimension encompasses proactive and entrepreneurial behaviors, such as initiating environmental programs and policies, engaging in lobbying efforts, and activism. It includes proactive pro-environmental behavior, eco-initiatives, eco-civic engagement, organization-directed organizational environmental citizenship behavior, and environmental voice behavior (Bissing-Olson et al., 2013; Boiral & Paillé, 2012; Robertson & Barling, 2017; Temminck, Mearns, & Fruhen, 2015). Each of these five dimensions includes both positive (e.g., energy-saving) and negative (e.g., energy-wasting) employee behaviors related to environmental sustainability. Dilchert (2018) introduced the concept of counterproductive sustainability behaviors as a unique expression of counterproductive work behaviors in the context of environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, the study of the variables with the impact that employees have on social sustainability by Ruiz-Pérez, Lleo, & Ormazabal (2021) introduced that the employee dimension (e.g., free association, working hours, occupational health and safety, human capital development, equal opportunities, fair wage, employee relations), the local community dimension (e.g., local employment, access to material resources, local community projects), the client dimension (e.g., privacy, health and safety), the value chain dimension (e.g., fair relation with suppliers, intellectual property rights, the society/ public dimension (e.g., legal compliance, social innovations, communicated environmental risk). The researchers argued that the importance of inclusion of social aspects of sustainability performance produced by employee behaviors.

Summarizing the above introduced insights of prior conducted research, the following conceptual model can be introduced (figure 1).

Employee education acts as a trigger for instance to personal attitudes, motivation, intentions, knowledge and skills, which lead to the sustainability behaviors of employees. This study aims to explore the causal relationship between employee training programs and their impact on the dynamic and iterative process. It seeks to understand how an employee training program acts as a catalyst, facilitator or barrier in this process.

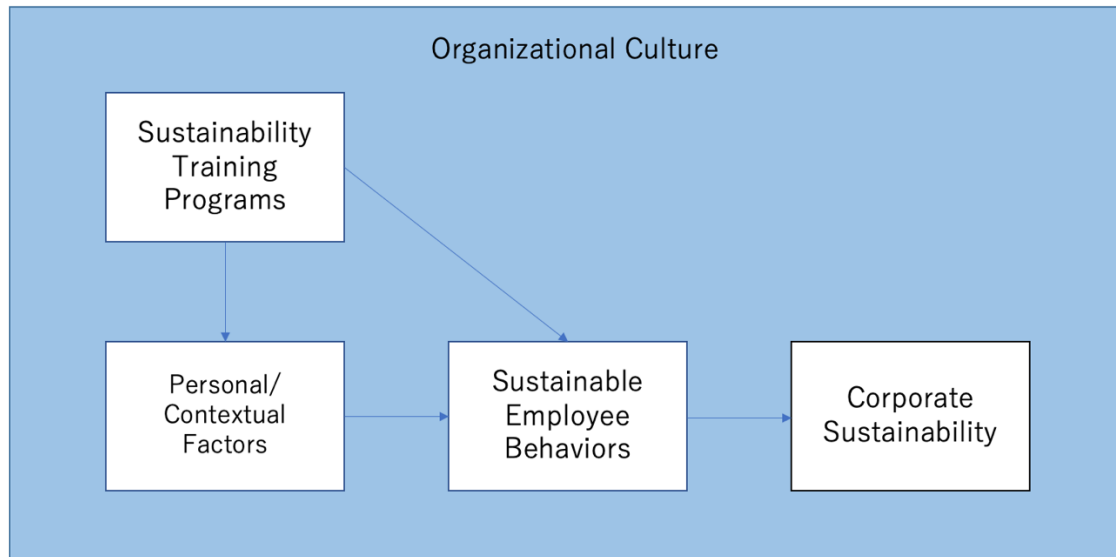


Figure 1: Conceptual model on the sustainable behavior of employee and CS triggered by training programs

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study focuses on two main research topics: (1) to develop a thorough understanding of sustainability training programs which is perceived as a means of fostering sustainable employee behavior; (2) to gain better understanding of how such employee behaviors enhanced by the training programs can drive organizational sustainability practices. In order to accomplish this, the emerging strands are built by conducting a qualitative, a multiple-case study on two different contexts. The two distinct sustainability training programs implemented by Dutch companies, namely the public waste company Omrin and the consulting firm Deloitte, are investigated. The research bases on a thematic analysis approach which is an iterative process focusing on identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns of qualitative data (Verhoeven, 2007).

