Aalto University
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DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY:

Sustainability managers as change agents in Finnish MNEs

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Abstract

Corporate sustainability, the pursuit of the triple bottom line of people, profit and planet, despite its complexity provides immense potential, as if businesses embed sustainability at the core of their strategy and practice effective change management, significant positive impact can be achieved. For business to transform from business-as-usual to creating both business and societal value, driving change for corporate sustainability through inspiring, motivating and influencing others is necessary. To do this, businesses increasingly appoint individuals to positions for initiating and implementing corporate sustainability. Therefore, the research question I'm addressing in this thesis is *how do sustainability managers drive change in Finnish MNEs?*

To answer the research question, I have studied sustainability professionals working in management roles from different seniority levels in multinational enterprises headquartered in Finland, henceforth sustainability managers in Finnish MNEs. The thesis positions as a phenomenon-driven research in the intersection of corporate sustainability, organizational change and sustainability leadership, with a special focus on the practice of issue selling. Moreover, the institutional setting of my research provides an interesting comparison to existing literature predominantly situated in anglophone institutional contexts.

I conducted my research as a comparative case-study, using eight sustainability managers as the individual cases. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews, after which I conducted within-case analyses and cross-case comparisons. What I found was that the interviewed sustainability professionals profiled under four different change agency approaches. These were the capacity building approach, rational and systematic approach, collaborative approach, and internal selling approach. Each approach includes a range of tactics used for driving organizational change for sustainability, as mentioned by the interviewees.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of change agency for sustainable development at the individual level, in the particular institutional context of Finland. It also provides practical implications for managers and organizations by identifying different approaches and tactics that can be used in driving change for corporate sustainability, as well as several contextual factors that influence the process and should be considered to adopt context-specific approaches.

Keywords corporate sustainability, organizational change, sustainability managers

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Tiivistelmä

Kestävä liiketoiminta pyrkii kolmeen tavoitteeseen, eli niin ihmisten ja ympäristön hyvinvoinnin kuin taloudellisen voitonkin saavuttamisen. Monimutkaisuudestaan huolimatta kestävämmästä liiketoiminnasta löytyy paljon käyttämättömiä mahdollisuuksia tehokkaan muutosjohtamisen kautta. Jotta liiketoiminta siirtyisi perinteisestä toimintatavastaan luomaan sekä liiketaloudellista tulosta että yhteiskunnallista arvoa, on kestävän kehityksen ajaminen inspiroimalla, motivoimalla ja vaikuttamalla muihin välttämätöntä. Yritykset nimeävätkin yhä useammin henkilöitä tehtäviin yrityksen kestävän kehityksen mukaisen vastuullisuuden edistämiseksi. Siksi tämän opinnäytetyön tutkimuskysymys, johon pyrin vastaamaan, on: *kuinka yritysvastuujohtajat ajavat muutosta suomalaisissa monikansallisissa yrityksissä?*

Vastatakseni tähän kysymykseen olen haastatellut yritysvastuujohtajia eri päällikkötasoilta sellaisista monikansallisissa yrityksissä, joiden pääkonttori sijaitsee Suomessa. Opinnäytetyöni on ilmiövetoista tutkimusta yritysvastuun, organisaatiomuutoksen ja kestävän kehityksen johtamisen risteyksessä, ja se keskittyy erityisesti selvittämään, miten muutosta myydään organisaation sisällä. Tutkimukseni instituutionaalinen konteksti tarjoaa mielenkiintoisen vertailukohdan aiempaan tutkimukseen, joka sijoittuu pääasiassa englanninkieliseen yritysmaailmaan.

Tutkimus on suoritettu kahdeksan yritysvastuujohtajan kokemuksia vertailevana tapaustutkimuksena. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin pääosin perusteellisten haastattelujen avulla, minkä lisäksi analyysin tukena on käytetty julkisesti löytyvää tietoa. Haastattelut analysoitiin ensin yksitellen tapauskohtaisesti ja sen jälkeen vertaamalla niitä keskenään.

Tutkimustuloksista ilmenee, että haastatellut yritysvastuujohtajat profiloituvat neljään erilaiseen muutosjohtamisen lähestymistapaan. Näitä lähestymistapoja ovat 1) sisäisen kapasiteetin kehittämisen lähestymistapa, 2) rationaalinen ja systemaattinen lähestymistapa, 3) yhteistyön kehittämisen lähestymistapa sekä 4) sisäisen muutosmyynnin lähestymistapa. Kukin lähestymistapa sisältää haastateltavien mainitsemia erilaisia taktiikkoja, joilla pyritään edistämään organisaation muutosta kestävän kehityksen mukaiseen suuntaan.

Tämä opinnäytetyö auttaa ymmärtämään yksilötasolla muutosjohtamista monikansallisissa yrityksissä kestävän kehityksen mukaisen liiketoiminnan suuntaan, erityisesti Suomen institutionaalisessa kontekstissa. Se tarjoaa myös mahdollisuuksia käytännön johtopäätöksiin johtajille ja organisaatioille avaamalla erilaisia lähestymistapoja ja taktiikoita sekä auttamalla tunnistamaan erilaisia kontekstuaalisia vaikutteita muutosjohtamiseen.

Avainsanat kestävä liiketoiminta, organisaation muutos, yritysvastuujohtajat

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1) INTRODUCTION

“I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is."

- Greta Thunberg (World Economic Forum, Davos, 24 January 2019)

This quote from one of the most controversial yet effective changemakers in the recent years presents the challenges we have ahead as a society, as well as the urgent need for action. Businesses are key players in the change for sustainability, as their actions play a major role in determining whether we will be able to transition into a more sustainable world or not. Organizations themselves have actors within them, who hope to drive change from the business-as-usual based on a quarterly economy to a more sustainable one, with long-term, intergenerational approach and targets. Sustainability managers are specifically positioned to act as change agents, promoting and integrating sustainability in their organizations, and influencing others in the organization to understand the burning question of sustainability and the implications it has for business, and then, to act as if the house is on fire. In this thesis my main objective is to therefore uncover how sustainability managers in Finnish multinational enterprises drive change to embed corporate sustainability in their business organizations.

1.1. Background to the study

Business is under high pressure for transformational change, as the world is increasingly concerned with the challenge of sustainability. At the same time, businesses play a key role in solving these issues by transforming their business models and practices to ones promoting sustainable development, defined by the Brundtland Commission as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This relevance and importance of business organizations in solving global challenges has been acknowledged by the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030, which call for collaborative action between all countries and stakeholders (*Transforming our world: The*

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). Yet, while the SDGs were designed with the purpose of engaging the private sector to address global challenges identified by the SDGs, research indicates that businesses are simply using them as “a massive global public relations charade” (Kramer, Agarval and Srinivas, 2019, p.1). This calls for a significant business transformation, which brings sustainability to the core of business strategy. Moreover, the scale of resources that could be used for tackling sustainability challenges is immense, if the private sector wished to mobilize them, by advancing the sustainable development goals through their core business (ibid). Therefore, by embedding sustainability at the heart of business strategy, vast potential for change can be unlocked.

Finland, among other Nordic countries, is showing the way for sustainable business. Some indication for this may be found when looking at the global sustainability rankings. Both Corporate Knights’ index of the world’s most sustainable corporations 2020 (Corporate Knights, 2020) and the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index (S&P Dow Jones Indices, 2020) include six Finnish businesses in their rankings, alongside other Nordic countries. This is partly due to the long-standing roots of stakeholder engagement in the region (Strand & Freeman, 2015). When it comes to corporate sustainability practices, Finland provides an interesting contextual addition to current empirical research.

Multinational enterprises then have the scale of resources that can really make an impact, if redirected to the challenge and opportunity of sustainable development, as well as the resources for appointing sustainability managers, teams and functions. Yet, due to their organizational complexity and global presence, transforming the business-as-usual to a more sustainable approach may be much harder than in smaller and more local organizations. Understanding the processes and practices behind driving change for sustainability in MNEs thus provides valuable lessons for achieving true change in the world.

To address the need for change and to further integrate sustainability into the business, companies are increasingly employing individuals with the responsibility of advancing corporate sustainability. I will refer to these individuals as sustainability managers. Sustainability managers are largely involved with not only the implementation of more sustainable business practices but also with influencing others in their organizations to find more sustainable solutions, strategies and practices, therefore acting as change agents. They advocate and champion for relevant practices, embed new ones within the organizational culture (Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020), and play a key role in designing and implementing positive emotionology of sustainability challenges, by framing them as a positive challenge and as a business opportunity (Wright & Nyberg, 2012). They can be "tempered radicals", who are "cautious and committed catalysts who keep going and who slowly make a difference" (Meyerson, 2001, p. 5). However, their task is not easy nor straightforward, as their role provides a battleground full of tensions and inherent contradictions, which require them to constantly balance and bridge opposing needs and views, to successfully promote corporate sustainability (Wright & Nyberg, 2012). Learning how these individuals act as change agents can therefore be not only inspirational but also teach us how we can better choose strategies for influencing others to drive change and for providing organizational contexts that enable effective change management for sustainability.

My personal motivation for this study stems from not only the urgency of climate action but also from the vast interest in how the world can be changed for the better and how business has the potential to play a positive role in this change. Multinational enterprises are generally representative of the business-as-usual approach, yet a clear shift can already be seen even in large businesses in traditional industries. Inside these organizations, some individuals are working hard to push and accelerate the transformation. I find the work and determination of these change makers and "activists-in-a-suit" (Carollo & Guerci, 2018) truly fascinating, and therefore wanted to better understand how they do it, what challenges they face and how do they cope with the challenges and tensions that are inherent in their roles.

1.2. Research gap

Both corporate sustainability and organizational change have yielded extensive research in the past years. Yet, while research on sustainability professionals and how they drive change is increasing, it remains largely focused on anglophone institutional settings (e.g.

Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Wright & Nyberg, 2012; Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020). This creates a gap in literature, especially since while corporate sustainability policies and management practices have been spreading globally, evolving into an "Americanization" of management practices, the national institutional contexts create differences among countries in the assumption of corporate sustainability. (Matten & Moon, 2008) This means that understanding the different institutional contexts, instead of focusing on a few similar contexts, is essential in understanding the phenomenon in a global context, as studying only similar institutional settings will explain the phenomenon only in relation to that particular context. As an example, Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020) establish that their research aims to understand the sustainability change practices only in relation to the US context. Research on different institutional contexts is therefore necessary to enrich the current empirical literature.

The Finnish institutional context of this thesis then provides an interesting background to the study, as there are long roots in stakeholder theory and practice in the Nordics (Strand & Freeman, 2015). Although using the term Scandinavia, Strand and Freeman (2015) claim that the region provides an especially inspiring context for studying stakeholder engagement, which is closely linked to sustainability, due to what they call a "Scandinavian cooperative advantage". They further argue that comparing the region especially with the US context, may provide interesting insight into sustainability practices in business organizations. While Finland is not technically part of Scandinavia, it is often included in it, due to its historical roots and institutional similarity. (ibid) When it comes to long roots in stakeholder engagement in society and in business practice, literature shows that Finland is clearly part of the pack (Carroll & Näsi, 1997; Strand & Freeman, 2015; Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017).

This thesis is therefore positioned as a phenomenon-driven research contextualized in the institutional setting of the Finnish welfare economy, contributing to the research areas of corporate sustainability and organizational change, and the understanding of the phenomenon as well as the contextual factors and influences in the chosen research area. For practitioners then, understanding the process of driving change in order to improve the organization's sustainability practices is helpful in deciding which tools and perspectives to adopt and how.

1.3. Research questions

In order to address the underlying research problem and contribute to the literature by empirical research on the phenomenon in the specific institutional context, the research objective would be to understand how sustainability managers act as change agents for corporate sustainability in multinational enterprises in Finland. Therefore, the overall research question is *how do sustainability managers drive change in Finnish MNEs?*

During the data analysis, an additional sub-question emerged, namely that of *how do contextual factors at the individual and organizational level influence the way sustainability managers promote corporate sustainability?* This is as a clear connection of contextual influences on the ways sustainability managers drive change emerged from the collected data.

1.4. Limitations

The main limitation of this thesis is that since the findings are based on data from semi-structured interviews, the findings only show what tactics each of the interviewees have consciously thought about during the interview. Therefore, the individuals' use of particular tactics, and more so the absence of others, cannot be determined as definite. Moreover, the duration of interviews, especially in some of the cases, could pose a limitation, as the richness of data may be less than it would have been with either longer interviews or other data collection methods. More extensive data collection could also have increased the reliability and connection of the contextual influences researched in connection to the approaches.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The overarching research areas for this thesis are corporate sustainability and organizational change, as the focus of the research is on understanding how sustainability managers drive change for corporate sustainability in multinational corporations. While there is increasingly research conducted on the individual level at the intersection of corporate sustainability and organizational change, the empirical research on sustainability professionals as change agents remains largely focused on anglophone institutional contexts, limiting the understanding of the phenomenon on a global level. I will now investigate each of these research areas and how they relate to our understanding of how sustainability managers drive change for corporate sustainability in Finnish MNEs.

2.1. Corporate sustainability

In this section I will discuss the definition of corporate sustainability, the influence of institutional contexts for corporate sustainability and finally, the business case for corporate sustainability and the inherent paradoxes and tensions it entails.

2.1.1. Defining corporate sustainability

Corporate sustainability is a concept that has yet to be defined in a universally accepted way and is often used as a synonym to corporate social responsibility (Millar et al., 2012). Yet, researchers argue that these two concepts should be kept distinct from each other, despite often used interchangeably by both researchers and practitioners alike (Bansal & Song, 2017; van Marrewijk, 2003). Bansal and Song (2017) claim that the concept of corporate sustainability and corporate responsibility should be seen as a separate, while in many ways similar, constructs, because they arise from two different paradigms. While corporate responsibility research comes from a normative position concerned with ethics, corporate sustainability arises from systems perspective with its basis in systems science. They further argue that both business managers and researchers use the two words “interchangeably, inconsistently, and ambiguously” (p. 106), and the blurring of these two concepts has hindered the development of the research field by causing confusion around the two concepts. (Bansal & Song, 2017) On the other hand, van Marrewijk (2003) emphasizes the contextual influence on the concepts and argues that both concepts should be defined depending on the specific organizational factors, such as the organization's ambition level. However, he argues that corporate sustainability serves as the ultimate goal, that of promoting sustainable development, while corporate responsibility is more linked to the people and communion at organizational level.

In line with the systems perspective and the ultimate goal of sustainable development, I will focus on corporate sustainability and define it as the pursuit of the triple bottom line of profit, people and planet (Millar et al., 2012). Furthermore, not only is corporate sustainability, rather than corporate responsibility alone, the focus area for many of the interviewed professionals, it also fits very well the sustainability issues framed as not only a challenge but as a business opportunity. However, as the concepts share many similarities, I will use and cite literature on corporate social responsibility compatible with corporate sustainability, while using only one terminology in the thesis for increased coherence and clarity.

2.1.2. Corporate sustainability in Finland

Matten and Moon (2008) propose that there are both implicit and explicit practice of corporate sustainability, and that the emphasis on each of them differs between countries. By using institutional theory, they discuss the differences regarding corporate sustainability between the United States and Europe, as well as the rise of the concepts' popularity in Europe. They argue that the way corporations are governed are shaped by the motives of key stakeholders, such as managers and shareholders, and the way the practice differs between countries is determined firstly by their formal institutions, but also by the norms, incentives and rules attached to them. Institutional theory thus enables the study of these in the relevant national, cultural and institutional contexts, including the analysis of interdependencies and interactions prevalent in stakeholder relations necessary for understanding corporate sustainability, operating in the societal sphere. Furthermore, they claim that there is a variety of the institutional factors affecting the differences in corporate sustainability between countries, including political systems, financial systems, education and labor systems, cultural systems, nature of the firm, organization of market processes, and coordination and control systems. For example, in European contexts other stakeholders than shareholders often have more influence than in the United States, which in turn affects corporate governance. Another example is how the differences in cultural systems in US and in Europe mean that the underlying assumptions about society, business and government differ significantly between the countries, thus also explaining differences in corporate sustainability. (Matten & Moon, 2008)

Since my thesis focuses on a certain institutional environment, understanding the effect institutional context has on the practice of corporate sustainability is necessary. At the same time, understanding the different ways corporate sustainability is practiced requires research on a variety of institutional settings, instead of solely focusing on one dominant research context. Moreover, studying an institutional context, such as Finland, which hasn't been researched before in relation to the research topic, allows for insights into the differing institutional contexts and how they relate to corporate sustainability. For example, Strand and Freeman (2015) argue that in comparison with the largely anglophone literature on corporate sustainability and change agency, the Nordic setting may provide interesting findings due to the contrasting context of welfare economy and high emphasis on stakeholder engagement.

The Finnish welfare state was built during the country's quick industrialization, beginning in the 1950s, and the society was based on a centralized market economy until the 1990s. However, in the 1990s and 2000s the society and business changed drastically as the economy opened with significant increase to free-market orientation, influenced by e.g. the increased globalization and becoming a member of the EU. Yet, public coordination of the economy was not completely left behind, which lead to a model of knowledge economy based on a combination of the Finnish business system with the national innovation system. This led Finland to become a global leader in various performance metrics such as education, human development, trust and transparency, and quality of life and happiness. Moreover, the importance of corporate responsibility and sustainability issues increased during the 2000s in the Finnish society, which also led companies to address corporate sustainability more in their business practices. (Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017) While corporate sustainability in Finnish business has traditionally been more implicit rather than explicit by nature, this also started to change in the beginning in the 2000s (Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017), indicating the presence of the "Americanization" of corporate sustainability (Matten & Moon, 2008) also in Finland. The underlying balance of traditionally implicit corporate sustainability, based on stakeholder engagement integrated in the society and business practice, and the newer, more explicit, corporate sustainability practices, influenced by the globalization, provides an intriguing setting by which to study the practice of corporate sustainability.