Multiple case study design was seen as the most appropriate for collecting data, as identifying the promoting factors of employee behaviors in sustainability requires a comprehensive result of comparison with different training programs in order to answer the purpose of this research. A multiple case study was also chosen over a single case study as it was regarded to be relevant as a mean to compare a variety of cases to see what is unique and common theme in each sustainability employee training programs (Bryman, Bell, & Nilsson, 2017) to draw a general conclusion about how the sustainability behaviors of employees take shape in these two different contexts, as well as how their behaviors influence on the sustainability practices in each context (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019; Yin, 2018).

Thus, semi-structured interviews help provide insights into the participants' perception and understanding of each training program, as well as the effect of the sustainability training programs on their corporate sustainability practices via the participants' behaviors.

Qualitative research often employs purposive sampling, a common technique used in multiple-case studies, where a small number of carefully selected cases provide valuable information to address the research questions (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). In this thesis, the researcher selected cases by considering specific criteria that were believed to yield valuable data for achieving the research purpose (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). The following criteria of the selected cases were assessed based on the criterions below.

Criteria

- | |
|--|
| 1. Operated by the firm which has the sustainability in the core of their businesses |
| 2. Operated by the firm which has been recognized as being a forerunner in the field of sustainability |
| 3. Having already been conducting a sustainability education program for employees for a few years |
| 4. Targeting employees from different departments |

One case is the *Tour de Omrin*. The program is organized and conducted by Omrin, a Dutch public waste company operating for 35 municipalities and chosen for one of the most

sustainable companies in the Netherlands (ontwerpers, 2021). The program has been conducted as an introductory course of the firm targeting their new employees, interns and trainee and held every month. The object of the program were to inform their mission and values, their operations and sustainability efforts. This was designed for employees to experience the Omrin's circular waste journey and to understand their role is a part of their circular waste chain. After the presentations about Omrin, the participants visit different places such as Leeuwarden, Harlingen and Heerenven, and have opportunities to see the operations closely, listen to employees' stories working at each site and interact with them. The program investigated by the author was held on March 11th in 2023 (Appendix B). The other case is *The Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability* from Deloitte. Deloitte provides audit & assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax & legal and related services to their clients. The company has been working on sustainability issues more and provide the services of sustainability assurance, environment, social impact, and sustainable finance (Deloitte Netherlands, 2022). The training has targeted at managers level from different departments. It was conducted for three days at Campus Fryslân, University of Groningen on November 23rd to 25th in 2022. The objects of the program were to provide valuable insights into climate and sustainability, policy and legislation, and their impact on various aspects and to equip employees with knowledge and experience for a sustainable transition, enabling practical application within Deloitte and its clients. It aims to inspire employees' future roles in sustainability leadership and fosters networking opportunities within the organization (Appendix B).

Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research design as it focuses on developing a deeper understanding of people's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data on deeper insights on perspectives and understandings of the sustainability training programs. Semi-structured interviews allow theories and concepts to emerge from the data (Bell et al., 2019). This approach combines structured and unstructured elements, providing a clear guide with pre-established themes and key questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers can vary the sequence of questions and ask additional follow-up questions based on important responses (Bell et al., 2019).

The sample size consists of four employees from each case, selected based on their job roles and knowledge after discussions with respective contact persons. Data was collected through online semi-structured interviews using Google Meet or Teams, with one participant opting for a face-to-face interview. Due to language barriers, two participants from Omrin provided their answers via email. The interviews were estimated to last 30 to 45 minutes, and one-hour appointments were scheduled for each participant. The interviews for the Omrin case took place between April 17th and 20th, while those for the Deloitte case were conducted from April 21st to May 8th. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed using otter.ai software. Data analysis was performed using the qualitative research tool Atlas.ti, involving coding, axial grouping, and categorization into overarching topics in an abductive manner. The two written interviews were directly coded. The interview guide, including questions about perspectives,

understandings of programs, missions, values, and employees' actual actions, can be found in Appendix A.

The research strictly follows the ethical code of conduct of the University of Groningen (“Ethics Committee Campus Fryslân,” 2019) and has been approved by the ethics committee. The ethics checklist and participants' informed consent forms can be accessed in Appendix C via the provided Google Drive Link. The research meets the quality criteria, including dependability, confirmability, and transferability, by providing detailed procedural steps and context descriptions. To ensure data consistency and trustworthiness, the interview questions were reviewed by third parties and shared with participants in advance to prevent any misunderstandings.

RESULTS

The study conducted 4 semi-structured interviews for each case to examine how employee training programs promote sustainable behaviors and influence corporate sustainability. The data analysis revealed 4 axial groups for enhancing employee sustainable behaviors and 3 axial groups for implementing corporate sustainability in the Tour de Omrin case. In the Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability case, 6 themes and 4 themes are found respectively. Common themes across both cases included learning form, change in awareness, and mission and roles.

The Tour de Omrin

Factors for fostering the sustainability behaviors of employees

Learning Form

The Tour de Omrin is a one-day tour to visit and see the different departments in several locations, and to get a whole picture of the firm's operation, their mission and other colleagues. It started in the morning at the Omrin's head office in Leeuwarden. They had a self-introduction time with other colleagues during having a breakfast offered by Omrin. After that, they went to the environmental street and the Estafette store in Leeuwarden, the Eco de Park in Harlingen and the REC in Heerenven. During the tour, the tour directors explain at each place as well as the employees told participants what they do, how the machines and process work and their stories. All participants liked seeing the whole process of the waste recycling, from separation to making new energy out of waste.

A: "I think Heerenven was really interesting because after they use their reusable garbage, the part that's left over is brought to Heerenven and they burn the garbage, make energy again. [...] they use everything they get. [...] you see all the behind the scenes. That's really impressive. "

C: "Before the tour I could not have imagined that so many materials from waste can still be reused. [...] During this tour you will get to know what Omrin does in a fun and educational way. "

D: "The process making Biogas of our trash. I find it unique that were capable Making gas of trash. It's really sustainable."

This experiential learning struck them by seeing the whole process with their eyes. Moreover, having interaction with other employees was seen as an important part of the tour as Participant B highlighted the experience:

B: "It was very nice because you are meeting other employees so that was nice to talk about other functions or talking about what they doing, meeting new people"

Change in Awareness

The collected data shows that all participants had a positive impression about the tour and changed their perception towards garbage and the firm. While Participant A and B talked about the possibility of garbage after seeing recycling and upcycling process, C knew more about the firm's operation and sustainability efforts.

A: "Once you come within Omrin, your vision of garbage goes like Mega[...]"

B: "They were making a boat from plastic. So they were very interesting [...] and We were also seeing the shops, Estafette and that was interesting because they were also showing how to make from old products to make something new. [...] Two euro product can become if you make it a little bit fancier, it's three euro or more. "

C: "With the tour I found out that Omrin is so much more than just emptying the container. It is a whole process involved in the processing of waste."

Mission and Roles

Omrin bases on the mission of building circular (waste) chains for the wellbeing of future generations. Moreover, they set ambitious objectives encompassing a circular approach, reuse, fossil-free practices, biodiversity conservation, and fostering an inclusive society. Three participants mentioned about people, more specifically, children, future and the future generations in the question regarding mission and value.

A: "I think Omrin really cares for people, but they also care about the future."

C: "The mission of the Omrin is to ensure that future generations can still live on this earth."

Furthermore, the participants had a good impression towards Omrin, especially their sustainability purpose. B mentioned about the sustainability awards while C explicitly talked that she supports their mission towards creation of sustainable society.

Although all participants agree with what Omrin want to achieve as well as they understand the importance of sustainability, two participants were not linking their job role much to the mission with no enough explanations about it. Participant A and B were explaining their role and how they contribute to a company's sustainability goals.

Organizational Culture and Climate

Omrin has an open culture across the departments and engages in communication with and among employees. Also, they often collaborate with various stakeholders and encourage employee to take an initiative by establishing an idea box platform.