Stakeholder management in particular has long been part of Finnish business research and practice (Carroll & Näsi, 1997; Strand & Freeman, 2015; Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017), and Finnish companies have perceived stakeholders as one of the main reasons to engage in corporate sustainability (Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017). In most cases, this is not because of the businesses' intrinsic stakeholder responsibility, but rather due to the practice of strategic stakeholder management, motivated by the expected business benefits and competitive advantage gained from the practices, therefore considering primarily financial gains for the business rather than moral commitments to stakeholders (Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017). Moreover, Kujala, Lämsä and Riivari (2017) found that while stakeholder management and the balancing of stakeholder responsibilities with economic interests has long been in the agenda of Finnish business managers, the business contexts influences the managers' commitment to stakeholder responsibility. For example, the expansion of free competition in the 1990s in Finland in particular strengthened the managers' commitment to stakeholder responsibility, especially in relation to environmental issues (ibid). This attitudinal change, in addition to the traditionally high stakeholder engagement, may be one of the reasons why Finnish businesses are so dominant in sustainability rankings in relation to the size of the Finnish economy, affecting the way corporate sustainability is seen in Finnish MNEs.

2.1.3. The business case for sustainability

One of the key drivers of the increased popularity of corporate sustainability and its' becoming of an ever more stronger part of business is the concept of shared value, or the process of "creating economic value in a way that *also* creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges" (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 64). By providing shared value, businesses are contributing not only to their own economic sustainability, but also to the social and environmental sustainability, therefore attaining the triple bottom line.

However, while the concept of shared value and the business case approach of combining profits with positive social impact may sound appealing due to their promise of having-it-all, Hahn et al (2010) argue that there are inherent trade-offs in business and sustainability that cannot be addressed just by the win-win paradigm. This, they say, is because the complexity and multifacetedness of sustainable development result in inherent trade-offs in corporate sustainability and ignoring the trade-offs and tensions would result in a narrow view of what corporate sustainability can contribute to sustainable development on the whole (Hahn et al., 2010). Moreover, focusing solely on the business case approach may prove to diminish corporate sustainability to just that, ignoring the fundamental paradoxes between e.g. the climate crisis and economic growth.

Despite the differences in approaches to corporate sustainability, it is evident that businesses need to develop new approaches and perspectives to navigate the complexity of the issue at hand. To challenge the existing assumptions about the traditional capitalist system and business-as-usual on one hand, and the perceived irrelevance of sustainability issues that do not directly bring easily measured business benefit on the other, the dominant perspectives on business practices need fundamental revising and for that, both significant and continuous organizational change and learning is needed.

2.2. Organizational change for corporate sustainability

Since achieving sustainable development requires a drastic shift from the business-as-usual approach to a new way of doing business, organizational change by management practices that drive corporate sustainability inside business organizations plays a major role. Next, I will discuss these practices particularly in relation to literature on organizational sensemaking and sensegiving, and the processes of framing and selling sustainability issues.

2.2.1. Sensemaking and sensegiving

Existing research on change management shows that organizational change involves a process of sensemaking (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Sensemaking in this context can be defined as a process of “meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempted to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Moreover, according to Weick (1995), sensemaking occurs in ambiguous and uncertain occasions. Because of the complexity and nature of sustainability challenges, organizational change driven by the need to tackle issues related to sustainable development is largely an ambiguous and uncertain process, therefore requiring sensemaking both at an individual and organizational level.

However, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argue that organizational change is not only about sensemaking, but also about sensegiving. According to them, sensegiving is “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). The phases of the sensemaking and sensegiving cycle respond to periods of understanding and influencing, translating to “cycles of cognition and action by the involved parties” (ibid). They further argue that “strategic change involves an attempt to change current modes of cognition and action” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 443). This would mean that by understanding others, and then attempting to influence the cognitive frames of others, is an essential part of initiating strategic change in the organization.

Frames are defined as “the means by which managers make sense of ambiguous information from their environments” (Kaplan, 2008, p. 729), meaning that they are the tools used for one’s process of sensemaking. The process of framing then refers to the act of intentional manipulation of the sense (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). This means that framing allows one to influence the sensemaking of others, thus themselves taking part in the act of sensegiving. Furthermore, Kaplan (2008) suggests that individuals participate in so-called framing contests, in which actors seek to transform their own cognitive frames into the predominant collective frame in the organization. In order to do so, actors attempt to influence how issues are seen by others, by aiming to make their frame resonate and to mobilize action in their favor. When successful, one particular frame will become predominant in the strategic choice, and when not, the divergence may defer decisions and therefore stifle change. (Kaplan, 2008) Therefore, successful framing of issues in the organization plays an important role in initiating change, as it enables the actor to change the predominant way issues are seen in the organization.

Finally, Hahn et al (2014) discuss the types of cognitive frames used when responding to sustainability issues in business. They propose two ideal-types of cognitive frames, which business managers use when making decisions on sustainability issues, and explore the way the content and structure of these frames influence sensemaking. The two ideal-type cognitive frames proposed are the business case frame and a paradoxical frame. In the former, corporate sustainability is approached by the win-win paradigm of combining profits with sustainability, while the latter frame recognizes and embraces the trade-offs and tensions inherent in corporate sustainability. Furthermore, neither of the two frames alone will be enough to create the level of responses needed to tackle the challenges in sustainability, they claim, but rather both should be used in managerial decision making. This is as the paradoxical frame can be useful when pioneering new, more comprehensive responses, while the business case frame allows for the translation of the responses into practice by reducing the complexity of the sustainability issues. (Hahn et al, 2014). Therefore, the skillful use of issue framing by sustainability managers producing both types of frames in the right moments and avenues is necessary when striving for high level of corporate sustainability.

2.2.2. Issue selling for driving change

Issue selling, defined as the “individual's behaviors that are directed toward affecting others’ attention to and understanding of issues” (Dutton & Ashford, 1993, p. 398), is a specific and practical way of driving change by influencing others in an organization, where top management’s attention is a scarce resource (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). This means issue sellers are “mindful and proactive orchestrators of change who, with intent, try to bring streams of issues, solutions, and opportunities together in ways that focus attention and invite action on issues" (Dutton et al., 2001, p. 732). Change agents such as sustainability managers then often act as issue sellers, as they try to initiate collective action in the organization.

Focusing on the top management's attention and how individuals aim to gain it, Dutton and Ashford (1993) developed a model of choices in issue selling and their primary outcomes. According to the model, the initial enablers for issue selling are the perceived characteristics of top management, including top management's openness and supportiveness, and the characteristics of the issue seller themselves, such as structural location and functional orientation, which lead to the initiation of the issue selling process. (Dutton & Ashford, 1993)

The issue selling process consists of issue packaging and the selling process. Issue packaging refers to "how an issue is linguistically framed, the way an issue is presented, and how an issue's boundaries are established" (Dutton & Ashford, 1993, pp. 410). By strategic issue content framing sellers aim to sell the issue in a way that influences the frame placed around it over time, for example by influencing how the issue's central attributes, such as its complexity or urgency, are perceived. Moreover, they claim that issue presentation is essential for successful selling attempts. According to the authors, by using drama and novelty in the presentation, the issue receives higher urgency, and therefore draws attention to the issue. After using vivid and dramatic stories, successful sellers use numerical and data-based evidence for selling the issue. The structuring of the claims, for example whether they are presented as two- or one-sided appeals, also influences the sellers' ability to affect the corresponding response. Finally, the extent to which an issue is presented as being in connection to other issues affects how much individuals are willing to invest resources toward the issue. The actual selling process then consists of the breadth of involvement, choice of channel and formal versus informal tactics. (Dutton & Ashford, 1993)

Issue packaging and the selling process will then determine the credibility of the seller for future selling attempts, as well as the attention provided by the top management. Therefore, the authors argue, the indicators of issue selling success are top management attention devoted to the issue, as well as the individual's maintained or enhanced credibility as an issue seller. Finally, after a successful issue selling attempt, the attained top management attention leads to substantive issue action and new issue selling initiatives. (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) The proposed issue selling model indicates that the key to successfully sell issues sustainability managers would need to skillful package issues and use an appropriate selling process, which then result in attained top management attention and increased credibility, in turn facilitating further issue selling attempts for corporate sustainability.

In a case study of a not-for-profit hospital in the US, Dutton et al (2001) provided further empirical research on the issue selling model focusing on the specific moves issue sellers make in the process. The study identified three categories of moves consisting of packaging moves, involvement moves, and process moves. They further divided packaging moves into presentation moves, which are the way the issue seller promoted the issue, and issue bundling moves, meaning the way the issue seller aimed to connect the given issue with other issues or goals. Involvement moves then focus on the target of involvement and the nature of involvement in the attempt. In order to sell issues effectively, they argue, issue sellers need to have knowledge of whom to involve and when. Process moves then consist of the formality, preparation and timing of issue selling attempts. (Dutton et al., 2001) Understanding the issue selling process and moves is important, as it provides the background for exploring the different tactics sustainability managers use when they act as change agents in the organization. However, in order to fully understand how change is driven in organizations, one needs to consider the specific context and their influence on the issue selling attempts.

2.2.3. Contextual influences in issue selling

The organizational context plays a key role in issue selling attempts, and several studies have been made in assessing how these contextual factors affect managers' decisions to sell issues. Dutton et al (1997) presented two studies with findings indicating various favorable and unfavorable contexts, as well as the influence of image risk on issue selling attempts. The first study found top management's willingness to listen, supportiveness of the organizational culture, competitive and economic pressures and change in the organization as favorable contexts. Unfavorable contexts were the fear of negative consequences, downsizing conditions, uncertainty, and conservativeness of the culture. In their second study, the emphasis was on impression management and image risk, as according to them, one key outcome of issue selling is the possible enhancement or harm to the seller's image or reputation in the organization. They found three factors affecting image risk, namely political vulnerability, referring to the characteristics of the process and of the issue that make it politically riskier to sell the issue, distant seller-target relationship, referring to the existence and quality of the relationship the issue seller has with top management, and norm violation, meaning deviation from a specific recipe for issue selling consisting of starting the process by selling the issue to one's boss, backing it up with data, and bundling it with a solution. (Dutton et al., 1997)

Another study was made by Dutton et al (2002) into how the organizational context affects issue selling by analyzing how contextual cues affect the decision to raise gender-equity issues at work by female managers. They argue that the individuals' decision to act is based on how they make sense of the contextual setting, and that by noticing and using contextual cues they decide whether it would be sensible to take action or not. Therefore, they argue, organizational cues affect the desirability of action as the issue sellers assess whether their effort will be successful or not, depending on the favorability of the context. Their findings suggest two types of contextual cues: so-called "red lights" and "green lights". The most frequently mentioned contextual cues for red lights were demographic patterns, qualities of the culture, qualities of top management, negative consequences for issue sellers, and the limited attentional capacity of the organization. The most frequently mentioned green lights then included demographic patterns, qualities of top management, organizational goals, voice mechanisms, existence of supportive structures, position or reputation of issue seller, small organizational size, desire for positive organizational reputation, regulatory compliance and litigation fears, qualities of the culture, and industry-level characteristics. Finally, they argue that the contextual cues affect the probability of success, image risk, and political support resulting from the issue selling attempt, which in turn affect the willingness to sell the issues. (Dutton et al., 2002)

These findings indicate that effective issue selling is highly context reliant, and the contextual factors not only determine whether the context is favorable or unfavorable, but also affects the decision whether to attempt selling a particular issue or not. Furthermore, Ling, Floyd and Baldridge (2005) argue that different national cultures affect the extent to which contextual cues influence an individual's intention to sell issues and the choice of selling strategy, which is why considering not only the organizational context, but also the institutional context is essential when studying issue selling processes. While these studies on issue selling have focused on a different contextual setting, their findings provide a basis for understanding the influences behind individuals' choice of action, when it comes to selling issues. Based on the research, there is a range of contextual cues which affect the decision to act, including supportive top management and organizational culture, as well as the broader organizational and industry context. Understanding sustainability managers' issue selling efforts then require understanding the context they operate in, and the influence it has on the effectiveness of issue selling attempts.

Moreover, Dutton et al (2001) found that contextual knowledge, consisting of relational knowledge, normative knowledge, and strategic knowledge, played a key part in the success of issue selling. Relational knowledge refers to knowledge that actors have of each other and their interests and intentions, and by having this knowledge issue sellers are able to understand what issues are important to others, how to talk about them, and how to navigate social contexts. For example, when using involvement moves, having relational knowledge about whom and when to involve enables sellers to use the moves effectively, e.g. when creating allies for their issue selling efforts. Normative knowledge then refers to knowledge of which behavior patterns are accepted and appropriate in different organizational settings. Lastly, strategic knowledge refers to the understanding sellers have of the organization's goals, plans and priorities. (Dutton et al., 2001) This means experience and generated knowledge of the particular context then improve the issue sellers' efforts and effectiveness.

In an ethnographic study in the US hospitals, Howard-Grenville (2007) focused on how organizational meanings influence issue selling effectiveness, asking what makes moves effective and how do issue selling efforts develop over time. Based on her findings, she develops a model of issue selling, which identifies it as a form of resourcing, meaning developing assets that enable issue sellers to enact "schemas", in order to drive action within organizations. She found that effective issue selling moves balanced between perceived novelty of the issues while remaining attractive to the dominant schemas in the organization. The two ways issue sellers became better at resourcing were accumulating assets (e.g. formal authority or normative knowledge) and learning from their experiences to better adjust their issue selling moves. The assets identified in the article were formal authority, relationships, expertise, and normative knowledge. In addition, she found six moves made by the issue sellers in the study: asserting decision processes, taking control, appealing to commitments, working within constraints, providing data, and offering explanations. Finally, the study found that patterns of successful and unsuccessful moves do not depend on what the moves are, but rather what they do in that context. Therefore, sellers need to experiment and learn how to navigate the context in order to use the moves effectively. (Howard-Grenville, 2007) Her findings indicate that drawing from different issue selling moves and using contextual knowledge accumulated over time, sustainability managers are able to influence the decision making in the organization. Through the process, they are further able to gain new knowledge and accumulated assets, as a way of resourcing, to increase effectiveness in new issue selling attempts. This means that driving change through issue selling is a circular process, in which experience in the organization increases the effectiveness of moves and helps with choosing the correct ones, and over time, improves the managers' skills in driving change.

2.2.4. Issue selling for corporate sustainability

Andersson and Bateman (2000) attempted to explain issue selling in the context of corporate sustainability at the individual level, by studying how "environmental champions" persuade others in the organization in order to push environmental issues into the business practice. They found that there are three underlying activities that shape what they call the championing process. These activities are first identifying an issue, then packaging it as appealing to others, and then selling it to the relevant decision makers. They further argue that each of these championing activities then contribute to the success of furthering an environmental issue in the organization. The authors found specific tactics that had been used in successful episodes of championing an environmental issue. These were for example framing an issue as urgent as well as downplaying the emotionality and drama of the issue, and instead, basing the arguments on formal business language and familiar protocol, as using dramatic stories and emotional language may not be seen as appropriate or effective in business settings. (ibid)

When it comes to issue framing, they found that there was no specific blueprint for successful framing of environmental issues, but rather one must create their own unique frame to the issue by focusing on the financial benefits of the issue and then tailoring the framing to the special features of both the issue and the organizational context. Moreover, they found that most of the environmental champions used rationality as a persuasion tool when selling issues to key decision makers. However, they found that the use of rational persuasion was not necessary for successfully championing environmental issues, despite it being used by most issue sellers, whether successful or not. Rather, the success of a championing effort was marked by the use of two softer influence tactics, namely those of coalition building and inspirational appeal. Moreover, by attaining help and endorsement from others the issue sellers gained increased credibility and legitimacy for their issue selling efforts. Finally, they noticed that the context was highly important and relevant to the championing process. For example, successful use of emotion and drama, and the level of effectiveness of inspirational appeal, depended on the existing strength of the environmental paradigm in the organization. (Andersson & Bateman, 2000)

Moreover, Crane (2000) studied the moral dimension of corporate greening and argues that corporations tend to partake in amoralization of corporate social responsibility, meaning "a lack of moral meaning and significance for organization members in relation to the natural environment" (Crane, 2000, pp. 673). The article presents corporate greening as a practice of issue selling and identifies the specific processes of amoralization as well as impression management practiced by the issue sellers. The author studied three types of organizations, which he calls conventional, collaborative, and social mission organizations, and found that while conventional organizations experienced depersonalization of issues with functional morality boundaries, in social mission organizations the issues are highly personalized and boundaries hierarchical, while collaborative organizations situated in the middle as 'split' depersonalization and situational boundaries. According to Crane (2000), more emphasis on the creation and promotion of ethical values and emotional connectivity is needed, thereby driving a radical change of business culture. Therefore, solely using the business case for selling sustainability issues may not be the optimal strategy for driving change, as it ignores the tensions inherent in corporate sustainability and may reduce the opportunities for true business transformation.

2.3. Sustainability managers as change agents

Since corporate sustainability deals with inherent tensions and trade-offs, sustainability managers need to develop new skills to navigate the complexity of sustainability challenges and balance them with business interests (Hahn et al., 2010). Moreover, as sustainability managers are not always the decision makers themselves, but instead focus their work on influencing decision making across different business units and organizational functions, the art of influencing and persuading others plays a big part in their role. By doing this, sustainability managers drive change in a wider spectrum in the organization, acting as catalysts for change. (Millar et al., 2012; Cramer et al., 2006) To be truly effective in achieving broader change for sustainability across business units and functions, sustainability managers need to learn to practice systematic and strategic leadership and change initiation. In this section I will discuss sustainability managers in the light of sustainability leadership, identity work, and change agency literature.

2.3.1. Practicing sustainability leadership

In order to achieve corporate sustainability, and sustainable development in general, effective leadership is needed. This leadership challenge is highly complex, and is essentially focused on change and influence, as leaders often work in uncertainty and the unknown when dealing with sustainability. Therefore, being able to manage and drive change is fundamental in the leaders' actions in addressing the challenges related to sustainability. (Knight & Paterson, 2018) The research on sustainability leadership is increasing, in order to understand how transformation for a more sustainable future can be achieved by new approaches to leadership. However, no generally accepted definition of sustainable leadership has been made, despite attempts at defining who is a sustainability leader. A commonly used definition of a sustainability leader is by Mary A. Ferdig (2007, p. 25), stating that "anyone who takes responsibility for understanding and acting on sustainability challenges qualifies as a 'sustainability leader,' whether or not they hold formal leadership positions." Thus, according to this definition, sustainability managers are not only sustainability leaders themselves, but one of their tasks is to develop these kind of sustainability leaders in the organization. Due to sustainability leadership as unlinked to formal position, the concept is well suited to the Nordic context, where the level of hierarchy is particularly low. However, while the definition provided by Mary A. Ferdig (2007) provides a starting point for who is a sustainability leader, it remains highly ambiguous, and its' broadness may restrict the efficient analysis of truly *leading* sustainability. As leadership also requires the existence of followers, I would describe sustainability leadership as fostering collective action towards sustainability at individual, organizational and societal level. This definition is largely based on social interactions, by influencing, motivating, and empowering others to drive change for sustainability.