A: "It's really always opening also for international students. [...] It's hard to get a NO from Omrin if you have an idea. It's a company that's always open for change."

When Participant B had an idea, her colleagues showed approval of her idea.

B: "They were saying, oh yes, good idea. And other people were also saying, oh, we have to celebrate it. So yeah, that's very nice. They want to promote it more to get ideas in the company. "

Moreover, the terms of innovative, connecting and clan-oriented are used by C during she described the company in the interview.

C: "It is important that we as employees know the core values, which are innovative, connecting, professional, responsible, and clan-oriented. "

Corporate Sustainability Practices

All participants mentioned that they took several actions towards sustainability at the organization in different ways after *the Tour de Omrin*. The most common sustainable employee behaviors identified via the interviews of Participant C and D was influencing others while Participant A and B performed at their houses. Additionally, one social sustainable practice was implemented by Participant B.

Conserving

As a public waste company, Omrin has been making efforts specifically in the recycling management not only for their operation but for the offices too. As a consequence, there are equipment and materials used for preventing resources and recycling, such as multi-compartment recycling bins and recyclable cups. Participant A changed his behavior to more sustainable ones, as he used to use recyclable cups as well as brought lunch which were plastic packaged.

A: "A recycled cup is already established but the use of mug is even more sustainable. And now I have like a container where I store my bread and I think that's a huge thing. If I take water from the tap, I get my bottle that is also some things. "

Although it is not sustainable behavior at work, Participant B and C stated the increase of their pro-environmental behaviors at home after the *Tour de Omrin*, such separating the waste more consciously, recycling their old clothes and buying products at secondhand shops or the fashion platform.

C: " I throw things more consciously in the container. But even if I want something else, for example, another sofa or dining area etc., I first see if I can find something second hand before I buy something new. "

Influencing Others

Generally, all participants shared their experience and thoughts on the day of the program as they told the tour was really good and fun. Knowing what each department does and how those machines work to process all the waste from separation, recycling to inclination processes was for them very interesting and impressive. Participant C and D shared their experience to their colleagues and clients respectively whereas Participant A and B told their family and friends.

C: “I have talked to people close to me about Omrin as a company, what they do and how it works. I have talked to colleagues about how Tour de Omrin is a very good initiative for new employees, you get a good impression of the company.”

D: “Yes, with clients. I talk about the process of their trash being recycled in our factories.”

Social Innovations

Omrin warmly embraces newcomers to the company, emphasizing their commitment to openness and friendliness towards external individuals. Participant B noticed that there was no a bicycle parking lot for visitors at the office when her professor came. B thought it was not kind enough towards everyone and therefore she proposed her idea of building a bicycle parking lot to the company.

B: “The value of Omrin is that If there is a new person coming, to be kind to that person. When there is a new person coming and saying where can I stand the bicycle? That's not very kind, maybe in my eyes [...] The idea came to have standing things for bicycles for other people. [...] I'm very happy with the idea and works out. That's also sustainability, more to think about each other. “

The Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability

Factors for fostering the sustainability behaviors of employees

Learning Forms

The training was designed to blend theory with interactive sessions, allowing for discussion, practical application, and input from attendees' expertise. The lecturers select the appropriate learning methods based on the specific topic being addressed. Also, the training included more experiential learning by visiting local restaurants and brewery as well as welcoming guest lectures who shared their story of the sustainability efforts. All participants mentioned that they liked learning forms.

E: “If I look at the, the experience, the locations, the effort that went into the program, the interaction, the hotel, the setup, everything, it was very enjoyable [...] it was fairly well organized, and a very enjoyable experience.”

Specifically, the importance of combining lectures and real experience was highlighted by Participant G.

G: “This kind of interaction is really helpful. If you also have the professionals there in the room, you can ask questions, you have more debates. It's more up to date. [...] a very nice dinner in the evening, locally produced etc. So that makes the builds on the experience as well.”

Also, F and H described they got inspired by entrepreneurs especially, found it inspiring hearing the CEO of *Dijkstra Draisma*, the construction company and the chef from the local restaurant.

Learning Materials

Due to that the training invited variety of lecturers from different areas, there were variety of relevant topics for the participants and the quality of teaching was recognized by them. Due to that Participant F engages in the social part of ESG as a law partner, the program provided her with a deeper understanding of the entire topic.

F: "I found very inspiring was that it dealt with all topics of ESG. So economic and environment, the social ones and governance. And it really gave me far more insights in the whole topic of sustainability. So I found it really inspiring. It was very diverse. A lot of topics."

The relevance of the topics was also highlighted by F, as the second day of the training focused on each position.

F: "That was for me very relevant, because it was really close related to the business. So how to translate everything, what is happening in the world, and what is coming towards us."

Lastly, E, F and G stated the teaching quality of the lecturers, specifically it made F and G clear on particular topics.

E: "[...]So I think all the speakers were great, well prepared, all these things were good."

G: "And because of the how it was explained by the lectures, and I saw this link between the CSRD requirements to Double Materiality and also the strategy of the organization, so that was really, really important."

Change in Awareness

While Participant F mentioned that her awareness increased due to the training, the training reminded Participant E and G once again the importance of their position in the sustainability.

F: "I think in any event, it's created a lot of more awareness for me as well. [...]for me, myself, and made far more were trying to I just leased an electric vehicle. I never had that. But it's also something that I thought well, it's to add also to the environment. Yeah, I think the awareness was very, very much and that's what I really gained."

G: [...] Of course, what you hear during those days, [...] strengthened my belief that we were on the right track. And therefore, encouraged me to do more to accelerate.

Knowledge

Generally, participants gained new insights and advanced their knowledge further. Participant G for example gained a clear connection between strategy and Double Materiality, which was for him own project to include the topic into sustainability reports.

G: “I think it was a Friday morning that the final day of the of the training that I certainly, saw that link between strategy and the Double Materiality, whereas before for me, there was always a bit of more like a bit of a hobby project[...].”

Whereas H indicated that his foundation of the environmental topics which he acquired just before the training by reading a book enabled him to understand the training better.

H: “[...] book really did help me kind of structure my thoughts, which I think made that course probably more effective.”

Mission and Roles

The attitudes of all participants towards firm’s sustainability mission are positive as Participant H for example mentioned that:

H: “[...]to drive our sustainability agenda. [...]to me, that feels like quite a big, quite a big statement that, you know, one of our top five, most senior people in the business has just been told, you know, three quarters of your day job is push sustainability.”

Furthermore, generally all participants recognized the link between their role and the sustainability mission. It was highlighted by G and H:

G: [...] collaboration across the different businesses. [...]for me that was a key value that I saw during the course.

We have a really a leading position in this in this debate. So, take a proactive stance towards tackling this established challenge.

H: “I think the start line is making an impact that matters. we want to be a preferred strategic partner, for big organizations, public and private as they embark on these big societal shifts and these big societal transformations. [...]I try internally to be an advocate for doing the right things and having the right conversations with clients.”

Regulations and Laws

Three participants show interests in the regulation topics because of their consultant job. They explained that they knew new regulatory but not well enough to know regulatory in details.

H: “[...] really useful for me, is that I learned in particular on the last day, a lot about the regulation[...] that was really interesting.”

G: [...]what I really liked was the final day, especially when we got the overview of all the regulatory topics, that was quite a good[...]because I'm aware of most of the regulations, but not in the in the level of detail that was explained to us. [...]

Corporate Sustainability Practices

Influencing Others, Taking Initiative, Avoiding Harm and Fair Wage & Equal Opportunities are identified via the data analysis. All participants took actions towards corporate sustainability while one participant mentioned social sustainability. Participant F stated they introduced fair pay based on their methodology after the training.

F: “So having all people paid equally, and then not only on gender, but also nationality, culture. And that was rather new for us. [...] But there is also a whole methodology behind this, how you calculate it, how you compare it, of course, because people are fully different age and everything and experience. So that was something we did afterwards.”

Furthermore, consulting jobs involves improving their client’s sustainability performance and especially they mentioned that their role is to make their clients aware of the issues and help them to translate into concrete actions.

E: “So I talked about the training to few individuals, we’ve given a presentation in, in an industry group and opening up the discussion, so I’m advising the government agencies.”