Knight and Paterson (2018) focused on the behavioral competencies of sustainability leaders through an international survey of individuals in sustainability leadership roles. They found five sets of competencies needed for sustainability leadership, namely those of the visionary thinker, change agent, inclusive operator, ethically oriented and results driven sustainability leaders. Moreover, they found that personal learning was the single most important behavioral competence, while the remaining five top critical behaviors all relate to influencing others. Interestingly, these two competencies were seen even more important than behaviors linked to thinking skills, problem solving, adaptability or delivering results. Therefore, they argue, developing adept sustainability leaders would include identifying managers who are learning oriented and who are skilled in influencing others. (Knight & Paterson, 2018)

Also Wesselink et al (2015) studied the competencies required for sustainability leaders and the core tasks of sustainability managers in four large multinational enterprises in the agri-food business. They found that the core tasks included orientation, entailing e.g. sustainability thinking, analyzing systems, weighing stakeholders and strategic decision making; reaching common ground, including e.g. initiating changes, building openness and trust, and balancing interests; performing pilot projects, focusing on e.g. collaborating, knowledge sharing and integration, and project management; and lastly, embedding results, including empowering internal change agents and integrating approaches. The competencies required for these core tasks included systems thinking, embracing diversity and interdisciplinarity, interpersonal competence, action competence and strategic management, out of which embracing diversity and interdisciplinary was seen as most important. (Wesselink et al, 2015)

The literature thus indicates that sustainability managers are not only sustainability leaders themselves, but also develop more sustainability leaders in the organization, by influencing others and empowering internal sustainability ambassadors. However, sustainability managers need to work with a multitude of tasks, spanning from leadership and change agency to systems level expertise, requiring a variety of competences for successfully filling their roles. This in turn requires skills not only in effectively managing others, but also in managing themselves and the underlying tensions in their work.

2.3.2. Balancing tensions through identity work

As sustainability managers balance between the often contradictory business and sustainability logics (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017), they act as “outsiders within”, and thus need to effectively manage themselves and others (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012). Wright and Nyberg (2012) studied how corporate sustainability specialists act as emotionology workers in major Australian corporations, translating and shaping the emotionology related to climate change in their organizations, and at the same time, managing their own emotionality. They found that while sustainability professionals play a key role in reframing climate change as an business opportunity as well as a challenge for corporate action, by designing and implementing positive emotionology around it, balancing the emotionology work resulted in tensions, contradictions and emotional dissonance, as the professionals needed to balance their own emotions with the external emotionology. (ibid)

Moreover, these tensions and contradictions in corporate sustainability and in the work of these professionals highlight the importance of coping with tensions through the process of identity work, which is “the interpretive activity of constructing a coherent sense of self amid multiple social interactions and conflicting demands” (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012, p. 1452). Through a qualitative study of 36 sustainability managers and external consultants in Australia, Wright, Nyberg and Grant (2012) sought to understand how these professionals manage tensions in their identity work, in a range of work and non-work contexts. They examined how sustainability specialists develop different identities amid the conflicting discourses around climate change and their sense of self, and how they try to overcome these tensions by constructing a coherent narrative identities of themselves and their careers. Through this, the authors show how identity work plays a major role in the micro-political action towards climate change in the business sphere and how the climate crisis enables individuals to reinvent themselves as moral agents of change. They further argue that sustainability professionals' identity work is an integral way of managing themselves and others, by self-affirming and motivating themselves through presenting a vision of themselves and thus personifying change and influencing others. Therefore, they claim, the extent of political influence sustainability professionals practice and achieve in the organization depends on how their identities overcome the prevalent tensions in organizational discourses. Through their analysis the authors found three principal identities, namely the "green change agent", the "rational manager" and the "committed activist". Notably, they found that these three identities were not fixed, but instead were adopted by the individuals depending on the particular context they were in. They also found that these three identities were integral to the process of influencing others to drive change in their organizations, as the individuals often described how the identities related to the political acts in order to spread knowledge and influence others. (ibid)

The green change agent identity was one whose objective is to promote environmental sustainability, not only in their organization but also outside of their work. Passion was a central aspect, motivating the professionals to transform existing practices and belief systems. They viewed themselves as agents of change as well as loyal employees, and gained significant satisfaction from the perceived high purpose of their work. Yet, this identity was sometimes hard to maintain, unless they received support from the top management. The second identity of a rational manager was in conjunction with the traditional business perspectives, operating as an individual concerned about the best interests of the business. This identity was often referred to efficiency, profitability and shareholder value, to rationalize discourse on climate change through the business case angle, downplaying the emotionality around it. Yet, individuals within this identity type still expressed personal concern about sustainability issues. Finally, the third identity of a committed activist focused on vigorously expressing their commitment to environmental sustainability, often amid organizational resistance. As opposing to the identity of a rational manager, the committed activist used their personal beliefs and environmental values as a political tool to challenge the existing practices and to drive change. Some individuals with this identity took up additional education relating to sustainability, while others eventually decided to change jobs, start their own consultancies or engage in community and political activism. (Wright, Nyberg and Grant, 2012)

In addition, Carollo and Guerci (2018) studied identity work of sustainability managers in Italy, aiming to understand paradoxes inherent in corporate sustainability at the individual level. They identified three main tensions that affected the managers' identity construction process. These were the business versus values oriented, the organizational insider versus outsider, and the short-term versus long-term focused tensions. They found that some of the managers attempted to accept and maintain both sides of the tensions at the same time, by expressing a paradoxical perspective in their identity work. Finally, they found that sustainability managers used metaphorical reasoning as a way to cope with the tensions present in their identity work. (Carollo & Guerci, 2018).

Literature on sustainability managers' identities shows that identity work serves as the basis for micro-political action and persuasion and as a coping mechanism for dealing with the inherent tensions in sustainability managers' work. Through the construction of different identities for different contexts, and using metaphorical reasoning to deal with contradictory discourses, sustainability managers are then able to navigate through the tensions and manage themselves and others, in order to influence others and initiate change for sustainability.

2.3.3. Acting as internal change agents

Sustainability managers as internal change agents play a guiding and coordinating role in the sensemaking process for corporate sustainability, as they influence others and drive change by the way they articulate and present ideas (Millar et al., 2012; Cramer et al., 2006). Millar et al (2012) investigated change agents' sensemaking in relation to sustainability initiatives through a ten-year longitudinal study, investigating change agents in their sustainability efforts in a Dutch subsidiary of a multinational manufacturer. The change agents consisted of senior managers and employees whose roles specifically included the management of change processes. What they found was that the process consisted of communicating, acting and building relationships. According to them, building internal relationships is necessary to effectively embed change for sustainability, and to build relationships interpretations of communicating and acting were required. Specific ways of communicating and acting were required to promote sustainability, and therefore context-dependent sensemaking was essential in embedding sustainability in the organization. (Millar et al, 2012) Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020) focused on the US context for understanding sustainability managers' work as change agents in corporations. Their findings indicate that the reputation of sustainability managers and the trust it builds in their organizations is a key ingredient in driving change for sustainability. To establish reputation and trust in the organization, they employ effective use political skill, which is a pattern of social competencies, manifested at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral level, and leverage accumulated social capital. (ibid)

These findings from Millar et al (2012) and Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020) show how important relational skills and social capital are in driving organizational change for sustainability, as the impact of change agents can be multiplied through social interactions (Kiesnere & Baumgartner, 2019). Yet, these are not the only factors in successful change agency. Kiesnere and Baumgartner (2019) studied facilitating change and improving corporate sustainability by identifying change agents and influences in the integration of sustainability at the heart of business operations in Austrian smaller large-sized companies. What they found was that the key success factor was that of top management support, and the main factor hindering implementation was lack of resources. They also found that the main drivers of sustainability implementation were ingrained in organizational and personal values. (Kiesnere and Baumgartner, 2019)

To better understand the personal values and drivers of sustainability managers, Visser and Crane (2010) looked at the motivations of sustainability managers for addressing social, environmental and ethical issues. Their findings provide four different types of sustainability change agents: those of experts, facilitators, catalysts, and activists, and the underlying values and sources of meaning for each type of change agent. The managers identified as experts are motivated by actions related to their specialist expertise, thus also finding satisfaction in developing and providing expert input, which often manifests through achieving and completing specific tasks and projects. Facilitators are motivated by empowering others, e.g. by transferring knowledge, team building and creating opportunities for others. Therefore, their source of meaning comes from relationships, and thus facilitators are more sensitive to interpersonal dynamics than other types of change agents. Catalysts then are motivated by driving strategic change, by e.g. giving strategic direction and influencing leadership, deriving meaning from dedicating to a cause and creative values. This, the authors claim, is strongly linked to the issue identification, packaging and selling as identified by Andersson and Bateman (2000) and influencing the top management. Finally, Activists find motivation from broader, societal level causes, which is highly linked to corporate sustainability, and thus they gain life satisfaction by making the world a better place and serving others. This may also provide frustration about limits of their personal power in relation to the magnitude and urgency of the sustainability challenges ahead, or if they perceive their level of impact and ability to initiate change in the world is too small. (Visser & Crane, 2010)

However, considering the magnitude of potential businesses have in tackling sustainability challenges, I would argue sustainability managers have a significant opportunity to make the world a better place. While their work is filled with the constant battle between contradictory values, they masterly navigate and cope with these tensions, all the while practicing effective sustainability leadership and change agency by skillfully influencing and empowering others.

2.4. Theoretical framework

To answer the research question of how sustainability managers drive change in MNEs headquartered in Finland, literature in the field of corporate sustainability and organizational change becomes highly relevant. Starting from the institutional context, the specific characteristics of Finland, such as the prevalence of Nordic emphasis on stakeholder engagement, influence the practice of corporate sustainability in business organizations, and thus also the underlying assumptions influencing the work of sustainability managers as change agents.

Since organizational change for corporate sustainability deals with high ambiguity and uncertainty, embedding sustainability into the core of an organization requires context-dependent sensemaking at the organizational level (Weick, 1995; Millar et al, 2012). Change agents play a key role in this process, not only by furthering their own understanding of the issues in the organizational context, but by influencing the sensemaking of others (Cramer et al., 2006; Millar et al., 2012, Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Influencing the way others make sense of the change and the issues at hand can be done by persuading others to adopt a certain perspective by building legitimacy and practicing frame alignment (Kaplan, 2008), thus framing the way issues are seen in the organization. A practical way of influencing how others perceive issues and how the issues are framed, is through the process of issue selling.

The organizational context provides the basis for issue selling, as factors such as top management support and organizational culture enable effective issue selling efforts (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al, 1997; Dutton et al, 2002), while challenges such as lack of resources may provide roadblocks of issue sellers (Kiesnere & Baumgartner, 2019). At the same time, issue sellers accumulate contextual knowledge and assets such as building relationships (Dutton et al, 2001; Howard-Grenville, 2007), which also influence issue selling effectiveness and are essential for achieving organizational change (Dutton et al, 2001; Millar et al, 2012). This means that over time, issue sellers become more effective in their efforts through learning from their experiences, gaining organizational knowledge as well as building relationships, trust and reputation, therefore enabling further issue selling efforts and informing the choice of issue selling moves (Millar et al, 2012; Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020).

Through the process of issue selling, through the packaging of issues in an appealing manner and selling them convincingly, and with the use of packaging, involvement and process moves (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al, 2001), sustainability managers are able to influence the relevant parties' attention devoted to the issues and therefore subsequently also influence the decision making of key actors (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). By gaining attention and acceptance for sustainability issues at both individual and organizational level, sustainability managers are then able to drive change for sustainability.

This framework, illustrated in Figure 1, provides the background for the research as it describes the processes by which individuals drive change by influencing others and the specific methods and tools used for it.

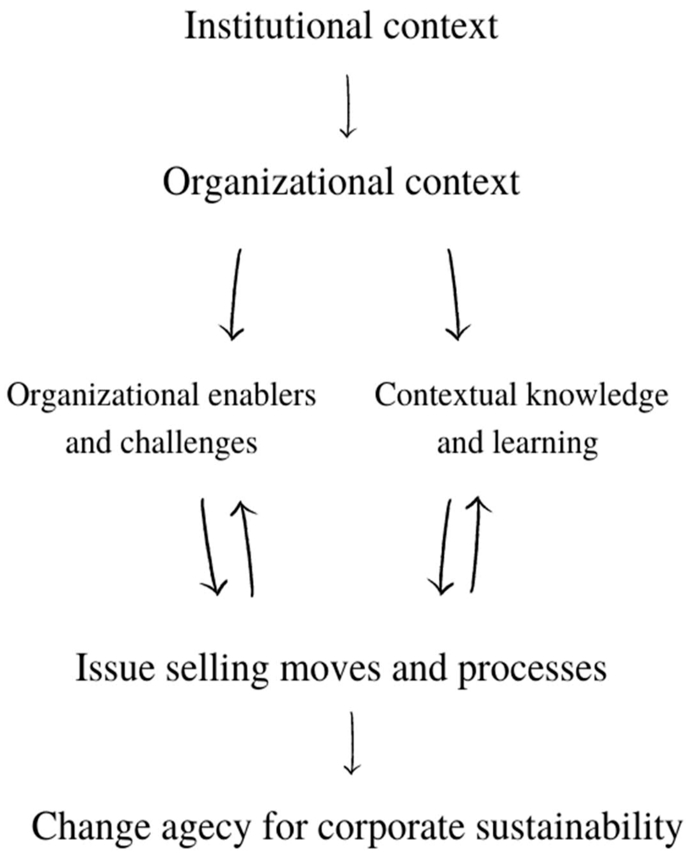

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for the thesis.

3) DATA AND METHODS

This chapter elaborates on the methodology used in the study, starting with the overall research approach and describing the onto-epistemological positioning of the thesis. Following the overall research approach, I will justify the chosen research design and context and describe the data collection and analysis process in detail. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with the evaluation and ethical considerations of the thesis.

3.1. Overall research approach

As the research focuses on understanding how change is driven in a specific context by certain individuals, the focus is on local perceptions and experiences of phenomenon of interest, which makes qualitative methodology the best suited for this research. This is because choosing qualitative research methods allows for understanding and being able to explicate the phenomenon and the related dynamics that are created. Additionally, as qualitative research studies closely specific contexts and settings, qualitative research on change can often provide implications for practice, such as recommendations for change agents. (Bartunek, 2012) Moreover, as the research context is relatively new and understudied, qualitative methods are best suited (Bansal et al., 2018).

The relevant onto-epistemological starting point for this research is that of critical realism – viewing reality as material yet understanding that people make different interpretations over different time and context. By this, critical realism combines both positivist and constructionist approaches. Furthermore, critical realism as the onto-epistemological position relates to the identification of how the world is constructed, which is also the driving philosophical background of this study. Therefore, the critical realist perspective stems from the belief that reality is independent of how humans see the world, but the knowledge created of this reality is socially constructed. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

Rather than being purely inductive or deductive, this study follows an abductive logic. Abductive logic incorporates aspects of both of these two ideal-type logics, by drawing from the meanings humans give in their everyday lives as well as the theoretical concepts that constitute the understanding of the phenomenon. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) This logic relates to a process called “systematic combining”, which is “a process where theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 556), and which I have aimed to follow throughout this research.

Systematic combining consists of the matching of theory and reality and the direction and redirection of the study. The matching process involves moving between the framework, the data sources and the data analysis, and to achieve matching, the direction and redirection of the research is necessary. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) In this thesis, following the systematic combining process has meant that after building a preliminary framework, I collected data while simultaneously conducting initial data analysis and going back to literature, in order to update the framework according to the findings. Therefore, the analytical framework used in this research evolved throughout the study, providing further direction for the data collection and allowing for new issues and themes to emerge from the data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This meant that while the preliminary framework consisted primarily of literature on cognitive frames and sustainability leadership, through the research process the literature on issue selling emerged as the focal point of the framework, due to its practical nature of driving change. Also, the importance of contextual influences, including the institutional context, emerged through the process. While the preliminary framework provided a guiding role in the research process, simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, and going back to literature, enabled the construction of a more coherent and accurate theoretical positioning.

3.2. Research design and process

The research for this thesis was conducted as an interpretative and comparative case-study focusing on sustainability managers in multinational enterprises headquartered in Finland. Conducting the research as a case-study was appropriate, as it addresses complex managerial issues and as by conducting case study research we can improve our understanding of the changes in business practices and the social contexts related to them (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Moreover, as I aimed to produce both a richly detailed description of data, as well as a broad, holistic knowledge of the phenomenon in the particular context, case study was best suited as a research strategy for my thesis, as it allows for analyzing rich, diverse and complex context by using multiple empirical sources. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

Furthermore, as a research strategy, case study examines a phenomenon as how it occurs in the natural world and identifies possibilities for theory testing or searches for a wider perspective and knowledge of how processes and causes are found in the individual cases (Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009). This thesis aims for the latter, by studying how individual sustainability managers drive change in corporations and how the process is influenced by contextual factors. Since the aim of the thesis is to elaborate on a specific phenomenon instead of a unique case, the use of multiple cases is best suited. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Moreover, since these explanations need to take the context into consideration in order to provide meaning, the explanations are necessarily local rather than universal, and contribute to theorizing in its own, contextual way by explaining phenomena (Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009). The boundaries for this case study then rely on the context and research question, since the research studies specific practices (change management) by specific practitioners (sustainability managers) in specific context (MNEs headquartered in Finland).