DISCUSSION

This research purpose was to develop a thorough understanding of sustainability training programs which is perceived as a means of fostering the sustainability behaviors of employees, and how such behaviors enhanced by the training programs can drive organizational sustainability practices. The data gained from qualitative interviews provided characteristics that fostered sustainable employee behaviors, out of which 4 themes and 6 themes could be derived, in the case of the Tour de Omrin and the Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability (the ELPRS) respectively. Among these cases, three themes of learning form, change in awareness and mission and roles are in common, which are shown in green box located in right side of the table below. Whereas learning materials, knowledge and regulation and laws are identified as unique factors in the ELPRS case. Organizational culture and climate are found as a unique factor in the Tour de Omrin. The employees who participated in each training took several sustainable actions results in finding 3 and 4 themes.

Aggregated dimensions	Themes	Aggregated dimensions	Themes
Learning Form	Blending theory with interactive sessions	Learning Materials	Inviting professional lecturers in different areas
	Hearing inspiring stories from sustainable entrepreneurs		Variety of relevant topics
	Experiential learning by visiting local places		Quality of teaching
	The whole process of the operation by visiting different locations		A clear connection between strategy and specific sustainability topics
	Having interactions with other employees		Gaining advanced knowledge about sustainability
Change in Awareness	Strengthening their belief and their position in sustainability	Regulations and Laws	Understanding new regulations in details
	Increasing awareness		Knowing new regulations
	Changing their perception towards garbage and the firm		Learning about a variety of regulations
Mission and Roles	Positive impression towards the firms' sustainability mission	Organizational Culture and Climate	Innovative, connecting and clan-oriented culture
	Recognizing the link between their roles and the sustainability mission		Engaging in communication with/ among employees
	Caring about people and future generations		Encouraging taking an initiative by setting up an idea box platform

Table 1: Overview of the results of two cases

Learning Method

The importance of the learning form was clearly found from both cases. As Kutbiddinova, Eromasova, & Romanova (2016) indicate, the learning form has the key to engaging in interactive learning enhances employee engagement, encourages collaboration and shared responsibility, facilitates practical application, supports self-reflection, and provides a feedback-driven learning environment. These elements contribute to the effectiveness of interactive learning for sustainability education among employees, enabling them to become champions of sustainability within their organizations and communities.

Moreover, in the case of the Tour de Omrin, visiting factories to see the whole process of recycling waste are perceived as a very effective way to inform due to that such experiential learning provides firsthand experiences, fosters engagement and emotional connection, encourages active participation and interaction, and creates memorable and shareable experiences.

To add this, the participants of the ELPRS also enjoyed visiting the local restaurant and the building company and hearing their stories in a face-to-face setting. The storytelling is recognized as a powerful method of inspiring and motivating people because it engages emotions, makes information relatable and memorable, and influences behavior change. By inviting or visiting for instance sustainable entrepreneurs and listening to their personal story

of pursuits of the sustainability, individuals can be inspired to take action, pursue their goals, and contribute to positive change in their lives and communities (Fryer, 2003).

To add to the learning style, what educational materials they use for the training is important to enhancing their knowledges and understanding of the topic (Mazgon & Stefanc, 2012). As participants of the ELPRS described, they satisfied with the variety of topics about the sustainability including not only the environment but social and governance aspects. Also, they found the contents of most of the lectures were relevant to their role and even one participant described it helped to translate the key learning into their work.

Individual Level Factors

As the researchers point out individual factors such as environmental attitudes, awareness and motivation influence on employee sustainable behaviors and these individual factors are affected by several contextual factors including education and training (Katz et al., 2022; Kouno, 2010; Zacher et al., 2023), the employees gained more awareness towards sustainability issues. Although all of participants from Omrin case stated that their perception of the waste as well as Omrin changed drastically, two participants of the Deloitte case denied the increase of awareness but instead the training made them reaffirm their position and role. Furthermore, in the ELPRS, the theme of knowledge is appeared. Training is a tool used by organizations to boost employee competencies as measured by knowledge, abilities, and skills (Al-Abadi, 2021). Due to that the participants followed the classes which were related to their job roles, it was easily accepted by them. Moreover, one participant argued that one specific lecture helped him to gain a clear link between organizational strategy and double materiality, which was an ambiguous connection.