In accordance with the overall research approach and the research design, the research process started with an initial review of research issues and relevant literature, defining the context for the research, creating an interview protocol and testing it out through a preliminary expert interview. Then, I began simultaneously collecting data and analyzing it, using an abductive logic and the systematic combining process. Finally, at the end of the research process, I went back to the literature and audited the data by sending the relevant chapter manuscripts to the interviewees for checking the validity of the data.

3.3. Research context

The chosen context for this thesis is sustainability professionals, ranging from junior to senior management levels, in multinational enterprises headquartered in Finland. This is because sustainability managers and directors play a key role in driving change for sustainability in their organizations, and the role of MNEs in sustainability challenges is significant.

The national context, setting the study in Finland, provides a possibility for interesting observations, as Finland is notably a very ambitious market when it comes to sustainability, and the institutional context in Finland and in the Nordics is unique in its focus on strong institutions and the welfare state. For example, Finland has been ranked the best performer in institutions in The Global Competitiveness Report 2019 (WEF, 2019), showing some of the distinctiveness of the institutional context. The report further claims that Finland, along with Sweden and Denmark, is showing the way to a holistic approach to growth, by being one of the world's most technologically advanced and innovative economies while also providing a high level of living conditions and being more sustainable than its peers (WEF, 2019).

Studying multinational enterprises is interesting because they are possibly the organizations where transformation to sustainable practices maybe the hardest, yet at the same time, MNEs have the resources to appoint sustainability managers and teams to drive and implement these changes. Moreover, MNEs have the keys to a more sustainable future, because if the largest companies are able to fully transform the way they do business, it will unlock immense source of resources to tackle the world's challenges and translate to a significant positive impact in the society.

As MNEs face the pressure to change, they are increasingly appointing individuals and teams to be in charge of initiating, implementing and improving the sustainability measures in the business. These sustainability professionals actively drive change inside the organization, and often in the whole industry as well. Understanding how they do this is of specific interest because it provides valuable insight into the processes of driving change for sustainability.

3.4. Data collection

The research is based on primary data consisting of eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews of sustainability professionals working in seven different MNEs in Finland, as well as on secondary data about their careers and the organizational context. In addition, a pilot interview of a sustainability manager in a Finnish non-profit was conducted, providing insights into the flow of the interview guide and the functionality of the interview questions. Next, I will describe the methods used for collecting the primary and secondary data and the sampling of the cases.

3.4.1. Data collection methods

Conducting semi-structured interviews was chosen as the main mode of data collection, because they provide rich data yet allow for following a structure based on the main themes of the study. A guided set of questions was used to ensure all main themes and topics were covered, while providing room for generating follow-up questions and freedom for discussion on the specific topics. This way, new insights may emerge that would not have been generated without allowing for more freedom in the interview. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Therefore, the interview questions followed an interview guide consisting of 25 open-ended questions, with space for additional follow-up questions when relevant, structured around the main themes of the study, while also including some narrative elements in the interview questions. The interview guide is provided in Appendix 1 and 2, in English and in Finnish. Notably, since the findings emerged from the interview data, they are based on what the interviewees have themselves identified as relevant information regarding each open-ended question. Therefore, it is important to note that the tactics mentioned by the individuals do not mean the absence of others, but simply that they were not mentioned by the individual during the interview.

While a majority of the interviews were held in Finnish, in one of the interviews the language was switched to English during the interview, by the request of the interviewee, while another interview began in English, but switched to Finnish mid-interview. In all cases, both Finnish and English professional terms were used regularly by the managers, which provides an interesting insight into how language is tied into meanings in the specific context. The interviews lasted from 36 minutes to 75 minutes, averaging slightly under one hour, and were conducted between December 2019 and May 2020. Secondary data was collected from public online sources, consisting of company website materials such as annual reports, sustainability reports, and blog posts, as well as of participants' professional, public social media accounts.

The interviews were originally intended to be conducted primarily face-to-face, but due to better accessibility to participants as well as the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemia, only three of the interviewees were held on-site, while one interview was via an electronic platform and four interviews were held on the phone. The interviews were recorded by mobile software and transcribed manually in full. The interviewees were asked for their formal consent for the recording of the interview and for the handling of personal data, with information on data handling provided in the beginning of the interview.

3.4.2. Case sampling

As the thesis studied sustainability managers through a multiple-case study, careful sampling and consideration for finding suitable individuals was essential. Since the individuals formed the cases studied, and in-depth interviews were considered the primary data sources, the sample size was chosen with the objective of capturing richness of voices through the research data (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). This objective was achieved with the amount of eight interviewed cases. While the individuals differed in their educational and professional background, gender, current role and the level of position, as well as the industry and time in the current company, the constant in the sample remained that they all work in multinational enterprises headquartered in Finland and in management positions where they are formally responsible for initiating and integrating corporate sustainability. A summary of the case individuals is provided in Table 1.

The initial sample for the cases was chosen by first identifying the largest enterprises operating internationally while being headquartered in Finland, and choosing a collection of businesses in different industries, while fulfilling the criteria for the sample. Since the Finnish business environment is fairly small on a global scale, therefore also limiting the number of MNEs present, relatively loose definition of a multinational enterprise was applied, namely that of a large corporation having operations in at least three countries outside of Finland.

After identifying suitable companies, company contact pages were used for identifying suitable interview candidates, mainly consisting of individuals holding middle- and senior-level management positions related to sustainability at the corporate or business division level. Middle- and senior-level sustainability managers were initially targeted, because of their higher role in strategic change and sustainability leadership. The identified individuals were then contacted by email. Next, after contacting the initially identified potential participants and interviewing five professionals, the social media platform LinkedIn was used for identifying additional potential interviewees. This time special emphasis was made for providing a wider range of backgrounds, positions and industries represented, and thus also two junior-level sustainability managers were included in the sample. By this I hoped to gain additional, more diverse perspectives, and to see whether the findings remained constant despite the increased heterogeneity of the participants.

Table 1. Case individuals and their roles and backgrounds.

Case individual	Educational background*	Current role**	Current sector	Time spent in the current company	Previous roles & industries
Kirsi	MSc Economics; MBA; Sustainability studies	Sustainability, Senior Vice President	Manufacturing	Under 5 years	Highly international career, roles in finance and corporate responsibility
Tuija	MSc Engineering	Sustainability, Director	Fast-moving consumer goods	Over 5 years	Quality management and procurement in different organizations
Milla	MSc Environmental Science	Social Responsibility, Manager	Manufacturing	Under 5 years	Corporate responsibility roles in the technology sector
Rosa	MSc Economics; Environmental management	Sustainability, Manager	Energy	Under 5 years	Roles in auditing and corporate responsibility consulting
Pekka	MSc Economics	Sustainability, Public Affairs & Brand, C-level executive	Energy	Over 10 years	Significant career in the energy industry in international roles, in sales, strategy and business development
Leena	MSc Economics, Environmental management	Corporate Responsibility & Brand, Vice President	Financial services	Under 5 years	Working for corporate responsibility, for over 15 years at her previous employer
Ilkka	LLM & MSc Finance	Corporate Responsibility, Director	Technology	Over 15 years	Finance and sourcing in international organizations and at the current employer in Finland and abroad
Sanni	M.Tech. Environmental management	Sustainable Business Development, Director	Manufacturing	Over 10 years	Different sustainability-related roles at the current employer

*Studies are not referenced entirely according to exact degree titles, in order to reduce participants' identifiability and thus increase data anonymity.

**Current roles and sectors refer to those during the time of the interviews.

One interesting insight was that during the sampling process, it became apparent that it was much harder to identify males than females when looking for sustainability managers on professional platforms, and therefore the sample only includes two men (Pekka and Ilkka) out of the total of eight cases. This seems to indicate that in Finland the profession is predominantly represented by women. Also, the two men were also the ones with the longest careers out of the sample, which might indicate that the profession has become more accessible in the past years. The rise of women in the ranks of sustainability managers has been documented abroad as well. According to GreenBiz report (Davies, 2020), the number of women in leadership roles relating to sustainability has risen by nearly 20 per cent since 2010, and the percentage of women with sustainability leadership titles reported at 63% for managers, 55% for directors, and 51% for vice presidents. However, this is still a smaller proportion than the sample in this research would indicate, which may suggest the influence of the institutional context and the higher level of gender equality present in Finland.

3.5. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the base for analyzing the empirical data, since according to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis should be used as the methodological foundation in qualitative analysis. They further define thematic analysis as a method which is used in the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns within the collected data. Moreover, thematic analysis can be used in various theoretical and epistemological research approaches, giving it high flexibility. In addition, thematic analysis is able to provide a detailed, rich and complex description of data, while remaining organized and well-described. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) This means that thematic analysis is best suited to fit this study as the chosen data analysis method. Furthermore, thematic analysis can interpret different areas of the chosen research topic (ibid), suited well to the interpretive case study approach.

Analyzing the data began with manually transcribing each of the interview recordings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this accounts as familiarizing with the data, the recommended first step in the analysis process. When transcribing, the researcher produces their own meanings through the process as they are interpreting the data at the same time. Therefore, transcribing is not only a purely mechanical process, but also an important step in the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To apply this in my own research, I have read through the text while transcribing, highlighting descriptive quotes and emerging key words, to enhance my familiarity with the data, providing a preliminary basis for analysis.

As the research design is based on a comparative case-study, the analysis was first conducted by within-case analysis methods, after which cross-case analysis was used. In the former phase, a general description of the case is produced, and in the latter, the similarities and differences are contrasted and analyzed, providing better understanding of data in both individual cases and the research on the whole. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Therefore, after transcribing the interviews, I moved to conducting within-case analysis, by first producing descriptive case reports of three to six pages, based on the interview narratives.

Next, I began to identify and highlight emerging concepts and key words in the case reports, after which I listed, organized and categorized them in separate files for each case. In addition to the tactics mentioned by the interviewees, I coded the challenges they faced in driving change, the frames they used, the main influencing factors, and relevant details for personal background and perspectives. Once all cases were separately analyzed and coded, I gathered all the codes into a single excel file one at a time, noting where they had emerged, and further organized them into emerging themes. This follows the method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), where codes are then analyzed categorically and thematically, meaning that emerging themes are searched for, the identified themes are further reviewed and finally defined and named.

As the research process follows that of systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), and therefore an abductive logic, the analysis has been largely data-driven while at the same time keeping in mind the theoretical concepts established and revised throughout the process. Due to the abductive logic and the process of systematic combining, the analysis of the data is interpreted throughout the research process to notice any emerging patterns and insights and possible redirection of the study. This might mean that the new ideas inspire further data collection, adjustment of the theoretical framework or even modified research question. Therefore, focusing on the alignment and consistency between the research question, the research methods and data collection is necessary (Bansal et al., 2018). In practice, this meant that both during the analysis process, and after having my initial findings from the within-case and cross-case analysis, I went back to existing literature for additional research related to my findings and revised the theoretical framework. In addition, I went back to the original data sets to identify possible new insights with the help of the revised theoretical framework. This circular process allowed me to gain new ideas and practical findings, while maintaining and cultivating a strong theoretical base for the analysis.

3.6. Evaluation of the study

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), the evaluation of the study can be conducted by examining the reliability, validity and generalizability of the research, in accordance with the critical realist onto-epistemological approach. Reliability refers to what extent can the research be replicated with consistent results, while validity refers to how accurate the description is in representing the phenomenon and generalizability to how widely can the results be applied to, which in qualitative research means a suitable and well-argued selection of cases. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) While my research is highly context-specific, reliability is provided by choosing a research design based on multiple cases. The careful case selection also provides for generalizability. Triangulation and member check were used to provide validity for the research. According to Piekkari, Welch and Paavilainen (2009), the quality of a case report depends on its ability to represent multiple perspectives in its explanation of a phenomenon, and in this respect, triangulation and the use of multiple data sources is a key to a well-founded study. Therefore, both triangulation of data and triangulation of theories were used by using various data sources in addition to the interviews, such as annual reports, website pages and social media and by investigating several possible concepts and theories to explain the phenomena. Member check was practiced by providing the participants the chance to comment on the empirical chapters, in order to determine whether there are any significant differences in interpretations of data.

Moreover, the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be evaluated by determining the dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability of the study. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Dependability of the study was provided by aiming to follow a logical approach to the process and fully documenting all the steps in electronic form. While the research topic in the specific context has been largely understudied, there are similar studies conducted on other institutional contexts. This similarity then produces transferability between this research context and others. Credibility in this study is established through a thorough familiarization of the research area and topic by both theoretical and data-driven observations, and through the aim of providing logical interpretations based on these observations. Finally, by striving to connect the interpretations of the data used in this research in a way that it is easily understandable by the reader, this study aims to achieve conformability of the research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

Healy and Perry (2000) further provide six explicit criteria for judging research conducted under the onto-epistemological paradigm of realism, which they believe to be the appropriate scientific paradigm when researching social science phenomena. The first criterion considers ontological appropriateness. When it comes to the realism paradigm, "the research is dealing with complex social phenomena involving reflective people" (p. 121), and in practice means selecting a research problem that asks *how* and *why* a phenomenon occurs. This is clearly the case with my thesis. The second criterion is positioned within ontology and considers the contingent validity by using generative mechanisms instead of finding direct cause-effect relationships. In practice this means e.g. theoretical and literal replication, using in-depth questions, emphasizing the "why", and describing the case contexts. I have done this by using theoretical frameworks and direct quotations, in-depth questions in the interview guide, and providing narrative descriptions of each case in the following chapter. Third, Healy and Perry (2000) consider the epistemology of the research, which should not be value-free nor value-laden, like the paradigms of positivism or constructivism, but instead value-aware. This can be done by having multiple interviews, supporting evidence, broad questions before probing ones, and triangulation. All of these have been included in my research. Additionally, according to the authors, the researcher should be aware of her own values, which is something I have aimed to keep in mind throughout the research.

The last three criteria proposed by Healy and Perry (2000) consider methodological trustworthiness, analytic generalization, and construct validity. The first has been considered here by using relevant quotations in the report, as well as providing summarizing tables of the data, as well as by describing the case selection and the interview protocols in detail. The second has been achieved by initial identification of research issues prior to data collection and by using the initial theoretical considerations to formulate the interview questions and process, focusing on theory building rather than theory-testing. Lastly, the use of prior theory, case study database and triangulation indicate construct validity. (ibid)

Having examined the evaluative criteria relevant for my research, I would argue that my research fulfills these criteria providing validity and trustworthiness for the thesis.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The main ethical consideration in this study is protecting the privacy of the subjects. At the beginning of an interview, the interviewees were provided with a detailed research data privacy notice and asked to sign a data consent form. From the data used, the names of the individuals and organizations have been changed for anonymity. The formal consent to participate and to be recorded was also asked once the interview and recording began. Finally, the possibility for reviewing and commenting on the material was given for participants after analyzing the data.

4) FINDINGS

In this chapter I will describe the key findings of the research and provide insights into how sustainability managers act as change agents in Finnish MNEs. I will first start by explaining the underlying tensions in the managers work and by then providing brief illustrative narratives of the eight cases and their roles as change agents in the organizations, after which I will discuss the four different types of change agency approaches identified in the study, including the tactics interviewed managers' use in driving change for sustainability. Next, I will discuss contextual influences affecting the managers' work and the key challenges managers faced in driving change, after which I will discuss the way they frame relevant sustainability issues. Lastly, I will provide concluding remarks of the research findings.

4.1. Tensions as the background force

Sustainability managers' daily work is a constant act of balancing tensions, whether between the complexity of sustainability issues and the need for a clear business case to promote it, the long-term and short-term focus of the firm, or the individuals' own inner motivation to tackle sustainability issues, all the while working in an organizational context where business-as-usual may be the dominant framework. However, while the tensions between sustainability and quartal economics is clearly present at the core of their work, it can also act as a motivator for challenging the status quo and driving change for sustainability.

> *"I believe that the world is going to change, and having studied all those horrible things in business school and economics and all those, I've seen all those models fail, so I think we need to develop a different kind of corporate model, which is not just driven by the quarterly earnings and all that. You need to have other parameters."*
> *- Kirsi*

Due to the dual purpose of their work, promoting sustainability while providing value for the business, sustainability managers act as a bridge between the 'sustainability world' and the 'business world', and their often contradictory values. When doing this, they are not fully immersed in either of the worlds entirely, but rather have one foot in both of them. While this is necessary, it can also create a tension between them and the “fundamentalist sustainability people”, as described by one of the interviewees, as well as with the general business managers in their organizations. Moreover, the organizational context may provide additional tensions present in their work. For example, sustainability managers may be people coming into traditional industries from outside the industry, creating tension between a new way of thinking and the traditional perspectives in the industry, or they may work for industries in which the business area or customers may be significantly contradictory to what goals the sustainability managers hope to achieve. However, just as with the general tension in sustainability and business values, these context-specific factors may provide additional motivation for driving change.

> *“It's an interesting industry, that if you think about sustainability and then think about our customer industries: oil and gas, mining, aggregates, pulp and paper, et cetera, there is huge potential. So it's kind of interesting when you think about the sustainability angle.” - Sanni*

No wonder that, as emphasized by one manager, those filling the positions are rarely just general managers, but people who have the inner drive to do work with a bigger purpose, as demonstrated by the quotes below.

> *“In corporate responsibility, many of my colleagues who I see, they do this in some way also from the love for the sport, and with an ardor, and it shows a lot.” - Leena*

> *“If over 10 years ago I had finance and sourcing jobs, then came the idea that I could do something where there would be a bigger purpose, and corporate responsibility is that.. So I have been quite satisfied about this [career change].” - Ilkka*

> *“It somehow feels like I have a kind of built-in need for doing the right thing.” – Tuija*

The inner drive and a sense of purpose, together with the different backgrounds and career histories of these managers, serves as an intriguing basis for studying the work of these sustainability managers. Next, I will describe the personal narratives of each individual in detail and provide some details into the similarities and differences between them.

4.2. Case descriptions and career backgrounds

The case individuals provided highly interesting and unique backgrounds and professional journeys that have led them to their current positions and that have influenced their perceptions of themselves in the organizational context, and the way they approach change management for promoting sustainability in their organizations. In this section I will describe these narrative stories of each case individual in detail.

Kirsi leads the sustainability team at her business unit in a pulp and paper manufacturing company. She has broad experience from multitude of industries and sectors, having worked internationally a significant part of her career. She has a strong business background, since she has worked in the financial markets for the majority of her career as well as founded her own company, until leading to corporate sustainability. After becoming interested in corporate sustainability, she decided to go for further studies to deepen her knowledge. In her current role she is leading sustainability on a business division level, with the main focus being on business opportunities, integration and policy. She has taken a leading role in the public affairs side, and as the debate around the related business and its sustainability has intensified throughout the recent years, she feels that's what has made the work meaningful. She also feels she has a very unconventional career path for a sustainability professional yet feels her broad experience has been very beneficial for her role, especially by providing business perspective for sustainability and by aiding its' integration to the organization.

Tuija identifies herself as an engineer with a strong business perspective. She has initially studied energy and environmental engineering, and worked in various industries and functions, such as the energy sector and in procurement, in her early career. After that she attended additional studies in corporate responsibility, sustainable business, and environmental and quality management. In her current role in the food industry she has a wide range of responsibilities, ranging from strategy and implementation to business opportunities and public affairs. A major part of her daily responsibilities is to have conversations with different stakeholders and meeting people from NGOs to policymakers and researchers. Another big part of her role is supporting the business internally and helping with issues others may have. In addition, she spends her days leading her team, calculating, pondering about new practices and improving old ones, going to different management team meetings, cooperating with internal stakeholder groups, and thinking about the communication angle of corporate sustainability. She feels in her role no day is the same.

Milla has worked in corporate sustainability since the start of her career, after studying environmental science and management, as well as natural sciences and organizational communication. She started her career by doing her master’s thesis about environmental risks for a company where she then also started as a quality and environmental manager. After, she worked in a large telecommunications company for most of her career, covering environmental management and responsibilities in corporate responsibility and reporting, working a lot with data, until she recently started in her new role as a social responsibility manager in a machinery manufacturing and service company.

Rosa is a sustainability manager working in the energy industry. She has originally studied business and worked in accounting, but once realizing that she wants to make a career change to corporate sustainability, she decided to go for additional studies abroad. After her studies, she has worked in corporate responsibility consulting, and she feels it has helped her in her current role by giving her a broader perspective. A major part of her role is developing sustainability reporting, especially in relation to different stakeholders and their expectations, and that way developing sustainability and implementing it. She has started her role just recently, as she switched from consulting to working in her new company, to be able to see the projects until their finish lines. She feels that sustainability is taken very seriously at her organization and is both integrated in the culture as well as used as the apex of the whole business, which were the reasons why her current company appealed to her as an employer in the first place. This all means she can now focus on developing and implementing sustainability rather than educating or persuading others.

Pekka comes also from a business background, and identifies himself as an energy industry professional, with a long experience in the industry. He is a top-level executive at an energy company, and during his years he has seen the change taking place in the organization and the industry as a whole. His main responsibilities are related to corporate level policy decisions relating to sustainability, public affairs and brand strategy. Responsibilities also include stakeholder engagement and public relations activities on global level. The scope of the role is global and requires close cooperation with business lines. Previously he has worked in, for example, developing new businesses, yet he has always been working also with regulation and raw materials, and similar. He also has extensive international experience. Pekka feels his long-standing industry experience works as a background force in everything he does, and he feels grateful for having seen the change for sustainability and working in a company full of enthusiastic teams working towards a change in the world.

Leena has initially studied various business subjects, while later gaining a master's degree in an interdisciplinary program in environmental management. She feels she has had quite an unconventional route to her position. After her studies, she worked in the transportation sector, in the business side of the organization, but wishing to combine her gained knowledge from the master's degree, she took part as a business-side representative in an environmental work group led by the technical unit. After that, when it became apparent that sustainability will become an important part of the business, a new role was created, and she was admitted into the new responsibility. She then began making the groundwork for change for corporate sustainability in her previous organization, until recently joining the financial sector as a vice president for corporate sustainability and brand. In her current role she acts as a link between the top management team and the business units. She says the management teams of the different business units have also themselves woken up to corporate sustainability, and have their own work groups for the topic, while she helps and consults their work when needed. In addition, she has been serving in several association boards related to corporate sustainability, which has given her a wider perspective on the topic.

Ilkka has his background with studies in law and finance, both in Finland and abroad, and with vast international experience accumulated over the years, having worked in a variety of organizations and later in several different functions in his current organization in the telecommunications industry. Already in his early career he got the idea of working for sustainability, some 30-40 years ago, before starting his career in finance and procurement roles. Now he has been working in sustainability for over ten years in his organization. He feels that his previous experience in finance and procurement has been very helpful in bringing the business perspective to corporate sustainability, and in showing the value of promoting corporate sustainability for the business. Generally, he feels that sustainability should be more integrated in the business operations, instead of being its own focus area, and indicated that also the investors could view the sustainability topics the same way as any other business opportunities and risks that could affect the profits or market value, not as a separate ”science” of its own.

Finally, **Sanni** is an environmental engineer by background, having done her master’s thesis for her current employer, after which she has worked in different sustainability roles in the same organization in the industrial manufacturing company since graduation, for over ten years now. In her current role the focus is on developing the businesses and developing a new way of thinking. Before her new role, she was heading the sustainability team in the organization. At the moment there are some major changes in her organization, which causes some uncertainty for her work and the future responsibilities. She feels that time has made driving change easier, as in the beginning she was more of a “lonely driver”, while now almost everybody sees how sustainability is kind of a must in organizations. She has also learned to navigate better and improve her internal selling skills throughout the years. However, she also feels that while the industry is where she wants to work in, sometimes she feels frustrated, as the change is not happening as fast as she would hope, especially in the broader, more global sense.

These personal narratives on the managers’ professional journeys and backgrounds provide interesting insights into the similarities and differences between different professional profiles. Some individuals emphasized their unconventional route to the position, due to having their background in business, for example. However, based on the sample, it seems to be fairly common to have a background in business studies and functions, after which the individuals have changed to corporate sustainability, and may have decided to gain additional education to support their career change. Indeed, five individuals mentioned having decided to gain additional degrees from sustainability related fields. Also, five individuals had their backgrounds in business, while the remaining three had studied engineering or natural sciences. Yet, business background was seen as a less common route to sustainability roles.

Despite surprising similarities, the case descriptions show how the professionals are in no means coming from the same mold, but rather have diverse backgrounds and unique journeys. However, in many cases, there has been a defining moment during their professional journey, where they have realized that they wish to work in a position that provides a higher purpose or makes the world a better place. An interesting finding then is that it is only a minority of the individuals who have worked in sustainability since the beginning of the careers. For these cases, namely Milla and Sanni, sustainability has been the driving force since their initial education and throughout their careers.

Another interesting finding was that while most interviewees seemed fairly optimistic of the future in relation to climate change and sustainable development in general, one person seemed to feel quite frustrated about the speed of change, and unhopeful about the climate change challenges being solved in time. She felt that especially when the big nations are not making significant commitments, it seems unlikely the necessary targets will be reached at the global scale and it can become quite unmotivating. One reason for this difference in perspective could be that she works in a fairly slow-moving industry, where the customer industries are rather contradictory to sustainable development, and thus increase the level of sustainability tensions present in her work. However, the interviewees seemed to universally agree to that driving change for sustainability has become significantly easier throughout the years, even if the speed of change may not have always been as quick as hoped for.

These similarities and differences in personal backgrounds, roles and careers lead to different approaches for driving change for sustainability, discussed in detail in the next section.

4.3. Approaches to change agency

From the findings four different types of change agency approaches emerged, categorizing the different tactics used by the managers. These were the capacity building approach, rational and systematic approach, collaborative approach, and internal selling approach. While the four approaches are analytically separate, in practice they have many overlapping aspects and are highly interconnected. While most of the approaches included one or two tactics mentioned by a majority of the interviewees, clear patterns of emphasis on a specific approach by each individual could be identified. Moreover, while these approaches seem not to be exclusive, most of the individuals seemed to have a leaning towards one or two specific approaches. However, one person seemed to employ tactics from each approach evenly, while another identified comparatively low levels of tactics in general, thus not falling clearly under any of these approaches.

Next, I will describe and analyze each of the approaches in detail, the possible precedents for the tendency to lean towards each approach and the reasons for differences in approaches.

4.3.1. Capacity building approach

The capacity building approach is based on the underlying assumption that the more there is understanding and knowledge of how sustainability relates to the organization, diversity in abilities and in thinking, and empowering of the employees in the organization to take action for sustainability, the more change can happen. This approach has a wide, organizational angle to it, focusing on the masses rather than on the individuals in the acts of change agency. Therefore, it is an organizational level, motivating activity, compared with the individual level approaches of, for example, internal selling. By using the capacity building approach, individuals act as a bridge between the outside world and the internal capabilities, by bringing the relevant information inside the organization and building the necessary understanding for the substance of sustainability, thus creating the basis for the change. Table 2 illustrates the different tactics under this approach mentioned by each case individual.

Table 2. Capacity building approach tactics mentioned by the interviewees.

Capacity building approach	**Kirsi**	**Tuija**	**Milla**	**Rosa**	**Pekka**	**Leena**	**Ilkka**	**Sanni**
Acting as organizational antennas								
Seeing the big picture								
Developing wider organizational understanding								
Organizing internal educational events & training								
Coordinating discussions								
Fostering diverse thinking								
Positive encouragement								

The capacity building approach builds upon the tactics of acting as the antennas of the organization, seeing the big picture, developing wider understanding of sustainability issues and practices inside the organization, coordinating general discussions to include the sustainability angle as well as fostering diversity in thinking and using positive encouragement. All individuals mentioned at least one tactic listed under this approach. The tactics identified by a majority of the individuals were acting as the antennas of the organization and seeing the big picture. This can be explained by the nature of the profession, where understanding the trends and discussions outside of the organization is vital for the success of the company, due to changing legislation and stakeholder expectations, for example. Moreover, keeping a big picture is necessary due to the complexity of sustainability issues and the business impacts on them.

> *"My job was to wake up the organization ... I think it is really important for the sustainability people to be kind of like the antennas within the organization" - Kirsi*

In addition to acting as the "antennas" of the organization, especially two of the individuals focused on translating this knowledge and transmitting it into the corporate culture. This included developing the wider understanding of sustainability issues and impacts in the organization, by e.g. organizing trainings and internal events, coordinating discussions to include the sustainability angle, and developing interdisciplinary teams to promote diverse thinking. In addition, positive encouragement was used, but interestingly, only by individuals otherwise emphasizing either collaborative or internal selling approaches.

"The way I see sustainability change management is that one key part is building the knowledge within the organization and there's up to a certain level you need the people on the ground to understand sustainability … we are just doing it in a very simple manner: the more people know, the easier it is to change the culture, and then when you change the culture, it is easier to integrate those new things." - Kirsi

The two individuals with high amounts of internal capacity building tactics mentioned, are also individuals working in perhaps the most traditional and slow-moving industries of the case organizations, in the manufacturing sector. Perhaps in their organizations the general knowledge of how sustainability applies to their business is lower, and therefore tactics to increase the understanding and developing diversity of thinking are deemed necessary. On the same note, one reason why others did not mention as many tactics under this approach could be that in their organization the general, broad understanding of how sustainability relates to their business might already be on a relatively good level, thus requiring less focus on building capacity in the organization.

4.3.2. Rational and systematic approach

The second approach is also less focused on social skills and interactions, compared to the collaborative and internal selling approaches, but rather on argumentation and actions with a more rational and analytical perspective, and with a systematic and consistent approach at the organizational level. These tactics include basing the argumentation on facts, numbers and evidence, showing the value behind the issue, simplifying the message, having a clear story, finding coherent logic, acting systematically, starting from the bigger issues, breaking them into smaller pieces, and finally, preparing well. These tactics are more focused on packaging the issue in an appealing way, by framing the issue with business benefits, bundling it with other organizational targets, and presenting it in an convincing manner, rather than on the actual issue selling process in contrast to other approaches, such as internal selling. Table 3 shows each of the tactics as how they were mentioned by each case individual.

Table 3. Rational and systematic approach tactics mentioned by the interviewees.

Rational and systematic approach	**Kirsi**	**Tuija**	**Milla**	**Rosa**	**Pekka**	**Leena**	**Ilkka**	**Sanni**
Using facts, numbers, and evidence								
Showing the value of the issue								
Simplifying the message								
Having a clear story								
Finding coherent logic								
Using systematic actions								
Starting from the bigger issues								
Breaking to smaller steps								
Preparing well								

Providing the evidence behind the argumentation was integral for majority of the interviewees, and became evident when not explicitly, at least implicitly, from all of the interviews. Some of the interviewees specifically emphasized how they themselves identify as persons with rational and logical focus or identify their organizational cultures as such. It becomes evident though, that no matter the dominant approach or perceived identity, evidence-based reasoning is seen as a must to move things forward. This is strongly backed by previous research (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Dutton et al., 2001; Howard-Grenville, 2007), where the use of the business plan logic, emphasizing the importance of numerical evidence, delivering it in a coherent and logical structure, and highlighting impacts on the bottom line, have been highly used in issue selling efforts, and have been important in establishing legitimacy for the issue sold. Interestingly, the rational approach to issue selling was emphasized at not only the individual level, but also the organizational and institutional level.

> *"I am a very rational person, so when I was piecing together the social roadmap at the end of the year, I just collected as much data as possible on why it needs to be done." - Milla*

While Milla emphasized her rational personality, Pekka focused on the organizational culture and how the kind of rational and systematic approach is valued in the organization.

> *"We are this kind of an engineering house and natural science house, which believes in what is measured is what you get, and we have at quite a high level specifically these kind of engineering sciences that are exact and so, and in our house one will be fine if one is coherent and logical and is able to present issues justifiably." - Pekka*

Finally, Kirsi considers not only the organizational culture and values, but the wider industrial context and the prevalent norms.

> *"Now I've realized how our industry is; it really needs to.. everything needs to be evidence-based." - Kirsi*

The rational and systematic approach did not include as clear profiles as the collaborative and internal selling approaches. However, there were two individuals who mentioned more tactics belonging to this category than others. These were also the only men in the sample. While one of them had also a clear profile under the collaborative approach, the other had nearly all of his identified tactics falling under this category. He emphasized having a simple, clear narrative with systematic actions, and having one message for all contexts, instead of significant adjustments of the message for different contexts and audiences. Moreover, he believed in the importance of first developing a clear idea himself of the issue at hand. Since he feels everyone in the company is somewhat on the same line of understanding and has the needed level of general knowledge, he would not need to adapt his message too much.

Some possible reasons for the emphasis on keeping a clear narrative and taking systematic actions could be the larger company size and global presence compared to others in the sample. This may make it very difficult to adopt an approach more focused on social interactions, especially as many of the meetings are online, and as daily, unofficial interactions were identified by others as important contexts where issue selling happens. Additionally, he is also the only one out of the sample with studies in law, which may also indicate preference for a clear and systematic way of thinking.

While the three tactics of starting from the bigger issues, breaking them to smaller steps, and preparing well do not fall as clearly under this approach as the others, they indicate systematic and logical thinking in driving change. Interestingly, all three tactics were mentioned only once, and only by individuals who profiled more strongly under the approach of internal selling. Moreover, using incremental change as an issue selling tactic and preparing well had significantly more emphasis on previous research than in my findings (Dutton et al., 2001). This is interesting, as it shows how the prevalence of certain tactics in certain research contexts does not necessarily translate to other contexts. Perhaps on one hand, the urgency of sustainability challenges such as climate change call for more drastic measures than incremental change, and on the other, the level of change is already high enough so that more drastic measures are already possible. Lesser focus on preparing well could be due to the context of sustainability managers, who are specialists by nature, and thus already have a significant level of expertise in the issues they bring forward.

4.3.3. Collaborative approach

The collaborative approach has an emphasis on working together with others in mutual ground, with a certain neutrality in one's position, compared to the other approaches. Here the focus is not on the acts of educating, selling, or reasoning, but rather on finding a mutual understanding of the issues at hand. This approach stems from the idea that the frame the individual has is perhaps not the right one, and the overall purpose is to search for the best-fitting frame in collaboration with others. Table 4 illustrates the tactics and profiles emerging under this approach.

Table 4. Collaborative approach tactics mentioned by the interviewees.

Collaborative approach	**Kirsi**	**Tuija**	**Milla**	**Rosa**	**Pekka**	**Leena**	**Ilkka**	**Sanni**
Listening to others								
Understanding others' perspective								
Respecting others								
Helping others to understand								
Building consensus								
Collaborating with others								
Being flexible								
Testing ideas first with others								
Looking for alternative angles								

The collaborative approach builds on the acts of listening to others, understanding others' perspectives, respecting others, making it as easy as possible for the other person to understand the issue, repeating the message, building consensus, collaborating with others, being flexible, discussing and testing ideas first with other experts, and looking for alternative perspectives. In this approach, unlike others, there were no tactics that were used by the majority, and half of the individuals did not mention any of these tactics. Instead, clear profiles emerged for two of the individuals, who used mostly tactics from this approach.

> *"One must try to find different perspectives to problems. First of course to think about them among your own expert team, and think about them with slightly different angles, and also be open to that sometimes one has to notice that the issues and open questions can be seen from an optional perspective and that there are alternative ways to move forward. One has to have some flexibility. Then one needs to consider and discuss them maybe informally and test out those ideas with other experts. This is very important - nobody can act in isolation, but instead in interaction with others."*
> *- Pekka*

While Pekka emphasizes the importance of finding different perspectives and working on the solutions by collaborating with others at the individual level, Tuija describes the importance of collaboration at the wider perspective, working together for sustainable development.

> *"It is a kind of mantra I have been repeating all over, that these challenges, which are in the world today and are globally ahead of us, and where sustainable development needs to be pushed forward, they cannot be solved by anyone alone and we need to get rid of the kind of siloed thinking, because otherwise those new solutions are not found. I can perfect my own part as much as possible, but it doesn't help if nothing happens before me or after me." - Tuija*

What is interesting is that all three individuals in the sample who had not had their studies in business, but instead majoring in engineering or natural sciences, included collaborative tactics in their narratives, while only one person from a business background did so. Two of these individuals explicitly expressed belonging and fitting in to the engineer-dominated company cultures, contrasting with some of the individuals with business backgrounds, who did not include collaborative tactics and sometimes felt as outsiders in their organizations. Possibly individuals who strongly feel that they fit into the company culture and organizational identity are more likely to employ tactics under the collaborative approach.