Contextual Factors

The contextual factors of mission and roles is identified in both cases while organizational culture and climate, and regulations and laws are identified via the Tour de Omrin and the ELPRS case respectively. As Jarnagin & Slocum (2007) research findings show, successful sustainability change requires transforming norms and values regarding the environment and socioeconomic well-being which includes adopting perspectives and values that prioritize care for the environment, society, and stakeholders. When managers and employees embrace these perspectives and value, change towards sustainability can be achieved. To add this, the mission can offer a path for employees regarding environmental strategy. Sharing the mission and vision of environmental strategy with their employees has a big impact on its implementations and is a key OC for improving environmental practices (Bakhsh Magsi et al., 2018). In both cases, the participants embrace positive attitudes towards companies' mission while they acknowledge the importance of pursuing the sustainability issues as their work. However, it lacked the evidence of how they perceive the connection between their roles and the sustainability mission in the case of the Tour de Omrin, as two participants did not describe well enough of their roles in the sustainability efforts. Whereas all participants of the ELPRS clearly explained why sustainability topics are significant, their mission and values as well as how they can play a role in the sustainability transformations. Moreover, they think Deloitte can play a bigger role in this topic as they can increase their client's more awareness about this issue and support them to translate into their actions.

Regulation plays a bigger role in the ELPRS case. The study of Zacher et al. (2023) indicates that leaders and entrepreneurs who want to go green for ethical reasons, to comply with governmental regulations. This especially links to their job as Deloitte's is a consulting company. The participants expressed that while they were aware of some new regulations, they lacked detailed knowledge about them. Therefore, the information provided via the training proved to be highly valuable and informative for them.

Organizational culture and climate of Omrin were continuously expressed by the participants. The characteristics of a sustainability organizational culture include integration of sustainability into core values, a long-term orientation, stakeholder engagement, emphasis on innovation and continuous improvement, collaboration and partnerships, employee engagement and empowerment (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). The employees continually described that the company value openness, connecting and innovation as two of them proposed the sustainable ideas to the company and actually implemented. That facts would enhance employee motivation towards sustainable behavior and, in turn link to corporate sustainability.

Sustainable Behaviors

As a result of the training conducted by means of enhancing sustainability behaviors, one common sustainable practice was identified, which was influencing others. All participants have taken the action in different ways such a sharing the experience to their colleagues, clients and advising clients and governmental agencies. Three sustainable practices of taking Initiative (e.g., creating a cross-functional community, proposing a new topic which learned during the training) , avoiding harm (e.g., leasing a electronic car, taking less flight), fair wage and equal opportunities (e.g., building the fair pay system) are unique in the case of the ELPRS while conserving (e.g., using reusable cups and lunch box, separation) and social innovation (e.g., setting up a bicycle parking lot for visitors) are unique actions in the case of the Tour de Omrin.

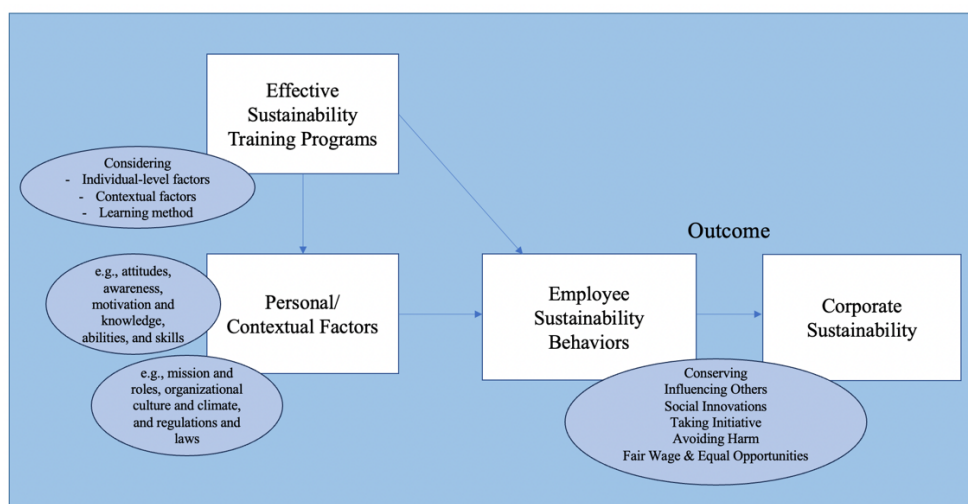


Figure 2: The process of corporate sustainability triggered by effective sustainability training program