Moreover, the one individual with a business background included under this approach seemed not to emphasize his business background as strongly as others, but rather identified himself as an "energy industry professional" due to his long history in the industry. He is also the highest level manager in the sample, as he is part of the top management team in his organization. This means that he does not necessarily need to focus on convincing others, but rather on finding the best solutions among his colleagues and relevant stakeholder groups.

Finally, both of the individuals profiling strongly under this approach have a high emphasis on stakeholder relations in their daily work, which may also translate to importance of collaborative tactics, as they may be especially suitable for engaging with external stakeholders.

4.3.4. Internal selling approach

The internal selling approach may be the most quintessential example of issue selling efforts in order to influence others. Internal selling as an approach is based on active change agency inside the organization, with the purpose of getting one's perspective heard and accepted, to achieve the hoped results. In contrast to capacity building approach, which is focused on actively influencing others at the wider organizational level, in internal selling the focus is on specific issues and individuals, and the interaction between them. The tactics mentioned under this approach, illustrated in table 5, include negotiation and internal selling, getting into different formal and informal discussions, bringing in external or internal experts for increased credibility, finding and contacting the key people, using others as internal agents, developing internal ambassadors, customizing the case to the context, adapting the argumentation language and style based on the other person's interests, using either their own tacit knowledge or team members' tacit knowledge of the organization for pushing issues forward, repeating the message and finally, creating a sense of urgency.

Table 5. Internal selling approach tactics mentioned by the interviewees.

Internal selling approach	**Kirsi**	**Tuija**	**Milla**	**Rosa**	**Pekka**	**Leena**	**Ilkka**	**Sanni**
Negotiation and internal selling								
Getting into discussions internally								
Bringing in external expertise								
Finding the key people								
Using others as "agents"								
Customizing the case to context								
Adapting the language and style							Partly	
Using own relational knowledge								
Using others' relational knowledge								
Repeating the message								
Creating a sense of urgency								

While this approach had the highest number of specific actions identified, similar to the collaborative approach, there were clear patterns emerging. The actions taken by a majority of the individuals were those of customizing the case to the context and adapting the language to fit the audience. It is important to note, that the positioning of the interview questions might have been leading managers to mention these tactics, since one question asked about how whom one is trying to persuade affects the argumentation style they use. One of the interviewees initially resisted the idea of adapting the argumentation style, as he preferred to keep a certain baseline for each context and individual. Later he reflected that he does make some adaptations based on who he is trying to persuade. However, this was more of normative, rather than relational knowledge, relating to e.g. being able to choose the level of the language to fit the level of responsibility (Dutton et al., 2001), rather than to fit the individuals' personal characteristics or interests. Others then, made a very clear emphasis on the importance of adapting the message to make it appealing for the individuals they are trying to persuade. This indicates having strong relational knowledge in the organization (Dutton et al., 2001), which also increases as the issue sellers accumulate assets over time, through their previous issue selling attempts in the organization (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Moreover, the former individual, who preferred to keep a certain baseline to his messages, had a clear preference for the rational and systematic approach, while the latter individuals had preference for the internal selling approach, which may explain the two different perspectives on these relational tactics.

> "*What I try to teach my team, and this is nothing different from general kind of organizational savviness, is that you need to identify the key stakeholders whose opinions you need to change, and then you need to think of what would resonate with these individuals. Sometimes it's their personal pride, sometimes it's making them feel that they invented it first. Sometimes it's risks, sometimes it's opportunity. There is no kind of a template you can use in the organization, because if there was, this would be much easier. So it is very much about individuals and managers within the organization and that is the tough part." - Kirsi*

An interesting finding is that one individual, who highly emphasized her rational personality and thought herself to have a lower level of internal selling skills, provided much more examples of tactics falling under the internal selling approach rather than under the rational and systematic approach. Based on the findings, she has high levels of social skills and organizational savviness and identifies most strongly under the internal selling approach. Interestingly, it may be her own reflexivity about her personal characteristics that allow her to skillfully navigate internal selling. She explains that instead of presenting ideas herself, she finds others to do that, as her "agents". Also, she was the only one who mentioned utilizing her team members' tacit knowledge of the organization, when they have worked in the company longer than she has. Clearly, while she may not be comfortable in direct influencing, she seems talented in using others as a resource to influence decision-making and to push issues forward.

> *"I have not given up on facts ... and as I have been in a quite engineering-dominated workplace, it has been an eternally good strategy … some people are just very good and charismatic presenters and they know very well how to summarize things. Well yeah, I do not see myself as any superb presenter, but maybe then I can use others as agents, so that I make good background materials and then someone luminous can present them." - Milla*

There were two individuals who did not bring up any of the internal selling tactics, apart from acknowledging that the level of detailing depends on whether presenting the ideas to an expert or to general management. Since according to the interviewees this is general knowledge when working with both experts and general business managers, it is not as tightly linked to the approach of internal selling, as it relates more to the level of the position rather than to the specific person. These two individuals were also the only men of the sample and also the ones profiling under the rational and systematic approach.

In addition, there were two other individuals who identified only a few of the tactics. One of them explained that she does not feel like she needs to persuade anyone, as everyone in the company already understands the importance of sustainability, and thus she only needs to provide her perspective, which she feels is also highly appreciated by others.

> *"My role is exactly just to kind of provide support, as in this house there is no more need for justifying, or rather, as I know how different starting point it can be in other companies. That was also the reason why I became interested in this company."*
> *- Rosa*

The other one had a strong emphasis for the collaborative approach, indicating preference for building consensus rather than trying to persuade others. Both of them felt that sustainability is seen as important in the company and integrated in the company culture. Overall, all those who felt that sustainability was highly regarded in their company culture, used no or very little internal selling tactics.

> *"As a company FoodCo has always dealt with the responsibility theme very seriously and in that sense, there hasn't been the need to justify why we need to think about sustainable development and responsibility and why we need to consider these things." - Tuija*

Surprisingly, repeating the message was mentioned only once, while in previous research, continuous proposal making has been a frequently mentioned presentation tactic in issue selling (Dutton et al, 2001), which is also the case with creating a sense of urgency (Andersson & Bateman, 2000). Involving others as an issue selling move has also been recognized in previous research, whether involving using external people for gaining credibility, or involving others in the organization to help with issue selling in formal and informal settings (Dutton et al, 2001). This is consistent with my findings, as those of the interviewees using this approach mentioned several tactics which included involving others. This is no surprise, since the internal selling approach is much about social skills and interaction.

4.3.5. Summarizing the approaches

This section has described the different approaches emerging from the data, which sustainability managers use in driving change for sustainability. Table 6 describes and summarizes the four different approaches, providing example tactics and illustrative quotes by individuals who profile under these approaches.

While the rational and systematic approach is more concerned about the issue packaging moves, making the issue appealingly framed and presented, the capacity building, collaborative and internal selling approaches are more about the actual issue selling process, focusing particularly on involvement moves (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al, 2001). Moreover, while the rational and systematic approach relies much more on strategic and normative contextual knowledge, the collaborative and internal selling approaches require relational knowledge of whom to involve and when. The capacity building approach is perhaps the most strategic in nature, and thus requires high levels of strategic knowledge of the specific organizational context. (Dutton et al, 2001)

Table 6. Summary of approaches with example tactics and quotes.

Approach	Definition	Example tactics	Example quote
Capacity building approach	Bridging and building the understanding of relevant sustainability issues, and thus developing the organizational capacity needed for addressing them.	Acting as antennas for the organization Organizing internal events and training Fostering diverse thinking Positive encouragement	*"A lot is to build capacity in the organization: the more people know, the more they can react themselves ... by next year onwards we will have a mandatory learning on sustainability, so everyone in the organization will have to go through the training, and that's part of the integration really." - Kirsi*
Collaborative approach	Seeking to understand others and building consensus in order to further sustainability issues.	Listening to others Building consensus Collaborating with others Being flexible Looking for alternatives	*"I have been once asked a question like 'if you must describe responsibility and the practice of it with one word, what would it be', so I have said that maybe the word is respect. Maybe that is the way I approach it." - Tuija*
Rational and systematic approach	Utilizing evidence-based reasoning and systematic promotion of issues to convince others and drive change.	Using facts and numbers Simplifying the message Finding coherent logic Starting from big issues Breaking to smaller steps	*"One should crystallize what's important in the issue, and then act systematically according to it, so that one doesn't always need to separately think about what they should tell a person.. to sell these things in a different way." - Ilkka*
Internal selling approach	Using interpersonal interactions and relational knowledge to influence others and advance one's own perspective.	Negotiating and selling Finding the key people Using others as agents Customizing the case Creating a sense of urgency	*"One needs to get people fired up ... I have many times needed to do exactly that negotiation work the most, or selling work. Maybe that has been a challenge, but then one always succeeds in it too." - Leena*

Table 7 illustrates the dominant profiles of each case individual. However, while the four specific profiles emerged through the interviews, none of the individuals used solely tactics from one category, and while the specific tactics were the ones explicitly mentioned, most likely several additional ones have been used by each of the participant. It became apparent that no matter the prevalent approach of each manager, they all act as antennas of the organization, keeping the big picture in mind, they base their issue selling efforts on factual evidence of the business value the sustainability issues provide, and they adjust the language and presentation style depending on the audience.

Table 7. Cases with four or more of the tactics mentioned in each approach.

Approach	Kirsi	Tuija	Milla	Rosa	Pekka	Leena	Ilkka	Sanni
Capacity building approach								
Rational and systematic approach								
Collaborative approach								
Internal selling approach								

When it comes to the different profiles, one interesting finding is that the two managers who use the capacity building approach profile also under the internal selling approach. This is not surprising, as both approaches are based on active and conscious effort in influencing others, acting as tempered radicals. Since capacity building is focused on the organizational level, while internal selling on individual level interactions, these two approaches are almost like two sides of the same coin. Moreover, in order to build capacity in the organization, one may also need to take individual level action through internal selling.

Yet, while internal selling, being the approach most similar to existing research on issue selling tactics, was the most often used approach, it also seems to be the most polarizing, as those using the collaborative or the rational and systematic approach did not mention many of the internal selling tactics. Moreover, there was a clear division between individuals on whether they opted for more collaborative tactics or for internal selling tactics, as those profiling under collaborative approach used very little internal selling tactics, the same way those with strong internal selling profiles used no or little collaborative tactics. A surprising finding was that the two men of the sample emphasized the rational and systematic approach as the only ones out of the managers, instead of focusing as much on the relational aspect of change management. This could have a link to deeper level gendered roles in the society.

There were two individuals who differed from the clear profiles emerging from the data. Sanni, who profiled most clearly under the capacity building and internal selling approaches, also used several tactics from the two other approaches, indicating an unusually wide variety of tactics in her work. She seemed to draw quite evenly from tactics under each approach, relying on different approaches in different contexts. On the other hand, Rosa mentioned very little tactics in general, profiling under none of the approaches. Both of these exceptions may be due to the organizational context, since while Sanni may have to work especially hard in integrating sustainability in a business environment, which is especially contradictory to sustainable development goals due to the customer industries, Rosa works in a company, which she herself identifies as one with sustainability at the heart of business strategy. Another contextual factor may be that while Sanni has worked in the same organization and industry for her whole career, thus accumulating knowledge and skills of the different change agency approaches, Rosa has started working in her role just recently, and therefore has not necessarily had the need nor opportunity to gain an extensive repertoire of different tactics.

However, despite the apparent differences in the adoption of these approaches to change agency, they all have the same goal of making business more sustainable, and it seems that it is the context, not the actions themselves, which determine the success of each approach.

4.4. Contextual influences in driving change

Not only has the increasing awareness and importance of corporate sustainability influenced the way these professionals approach their roles, but there seems to be a variety of contextual influences ranging from the organizational context to their own personal backgrounds and characteristics. While some of them may be self-evident, others provide some interesting insights on the background forces behind change agency. At the same time, several challenges in change agency and specific tactics to overcome them emerged from the interviews. In the following section I will describe these influencing factors in detail.

4.4.1. Personal background and characteristics

Through analyzing each case, there appears to be both explicit and implicit effects of personal background and characteristics on the way sustainability professionals drive change. First of all, as there is a clear division of business versus engineering backgrounds, as well as identities formed based on them, this also translates to the practices in driving change. Many of the interviewees acknowledged the effect of their background in their perceptions of their work and of change agency. For example, a business person in a highly engineering-dominant workplace may find it challenging to establish credibility, while an engineer may feel more comfortable in a similar organizational setting. This business versus engineering divide appeared regularly in the perceived ease of finding the right tactics in the organization.

> "*It's not something that somebody coming from outside of the industry can easily just go and say 'well this is how this is, sorry, for 30 years you've been here and a non-engineer is coming to you telling this is the way you do it' ... this is the first organization where I am totally an alien amongst engineers and that took a while to adapt to." – Kirsi*

While Kirsi found it hard to adapt to the traditionally engineer-dominated industry, coming herself from strong business background in the financial sector, Sanni emphasizes how she feels belonging to the organizational identity.

> *"This has been really the only place I've been working in since graduation ... It has been fun, it is an engineering company and I'm an engineer, so I feel I'm in the right place." - Sanni*

Moreover, the time spent in the organization clearly improves the issue sellers skills in resourcing for successful issue selling efforts (Howard-Grenville, 2007), as it increases contextual knowledge on e.g. who are the key people and how the issues should be framed as well as the accumulated assets of e.g. knowing the right people in the organization and building networks, and teaches how to sell issues successfully. Moreover, this also translated to difficulties in driving change, when the case individual did not have accumulated yet enough of these assets.

Secondly, those with a wide range of experience from different functions and international experiences, as well as with additional studies, seem to perceive significant benefits from their distinctive backgrounds. Here is also where being an outsider as a business person in a technical area comes into play as a positive force, as the interviewees feel they benefit from seeing the business side of things and from thinking in a different way.

“We speak much more to the companies here and that's where my background for instance is very useful, because that’s what I’ve been doing my whole life - speaking to customers, while most in the organization are not adapt to that.” - Kirsi

While Kirsi recognizes specific aspects of her career history, which enable her to bring new skills to the workplace, she also acknowledges the benefits her unique and broad background provides for her work in general.

“If you look at my CV, you don’t really know where to look at ... but I only see that it has probably benefited me and still benefits me.” - Kirsi

Finally, two of the interviewees explicitly mentioned their own personality as a determining factor in how they aim to influence other people. One of them explained how she is very straightforward as a person, which is why she prefers direct influencing. The other emphasized how due to her rational personality, being fact-based has always been her go-to approach. From the narratives told, it seems that personality could be a significant factor in which tactics and methods feel most useful and which approach fits best for each person.

4.4.2. Organizational and industry context

As may be expected, the organizational context had a significant influence on the perceived ease of driving change. According to the interviewees, top management support is perhaps one of the most important influences in how effectively change can be driven, and the findings are also strongly supported by previous research (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al, 1997; Dutton et al, 2002; Kiesnere & Baumgartner, 2019).

“*If you have management support, I mean that kind of makes it happen, since even if your peers don't see the point it’s forced upon them. So again, it is really up to the top management ... it boils down to that if your CEO doesn't think that you're doing the right thing, I don't think you will be able to change the organization.” - Kirsi*

Company culture and values also had a clear influence, not only in terms of the organizational identity, such as being an engineer-dominated workplace, but also in the integration of sustainability values to the company culture. This again is supported by previous research and acknowledged as one of the key organizational influences on issue selling (Dutton et al, 1997; Dutton et al, 2002).

One interesting influencing factor seems to be the ownership type of the organization, as a family-owned business can have a more intergenerational perspective, and a stock listed company a stronger focus on quarterly earnings. Another factor, also identified by previous research (Dutton et al, 1997), was going through major organizational changes, such as mergers and acquisitions and restructuring, and the resulting uncertainty.

> *"This is really a changing organization, so we are having these organizational changes all the time. So I'm sort of used to it that you always have a new person you need to contact and start explaining to." - Sanni*

Organizational agility and size as well as centralized versus decentralized CSR seemed to also affect the ease of integration. Furthermore, in line with Dutton and Ashford (1993), the functional positioning of sustainability managers serves as an obvious enabler of issue selling, as their work depends strongly on successful issue selling efforts, whereas the structural location of their role may influence their access to key people. For example, one case individual had been reporting directly to the CEO in the beginning, which significantly increased the opportunities for driving change. Lastly, demographic influences were surprisingly limited in my findings, compared to previous research (Dutton et al., 2002). The only mentions of demographics were when considering the broader change for sustainability, by identifying older men as the stereotypically less sustainability-oriented audiences.

A major influence to driving change for sustainability is the industry the company operates in. Perhaps the highest influence perceived by the interviewees on which companies are able to transform their practices faster was the amount of external pressure from various stakeholders. When the external pressure is low, argumenting for sustainability becomes much harder, as the business case is not seen as clearly. Relating to this, the industry's closeness to consumers affects the urgency of changes made, as the closer the consumer market is, the more there is evidence for the business case arising from emerging consumer trends. These link to the competitive and economic pressures, that have also been previously identified as influencing context favorability (Dutton et al., 1997).

> *"Maybe we are in an industry, which is in general very slow. Organizations change all the time, things change, but the general thing.. maybe it is not that dynamic like some industries. It's kind of a big slow boat." - Sanni*

The relevance of natural resources was another factor, as when the company is directly working with natural resources, the effects of e.g. climate change can pose a much higher business interruption risk than otherwise, while also legislation may be developing rapidly in those sectors. Also, industry leadership was clearly a motivating factor for organizations to change and adapt, and this translated to high ambition levels also regarding sustainability.

Finally, quite understandably, the global presence throughout the value chain increase the complexity when driving change, due to market differences, different legislations, long supply chains, and high cultural differences in the workforce, translating to the challenges sustainability managers face when working in multinational enterprises.

4.4.3. Challenges in driving change

The challenges identified by the interviewees seemed to fall into those identified by the majority, despite the context, and those that seemed to be dependent on the specific context.

The challenges that seemed to exist no matter the specific context was the lack of and fight over resources given to sustainability issues, identified also in previous research as the main barrier for implementing corporate sustainability (Kiesnere & Baumgartner, 2019). The lack of resources and the state of priority were also highly related to how much time others are willing and able to give for sustainability issues. Also tensions between long-term and short-term focus in the organization as well as the challenge of correct timing were mentioned by two interviewees.

While finding the right people was also mentioned as a challenge by two individuals, this may fall under the context specific challenges. In the first case the organization is very global and decentralized, which makes it harder to identify and approach the key contacts. In the second case, the individual feels she has not yet developed very strong relational knowledge on who are the key people, which likely correlates also with that she does not yet have the personal networks needed for knowing the key contacts. In addition, her organization is also quite global with several business units, adding to the structural complexity. The latter person also identified as a challenge being a businessperson in an engineer-dominated workplace. This meant she needs to find ways to increase her credibility in the organization and to have support for the more technical side of the argumentation, which can be difficult at times.

One individual mentioned the challenges of the speed of integration, implementation at the unit level, as well as of creating consensus. She feels that there are times when she has been pushing for an initiative that she has found to be very urgent, yet the initiative has not been started on time. Then later, it might be the same person who initially blocked the initiative, who brings the issue up again. This seems to bring some frustration for her, as she has a clear emphasis on the timing and urgency of the issues at hand. From the interview, it seems that she generally has a strong preference for quick action, which is why the speed of change can be especially frustrating for her. Finally, she was also the only one to mention the challenge of creating consensus. As she also had the highest emphasis on the collaborative approach and building consensus out of all the cases, it may be that as finding consensus is very important to her, it also emphasizes the challenges associated with it.

One of the individuals mentioned cost savings as a challenge, as well as ending up in a CSR “bubble”. It is surprising that the former did not receive more attention, but it may be because it is strongly linked to lack of resources. The perception of being in a CSR “bubble” in the organization then seems to stem from her experience in her previous organization, which is significantly larger than the other case organizations. This is further supported by the fact that the same term was used by another individual, currently working in the same organization.

"We may get this CR bubble that this is now a super important issue, and then when one thinks about it from the whole company's scale, then it is maybe not really such a priority, that not all things need to be advanced." - Milla

Finally, one individual mentioned the challenges of organizational uncertainty and the conceptual complexity of sustainability. The former challenge is prevalent throughout the interview, as the organization was going through some major changes and had been facing changes in the top management regularly during the recent years, causing some distress and difficulty when it comes to driving change for sustainability. She also found it hard to increase the understanding of sustainability, when the concept itself is very complex. She was one of the two using several tactics under the approach of capacity building, and seemingly, as she aims to increase the level of understanding in the organization, also the difficulties of doing this are more prevalent.

4.4.4. Overcoming the challenges

The tactics to overcome these challenges also fell into two groups: more general ones and more context specific ones. The generally used tactics were further argumentation based on benefits, costs, legislation, risks, and other evidence, therefore further supporting the business case. Just as popular was taking a timeout and bringing the topic up again next year. Many felt that this usually works for initiatives that just do not seem to move forward otherwise. Other tactics mentioned more than once were choosing your battles, finding the right people, balancing and prioritizing issues, and being determined and persistent. Dutton et al (2001) found that timing, and more specifically persistence, opportunism, and involving others at the right time, was a key part of process moves in issue selling. This seems to be consistent with my findings, especially in regards to persistence, as while correct timing was not mentioned in the initial moves, incorrect timing was one consistent factor between unsuccessful efforts and to overcome the challenge of timing, persistence and coming back to the issue next year seems to be the key strategy.

Tactics mentioned only once seemed to be more context specific. For example, there can be a company specific process to follow through if the issues really are not going forward. One individual whose role included anticipating the need for resources and allocating them effectively, felt that for him it is important to stay aware of things, react quickly, and keep the big picture in mind, to avoid any difficult situations. Another person who had been working in an organizational setting where she had had a significant lack of resources, a high external pressure and a sense of being somewhat a tempered radical, tried to find resources elsewhere, practice internal selling, and think of alternatives. Therefore, she focused on finding creative solutions and on persuasion skills to overcome the obstacles. Finally, one of the interviewees mentioned being flexible, taking smaller steps and working with a positive approach. She works in an organization where the priority of sustainability might have been less high on the strategic agenda, which could be why working slowly but surely is her preferred choice.

> *"One needs to sometimes try to maybe take a kind of a timeout, if it is clearly said that "not now, now is not a good time". If you are missing the key contacts, and someone higher in the organization says that "now is not a good time, we have this thing now and we focus on this", well then of course you don't want to go there like "but now now now", but rather, you need to come back and persistently show the value and maybe then move with smaller steps and not expect too much." - Sanni*

A surprising general finding from the interviews was that none of the interviewees felt any of their initiatives had ever been truly unsuccessful. They may have been slowed down or forgotten for a moment, but then would have progressed on another time or in another way. The interviewees found their ways around the problems and thus felt that in the end they had always been successful in some way or another. Yet, at the same time, it was very common to note that there is a significant number of obstacles and challenges in driving change for sustainability. Nonetheless, several of the interviewees noted how driving change for sustainability had become much easier over the years, as it has become an increasing trend among e.g. the media, consumers, regulators and competitors. Therefore, the same efforts on change agency are not necessarily needed anymore as were when these professionals started their careers in corporate sustainability.

4.5. Framing the case for sustainability

An initial interest for this research was to understand whether sustainability managers frame issues predominantly from the business case perspective, or from a broader perspective, embracing the inherent paradoxes present in corporate sustainability. It soon became apparent that the dominant logic behind issue framing was the business case lens, emphasized in majority of the cases. This is directly in line with previous research on issue selling in the context of corporate greening, and the process of amoralization, in which managers try to avoid any emotionality or morality aspects of greening and instead to focus on the business case and its benefits for the business (Crane, 2000).

> *"It's really about showing that there's value in it, because, of course, since this is a listed company, the main purpose is to make as much money as we can for the shareholder ... so you always need to find the angle." - Sanni*

> *"Of course, whether it is about corporate responsibility or about anything, one needs to be able to show the concrete evidence and not only that this is the right thing to do in my opinion, even when it is one big reason ... it is the business case with which the interests of the leadership awaken." - Rosa*

However, there were interesting differences on whether the business case, although always dominant, was the only lens used in issue framing. Three out of the eight interviewees mentioned that the business case is not the only argumentation angle they use for sustainability issues. Instead, two of the interviewees mentioned how some issues, such as human rights, are simply important on their own, no matter the business implications, and thus do not require argumentation for their importance for the company. One of the two explained this further by stating how in their company some things are simply done because they ought to, based on their company culture and practices.

> *"Well the business case is undeniably a good approach, but then surely many conversations often have in addition that it is just an important issue. Also, naturally, let's say in human rights issues and others, there's no need to discuss much whether they are important or not, people do understand them as they are." - Ilkka*

The third case where the business case was not the only lens used was intriguing in the sense that the individual seemed to be generally an outlier in the study, as the interviewee felt that she doesn't have to strongly argument for the business case or for sustainability in general, as she can begin from her own understanding of license to operate. She further clarifies that she does not present simply any ideas she might have, but instead bases them on stakeholder expectations, for example. Yet, she feels that since everyone in the company already understands the importance of sustainability, she does not have to provide strong argumentation for it, nor does she need to persuade anyone, but rather simply provide general support for the business.

> *"There isn't that must anymore [to argument for issues], when you have your own kind of passion … that it is in my own opinion a kind of license to operate, that these things, they need to be in order." - Rosa*

Rather than herself actively aiming to influence others, she has been regularly asked for her opinions on the issues, based on her past experience working in sustainability consulting. Her sense of how sustainability is already valued at the company seemed to indicate that she felt no need for change agency for sustainability in her organization. However, regardless of these exceptions, it seems that the business case approach is the single most important method of framing sustainability issues in the case organizations.

4.6. Conclusions

By learning about the different backgrounds and roles of sustainability managers, the approaches they use in driving change for sustainability, the contextual influences enabling their work and the challenges they face, and finally the way they frame sustainability issues in the organization, we are able to paint a comprehensive picture of their work as change agents for sustainability.

From the findings four specific types of approaches emerged, namely those of capacity building approach, rational and systematic approach, collaborative approach and internal selling approach, consisting of a variety of different tactics to drive change. The case individuals generally profile under one or two of the approaches, influenced by their personal and organizational characteristics. While there are universal challenges and enablers faced by the managers, such as lack of resources and the support of top management, the specific context they operate in provide additional enablers and roadblocks for their work. To navigate through the organizational context, they develop necessary knowledge and additional tactics to overcome challenges and improve their position as issue sellers. Finally, they focus on framing the case of sustainability in a way that appeals to other business managers and decision makers, by showing the value of corporate sustainability, and skillfully mastering the art of change agency.

> *"Now some organizational changes are going to be happen, which will also facilitate [the change]. So I've earned my income or earned my bonuses this year. (laughs)"*
> *- Kirsi*

5) DISCUSSION

My thesis sheds new light on how sustainability managers act as change agents in organizations in order to promote corporate sustainability, by showing that instead of using a universal pattern of change agency, they approach the task in different ways, influenced by their personal and organizational characteristics. Moreover, the particular institutional context, setting the study in Finland, provides insight into the practice of corporate sustainability in the Nordic welfare economy, where stakeholder engagement is embedded at in the business strategy. In this section I will discuss and illustrate the main insights in detail.

5.1. Collaboration as a Finnish characteristic

While the findings provide support for previous work on issue selling, there are multiple additional insights found in this study. Much of the research of issue selling by managers has focused on organizations and individuals in the US, apart from studies of subsidiary managers conducted in certain European countries focusing on issue selling at the organizational level (e.g. Gammelgaard, 2009; Dörrenbächer & Gammelgaard, 2016), and the literature on change agents for corporate sustainability has also been much focused on anglophone institutional contexts (e.g. Andersson & Bateman, 2000, Wright, Nyberg and Grant, 2012, Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher, 2020). This means that variations in issue selling moves and processes could be explained by the national culture and the characteristics of the local market.

An interesting insight on how the institutional context affects change agency arose from the emergence of the collaborative approach at the individual level in issue selling, in contrast to the emphasis put by previous issue selling research on the more direct influencing approaches of internal selling and rational reasoning. For example, the Nordic emphasis on stakeholder engagement could explain the higher use and range of collaborative moves than suggested by previous research. On the other hand, Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020) studied sustainability managers as change agents in the US context and emphasized the use of political skills and reputation, having trust as a central theme of the findings. While it becomes clear from my findings that political skills are often necessary to drive change for corporate sustainability, reputation and trust did not emerge as strongly from the data, as the US-based research would suggest. The high levels of embedded stakeholder management in the Finnish context may explain why trust was not explicitly mentioned by the interviewees, as trusting and respecting others at all levels is implicitly integrated in effective stakeholder engagement and in collaborating with others. Moreover, Finland is generally considered a country where there is a high level of trust both in the local institutions and in other individuals, and perhaps then there is not a need for explicitly considering trust unless there is a clear reason for mistrust. However, as sustainability managers act as bridge-builders between different stakeholders (Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020), it becomes evident that even if trust isn't a major concern explicitly for Finnish sustainability managers, it is necessary for being able to act as a change agent, since to be able to build bridges, one needs to be trusted and respected by both sides of the party. Furthermore, as one of the managers who employed tactics mostly from the collaborative approach emphasized, respect for others is a critical element in fostering truly lasting change.

Just as with trust, reputation was not explicitly mentioned by the managers. This may be related to the egalitarian values and low levels of hierarchy in the Finnish society, linked to mutual respect and trust, since when everyone is respected and trusted equally, the importance of increasing one's reputation and credibility in change agency might be lower. Yet, while the importance of reputation was not explicitly a major concern for the managers, it came through implicitly from the findings on the businessperson versus engineering identities as well as the organizational insider versus outsider tensions. Gaining reputation through small wins in the change agency for corporate sustainability throughout the years in the organization (Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020) explains the difficulties experienced by someone coming as an outsider into a new industry, and the ability to drive change in highly controversial industries by individuals who are industry 'natives'. Moreover, while the interviewees in most cases did not discuss gaining or maintaining respect for themselves, which increases the level of reputation (Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020), especially in the collaborative approach respect for others was a key element. One could think then, that by respecting others, a positive outcome would be also gaining respect for yourself in return.

Finally, according to Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020), networking ability affects the reputation of sustainability managers. In many of the cases in this thesis, the networking ability and willingness of the managers has become highly apparent from most cases, both inside their organizations as well as inter-organizations and among their close group of colleagues in different industries. In that sense, sustainability managers may engage in this kind of reputation building more indirectly. This is also enhanced by the Finnish business environment, where the social circles are relatively small and thus increases the ease of networking and building relationships with colleagues inside and outside organizations.

5.2. Business case for the business environment

As the study initially aimed to identify whether sustainability managers use solely business case frames or also paradoxical frames in their quest for corporate sustainability (Hahn et al., 2014), a clear finding emerged in the support of the former. Since the study focused on multinational enterprises at the organizational level, and thus large businesses often owned publicly, it is no surprise framing the sustainability issues through business benefits was the dominant logic behind issue selling. While many of the sustainability managers indicated that they themselves do not only consider the business case as the most important driver for corporate sustainability, they felt that the only way to further sustainability in their organizations was through building the business case and thus framing the issues with the business case logic. Many of the sustainability managers also emphasized that they would try to avoid any emotional arguments for corporate sustainability, as these would not be effective in their organizations as it may reduce the credibility of the argument. This is especially in line with the rational and systematic approach, and previous research where the use of business plan logic and establishing legitimacy through facts and evidence has been one of the main methods in issue selling (Dutton et al., 2001; Dutton and Ashford, 1993).

Also, since the Finnish business environment is traditionally focused on implicit corporate sustainability, it may be that the managers simply do not feel the need for emphasizing the moral, more emotive side of corporate sustainability, as everyone in the organization already understands the moral value behind it. Interestingly, the individuals mentioning the inherent importance of e.g. human rights have been working in the most global organization in the sample, which might mean that the cultural norms are not as prevalent there, and thus consideration of the moral side more explicitly might surface more easily. However, Finns are also known to culturally value natural sciences and logical reasoning and to avoid excessive emotionality, which is directly in line with the sustainability managers' perceptions on how sustainability issues should be framed in order to gain approval for them. This illustrates well how the institutional context influences the organizational context for corporate sustainability.

The downside of the business case approach is that the focus on the business case logic may constrain radical changes in the organization and hinder organizational learning (Dutton et al., 2001). Using the paradoxical frame in addition to the business case frame would allow for creating innovative and more comprehensive responses and focusing on solely one of the two frames can prove to be insufficient in the need for tackling the challenges of sustainability (Hahn et al., 2014). Deferring from using emotive, moral arguments in driving change for sustainability may also impede with the institutionalization of corporate sustainability (Crane, 2000). Therefore, while the individuals themselves seem to understand the complexity of sustainability challenges and its paradoxical nature, the wider, organizational focus on the business case and reasoning based on numerical evidence may not be enough for the global challenges we are currently facing. Perhaps individuals in key roles could draw more from the different issue selling moves available to advance also more moral arguments, thus influencing the organizational culture and values that are in place. Moreover, the increasing calls for more ethical and sustainable capitalist system, also voiced by the interviewed sustainability managers, indicate that embracing a more paradoxical paradigm on corporate sustainability might act as a way of pioneering and staying ahead of the curve. One challenge often mentioned in the interviews was the lack of suitable measures for sustainability, which makes it difficult to argue for certain issues, which cannot be easily reasoned for through the business case frame. While the increased availability of these measures would be likely to aid the process in driving corporate sustainability, meanwhile, the most effective way may be utilizing the personal, accumulated assets each individual has and the wide array of different issue selling moves available.

5.3. Individual profiles in the approaches

One major finding in the study was that different individuals draw from different sets of issue selling moves and tactics, based on their personal and organizational characteristics. Previously, the literature has focused on the different moves on the whole, rather than investigating patterns between the issue sellers and the moves they use. My research indicates that moves come in 'packages' (cf. Dutton & Ashford, 1993), influenced not only by the organizational context but also the personalities of the individuals using them. Moreover, while some of the specific moves, e.g. using facts and evidence, were commonly identified both in my study as well as in previous research, other moves identified previously as common ones were not as evident throughout this study and instead several additional moves were identified.

Another difference to existing literature on managers' issue selling efforts is that much of the previous research have studied individuals' willingness to participate in issue selling and have identified factors that either encourage or discourage individuals' willingness for issue selling. Instead, in my research, the willingness for issue selling and the choice of not selling an issue did not seem to be in such a big role, but rather how easy or difficult the process really is. Sustainability managers seemed to try to sell the issues they found important nonetheless, even if in some contexts and situations it could be more difficult than in others. In the more unfavorable contexts, they aimed to utilize additional moves to overcome the difficulties such as lack of resources or poor timing. After all, many felt that all tactics were eventually successful, but they just differed in the ease and the speed of the process and thus determined whether additional time and measures would be needed. This could be due to not only their personal drive and motivation in selling sustainability issues actively, but also the functional role of a sustainability manager, as one of the core tasks and competencies is initiating and integrating change in the organization (Kiesnere & Baumgartner, 2019; Wesselink et al, 2015).

An interesting finding that emerged from the different profiles in change agency approaches was that firstly, capacity building and internal selling seemed to be directly related, as both of them relate to active change initiation in the organization, and thus those using capacity building at the organizational level also used internal selling tactics at the individual level. Yet, the collaborative as well as rational and systematic approach seemed to be in contrast to the capacity building and internal selling approach, as individuals profiling under the former approaches mentioned only a few capacity building and internal selling tactics. Moreover, all of those who explicitly expressed belongingness to the company culture and the industry, due to their educational backgrounds or their long history in the industry, included collaborative tactics and in relation, all of those with studies in engineering or natural sciences included collaborative tactics, while the remaining managers did not include any of them. This also meant that individuals who seemed to be more positioned as "outsiders within" (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012), profiled under the internal selling approach.