As the level of personal factors (e.g., awareness, attitude, knowledge) are different among participants, it is more effective to invoke the five change behavioral stages namely, the transtheoretical model (TTM) stages (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) . It includes precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. When it comes to behavioral change in individuals, it is considered highly effective to implement approaches that are tailored to each stage (Raihan & Cogburn, 2023). Thus, it could be useful to know how much the participants knows about the sustainability topics and what they want to learn specifically. By doing so, for instance each lecture can be suit to their current level of knowledge, and in turn might motivate them to learn more. Additionally, it is also useful to research on their sustainable behaviors at home so that the human activities at work and non-work environment cannot be separated (Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980).

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide:

Semi-structured interview with each participant after the sustainability employee training program

Introduction

Thank you for participating in the interview regarding the RUG Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability/ the Tour de Omrrin. I have a few questions for you about the program which was intended to foster the knowledge and understanding of not only Deloitte's operation but also their sustainability efforts.

There are no right or wrong answers, and if you don't feel comfortable to answer a question that is also fine of course. I would very much appreciate your honesty. The interview will take around 30-40 minutes.

Before we start, are you ok with me voice recording the interview to transcribe it later? And here is the participant consent sheet to sign. I hope everything is clear, if not, now is the time to ask me questions about the form.

About Program/ Factors/ Mission

- **Could you guide me through the experience you had during the program?**
 - What do you remember the most?
 - **What did you learn from the program?**
 - What was that? and why?
 - Did you learn something new?
- **What did you like the most / find it interesting during the program in terms of sustainability?**
 - Why that in particular?
 - Did you look further into the topic after the program? If so, how? What did you find out?
 - Did you know it before you joined the program?
- **Could you tell me in your words, what are Deloitte's mission and values? What do they care for?**
- **Could you describe it especially in terms of sustainability?**
 - What do you know about the sustainability efforts Deloitte pursues?
 - **Could you describe what you do (your role) in Deloitte and how do you connect your role to the Deloitte's mission and values in sustainability?**
 - **Is there any fact you can share with me about any sustainability issues or projects (e.g. companies, products & services, civic activities etc.) you looked up or found out recently after the program?**
 - Where did you find out about that one? And when?
 - What motivated you to do so?
 - What have you done or plan to start after you looked up?
 - **So taking this into account: What sustainability now mean to you? Can you name the three things that come straight into mind?**
 - **Can you tell me what could have been better/ improved if you point out?**
 - What was missing for you?
 - Any suggestion?

BEHAVIORS

- **Have you spoken to others what you saw and learned after program?**
 - What did you talk about?
 - Why and why not?
 - Who did you talk to?



- **How likely have you taken actions towards more sustainable one in your workplace?**
 - How you can integrate what you learned into your workplace/ job?
 - Could you elaborate more on what you do? Or What do you want to start?
 - Do you notice somewhere needs to be changed to improve sustainability performance in your department? How do you approach that? Why not?
 - What would make you try sustainable actions in a workplace? (if no idea: communication, time, organizational system, sustainability initiative programs, cross functional meeting/ workshop etc)
 - And what is still holding you back / bothering you?

- **How likely have you changed your attitude and behavior in your daily life to more sustainable one?**
 - What have you started or planning to start?
 - Why did you choose to do that at that moment?
 - Is this something you do regularly or was it a new thing?
 - What would make you try out more?
 - And what is still holding you back / bothering you?

**Appendix B: Google Link to Documents of each program:
the Tour de Omrin and The Executive Learning Program Responsibility for Sustainability
(Assessors only)**



https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yFrB2wj3Hy1HyRj5_cjMPwbqyEFbHbQR?usp=share_link

Appendix C: Google Link to Ethics Checklist & Informed Consent Forms

(Assessors only)

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fy1Zf8fy70xDqgMdkMfYfufSgToRYOk0?usp=share_link