Lastly, an interesting finding was that the only ones profiling under the rational and systematic approach were the two men in the sample, who also mentioned very little internal selling tactics. Furthermore, in contrast to several female colleagues, they did not mention their inner drive and passion for sustainability to be a driver in their influencing efforts, although recognizing it as the motivation for their chosen profession, but rather emphasized using logical reasoning over emotive argumentation in change agency and even slightly downplaying the use of emotions in argumenting for corporate sustainability. In contrast, most of the women profiled under the internal selling approach, which focuses strongly on the relational aspect of change agency. The exceptions were Tuija, who used mostly collaborative tactics, and Rosa, who did not profile strongly under any of the approaches. While the low number of men in the sample does not allow for generalizations, this could indicate towards the deep-rooted, gendered societal norms in relation to showing emotions.

However, despite differences in approaches, many of the cases in this thesis indicated high levels of relational knowledge, social astuteness and the ability to use interpersonal influence. This is much in line with the findings of Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020). For example, the consideration of the audience and tailoring the message accordingly was something that all of the interviewees practiced, at least partly. Apparent sincerity of the sustainability managers also played a key role in their findings. According to them, authenticity in the managers' passion for sustainability and perceived integrity were integral to change agency. As discussed in the findings section, it became evident that the cases in this study have the passion and calling for purposeful work, and a kind of an inner fire driving their work. Some interviewees even explicitly mentioned how the passion for sustainability shines through themselves and their colleagues, almost permanently imprinted on them. Finally, while some change agency approaches discussed in this thesis include the use of political skill more explicitly than others, it becomes evident that political skill is necessary for most approaches, as suggested by Gallagher, Porter and Gallagher (2020). This may also relate to how the interviewees in this research perceived that despite challenges, these approaches have often been successful in the efforts to push the change forward

A final observation in this study that has not been strongly identified by previous research is the effect of personal reflexivity in the ability and ease of finding the most effective moves and methods for issue selling. By reflecting on their personal characteristics, the sustainability managers were able to maneuver around their perceived weaknesses, such as public speaking skills, and emphasize moves that built on their personal strengths, such as competence in direct influencing. This also allowed for a more intentional use of the accumulated assets gained through their experiences in issue selling (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Increasing and promoting personal reflection may then enhance the abilities for issue selling and change agency, as managers learn what kind of tactics draw from their personal strengths and in turn, when the adoption of new approaches might be necessary. As an example, Milla, who felt she was not as fluent in presenting the issues as some others, but rather had her strengths in rational thinking, focused on preparing the material well and collecting as much data as possible, and then found others, more skilled in persuasion, to present them. Therefore, by building on her self-reflection on her personal characteristics, she was able to sell issues and drive change through others, while using her relational knowledge and skills to find allies and to use them as her agents.

These findings indicated clear types of change agency in sustainability managers. The profiles of sustainability managers in change agency echo with similar findings in previous research. For example, Visser and Crane (2000) identified four types of change agents, those of experts, facilitators, catalysts, and activists, based on their motivations and sources of meaning in their work. For example, an individual who clearly identified as an expert based on the personal narrative, emphasized several of the moves under the rational and systematic approach, while also incorporating many of the collaborative moves. However, many of the individuals seemed to indicate motivations from more than one of the change agent types proposed by Visser & Crane (2010), and nearly all of the individuals expressed that their underlying motives in the career choice stemmed from the wish to do something with a bigger purpose, which would fall under the change agent type of an activist.

Furthermore, in accordance with Wright, Nyberg and Grant (2012) findings on the different types of identities in the sustainability profession, the interviewees seemed to present aspects of all of the three identities, consisting of the green change agent, rational manager and committed activist. As suggested by the authors, the three identities of green change agent, rational manager, and committed activist, seem not to be fixed positions for each individual, but rather more fluid, depending on the context. However, each case in my thesis seems to profile most strongly under a single identity. For example, Tuija, Milla, Leena and Sanni seem to fall quite clearly under the green change agent, driving change while working within the organizational norms, Pekka and Ilkka under the rational manager, emphasizing the best interests of the business in their sustainability efforts, and Kirsi and Rosa under the committed activist, as Kirsi decided to start her own company earlier in the career and Rosa joined her new employer, in order to work in an environment more appealing to their values. These sources of meaning and narrative identities are provide the managers a way to cope with the tensions and emotional dissonance present in their work.

5.4. Tensions in identity and emotions

In addition to the approaches and contextual influences in change agency, my thesis has demonstrated the presence of underlying tensions in sustainability managers' work. Existing literature shows how identity work is necessary to deal with these tensions (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012; Carollo & Guerci, 2018). Based on my findings, how the interviewees deal with tensions related to their identity work seems to indicate a paradoxical paradigm of accepting the duality of issues and working with it, rather than against it. This is much in line with previous research on tensions and identity work in corporate sustainability (Carollo & Guerci, 2018). However, some of the managers' seemed to have tendencies for a particular orientation when dealing with tensions. For example, the business-oriented sustainability managers emphasize rational and instrumental approach to managerial work, in line with the rational and systematic approach. Not surprisingly, both managers who used several of the tactics under this approach seem to best fit the identity of the business-oriented sustainability manager. For example, Pekka concentrated on the business operation side of driving sustainability, rather than the actual sustainability issues.

While it is harder to identify a purely values-oriented sustainability manager, also a minority in Carollo and Guerci (2018) findings, one could argue that Rosa could be ascribed as one. She explicitly expressed that for her, while the business case was a way to argument for issues to the higher level decision makers, the most important motivation for issues stemmed from that "these things need to be in order". However, my findings would indicate that most sustainability managers, at least in my sample, would fall under the paradoxical perspective when it comes to the business-values tension in their identity work (Carollo & Guerci, 2018), since from all of the interviews it became evident that sustainability values are highly important for the managers, and a driving factor in their work. Yet, they all also recognize the importance of business rationale to be able to effectively in the organizational context.

One tension prevalent in their work is that of the managers' positioning both within and outside of organizational boundaries (Carollo & Guerci, 2018). While several of the interviewees emphasized company values, organizational culture, internal cooperation and support, and belongingness to the organizational identity, some managers seemed to identify themselves more as outsiders. For example, Kirsi referred several times to her distinctive background and the narrative of an outsider within, clearly with a very different profile to that of the traditional organizational identity, which influences her work in organization. Rosa also framed her previous experience as a consultant as something that brings outsider perspective to the organization. Kirsi and Rosa were also the ones who explicitly used the metaphor of being the "antennas" of the organization, which may relate to this outsider perspective. However, even those identifying themselves clearly as organizational insiders indicated that they work as bridges between the organization and the outside world, indicating a paradoxical perspective on the organizational insider-outsider tension.

Finally, also the short term versus long term tension in identity work (Carollo & Guerci, 2018) showed clearly through the data. None of the interviewees seemed to be a purely short-term focused sustainability manager, which is quite natural due to the long-term perspective needed for promoting sustainability issues. However, the short term orientation in business was often mentioned, especially when it comes to quarterly earnings and the targets based on them. Some of the interviewees found the tension as a major challenge, as they themselves were clearly strongly focused on the long-term results. For example, Ilkka emphasized the importance of long-term planning and vision in decision making and used it in his examples of both successful initiatives as well as the challenges faced.

These tensions and the related identity work also relate to the emotions faced in the sustainability managers' work. Wright and Nyberg's (2012) research on sustainability professionals as "emotionology workers" in large Australian corporations highlights the tensions and contradictions prevalent in their work. Focusing on climate change issues and the emotionality around them, the authors studied how these professionals translate the emotionality around climate change into risks and opportunities for business. It is evident from their findings, as well as from the findings in this thesis, that sustainability managers need to balance between the emotionality around sustainability issues, as showing too much emotion can be perceived as unprofessional, while at the same time, being themselves highly passionate about the issues. Keeping that cool and calm manner when discussing the issues may be in conflict with the individuals' own emotions, creating emotional dissonance. This is directly linked to the use of the business case frame in corporate sustainability.

However, in contrast to Wright and Nyberg's (2012) findings on sustainability professionals, although some of my interviewees mentioned how their passion shows through their work and helps them in driving change, none of them mentioned using their emotionality explicitly as a tactic to drive change. Championing and emphasizing the passionate emotionology was therefore not seemingly included in the toolkit of the Finnish sustainability managers. Instead, in several cases, using emotionality as a tool was mentioned as a negative and a harmful tactic to drive change, in line with the preference for the use of a rational approach and the business logic angle. Perhaps this can also be explained by the institutional context, as in Finnish culture, just as in the cultural norms in many of the case individuals' organizations, rationality, fact-based and numerical evidence and measurement, prevalent in engineering and natural sciences, are highly valued and sometimes even seen superior to more emotional and social science focused approaches. Therefore, one can have that inner drive and passion, and it may show through the work, but it should be used carefully in order to maintain credibility, leading to the importance of identity work and coping with tensions.

5.5. Contribution to research

This thesis has aimed to address a phenomenon-driven question of how sustainability managers drive change in MNEs headquartered in Finland. As a result, the findings provide insights into how the professionals act as change agents by using a variety of tactics and approaches in promoting corporate sustainability and embedding it into the core of business.

While in the recent years, an increasing amount of research has been made into sustainability professionals' work towards a more sustainable future, the institutional context provides an interesting background in contrast to the dominant, anglophone backdrop in previous research. The institutional context and the characteristics of the Finnish society and business environment, where trust and respect for others and the deep-rooted practices of stakeholder engagement are implicitly present in the business environment, influence the approaches used in change agency by providing more emphasis on collaborating with others, while expressing less explicit need for gaining trust and reputation, than suggested in earlier literature.

Moreover, how they drive change is tied to who they are and where they operate. This results in different change agency approaches, rather than one universal approach to change agency. By providing profiles of different approaches and where they originate from, whether the contextual factors or personal backgrounds, my thesis differentiates from previous research where the focus has been issue selling for corporate sustainability rather than the issue sellers themselves, while admitting to existing literature on the motivations and identities of these change agents. No matter the preferred approach, or mix of approaches, these individuals tirelessly drive change and push sustainability issues closer to the core of business, skillfully maneuvering the organizational context.

Based on both my findings, and on previous research in different institutional contexts, it seems safe to say that sustainability managers act as bridge builders both inside their organizations as well as between their organizations and external stakeholder expectations. Their work results in tensions and contradictions, but through their inner drive these professionals are able to keep finding solutions and navigating the complexities day after day. Moreover, sustainability managers are highly skilled in interpersonal influencing and have high levels of not only more explicit organizational knowledge, but also highly implicit relational knowledge. Finally, they practice self-reflection in order to find the approaches best suited for their own personalities and unique abilities.

6) CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, I will provide the overall conclusions of the research and the managerial implications the findings provide. I will also restate the limitations of the research and suggest future research avenues emerging from the findings.

6.1. Conclusions and managerial implications

In this thesis I aimed to answer the question of how sustainability managers drive change in Finnish MNEs, to understand the phenomenon of organizational change for corporate sustainability at the individual level and in the specific institutional context of Finland. By using literature on issue selling as the basis of theoretical positioning, while recognizing the importance of institutional and organizational contextual influences, I have conducted a comparative, multiple-case study by using eight sustainability managers in Finnish MNEs as individual cases, studying their experiences in driving change. The findings indicate that sustainability managers draw from various tactics, ranging from the more strategic, organizational-level approaches of capacity building and the rational and systematic approach, to collaborative and internal selling approaches, focused on interpersonal skills and interactions. Moreover, the managers use the business case as a predominant frame for corporate sustainability, in order to influence strategic decision making, yet they recognize and maneuver through the tensions emerging from the contradicting values of business and sustainability.

These findings contribute to corporate sustainability and issue selling literature by providing empirical evidence of how change for corporate sustainability is driven in practice, from an institutional context that adds nuance to the US-dominated research area. Furthermore, my findings help managers to identify suitable change agency approaches depending on the context and their personalities, as well as to practice self-reflection and further advance one's change management and leadership skills. Organizations benefit from these findings by building organizational cultures that foster, rather than hinder, the change agency practices and processes of sustainability managers.

6.2. Limitations and future research avenues

The main limitation of my study is that as the findings are based on the interview narratives, the approaches used and the tactics mentioned are merely the ones the interviewees talked about during the interviews. Thus, that a tactic was not mentioned by one individual does not mean he or she does not use it. The profiles therefore emerge not only from the individuals' perceptions of relevant tactics and approaches, but of those they happened to think about at that very moment.

Several interesting issues emerged during the data analysis that could provide future avenues for research. One such issue is related to gender and how this may affect the approach used for driving change. This study suggests that there is a division between men and women in whether they emphasize relational knowledge and context-specific approach or a more rational and systematic approach with the focus on logical and clear messaging. However, as the sample only included two men, the subject would require further empirical research.

Moreover, as an interesting additional insight, although through a general observation, is that a significant majority of sustainability managers seemed to be women. This is especially interesting as previous literature has emphasized the barriers of women for sustainability leadership positions. For example, Marshall (2007) found that women and men are in different position to work within the dominant paradigm in corporate sustainability, which she claims to favor masculinity, and that leadership in corporate sustainability is dominated by white men. In more recent research, Shinbrot et al (2019) state that while sustainability leadership roles have become less gendered throughout the past years, the perceptions of barriers for women have not changed, as they found that there are still significant concerns about patriarchal structures constraining women from becoming leaders. While the recent rise of women in the ranks of sustainability leadership has been documented (Davies, 2020), it seems that the seemingly high presence of women in sustainability leadership roles is also a context-specific phenomenon, likely influenced by the Nordic societal context with high levels of gender equality on a global scale. This observation could provide further opportunities for future research on gender and sustainability leadership.

Another insight that emerged from the research findings was that of identity work and organizational identity, especially in regards to the engineer-businessperson divide. While this finding was unexpected, it does fit into the cultural setting in Finland. A deeper look into how organizational identity affects the work of sustainability managers, and whether similar tensions can be found in other institutional contexts, could provide interesting research findings. Moreover, in relation to emotionology work, my interviewees indirectly expressed various levels of climate pessimism and optimism during the interviews, from high levels of anxiety to high levels of optimism for the future. Wright and Nyberg (2012) have discussed the inner emotionology work sustainability professionals face, but how climate pessimism or climate optimism relates to the context could be an interesting research topic.

Finally, the relation of the institutional context can provide further opportunities for research. Especially considering the Nordic context, where stakeholders are a key motivating factor for corporate sustainability (Kujala, Lämsä & Riivari, 2017), how the target of issue selling affects the process and framing of issues would be an interesting research question. Moreover, while this thesis provides empirical evidence for the gap in literature concerning different institutional contexts of the particular phenomenon, further research in other non-anglophone and perhaps non-Western institutional contexts would allow for a wider comparison on how different, or similar, corporate sustainability, sustainability leadership and change management practices are in a range of institutional contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview guide in English

1. About the interview (2min)
    a. Who I am
    b. The purpose of the interview
    c. How I process the data

2. About the interviewee (3min)
    a. Title of the position
    b. Role and responsibilities of the position
    c. Background of the interviewee

3. About the role (10min)
    a. Can you tell me more about your position and your daily responsibilities?
    b. Who do you mostly work with in your daily responsibilities?
    c. How much do you take part in strategic decision-making?
    d. Who are the most important stakeholders in your work?
    e. In what ways do you interact with these stakeholders?

4. About driving change (30min)
    a. How big part of your role is influencing strategic decision-making related to sustainability?
    b. How do you try to persuade others in order to influence decision-making?
    c. In what particular situations and contexts do you try to influence others?
    d. How do you frame the issues you aim to bring forward?
    e. What kind of argumentation methods do you use?
    f. If these methods don't work, what do you do next?
    g. How does who you work with affect how you build your arguments?
    h. Can you give me a recent example of a situation where you have successfully driven change for sustainability?
    i. What kind of challenges do you face in driving change?
    j. How do you try to overcome these challenges?

k. Can you give me a recent example of a challenge and how you dealt with it?
l. How has your own approach to driving change developed over time?

5. Other questions (10min)
    a. How does the industry affect what you do?
    b. How does the company's business model affect what you do?
    c. How does working in a multinational company affect what you do?

6. Conclusion (5min)
    a. How would you sum up your experience as a ___ at _____?
    b. Any final thoughts you may have?
    c. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 2. Haastattelukysymykset suomeksi

1. Tietoa haastattelusta
    a. Kuka olen
    b. Haastattelun tarkoitus
    c. Tietojen käsittelystä

2. Haastateltavasta
    a. Työnimike ja työtehtävän vastuualueet
    b. Haastateltavan tausta

3. Työtehtävästä
    a. Voisitko kertoa enemmän vastuualueistasi sekä päivittäisistä työtehtävistäsi?
    b. Keiden kanssa teet eniten yhteistyötä päivittäisissä tehtävissäsi?
    c. Kuinka paljon osallistut strategiseen päätöksentekoon?
    d. Ketkä ovat kaikkein tärkeimmät sidosryhmät työssäsi?
    e. Millä tavoin olet vuorovaikutuksessa näiden sidosryhmien kanssa?

4. Muutoksen eteenpäin viemisestä
    a. Kuinka suuri rooli työssäsi on kestävään liiketoimintaan liittyvän strategisen päätöksentekoon vaikuttamisella?
    b. Kuinka pyrit vakuuttamaan muita vaikuttaaksesi päätöksentekoon?
    c. Minkälaisissa tilanteissa ja konteksteissa pyrit vaikuttamaan muihin ihmisiin?
    d. Millä näkökulmalla pyrit tuomaan esiin valitsemasi asiakohdat?
    e. Minkälaisia argumentaatiomenetelmiä käytät?
    f. Jos nämä menetelmät eivät toimi, mitä teet seuraavaksi?
    g. Kuinka keiden kanssa toimit vaikuttaa siihen, miten rakennat argumenttisi?
    h. Voisitko antaa viimeaikaisen esimerkin tilanteesta, jolloin ajoit menestyksekkäästi eteenpäin muutosta kestävämmän liiketoiminnan puolesta?
    i. Minkälaisia haasteita kohtaat muutoksen eteenpäin viemisessä?
    j. Kuinka pyrit ratkaisemaan nämä haasteet?

k. Voisitko antaa viimeaikaisen esimerkin haasteesta ja kuinka ratkaisit sen?
l. Miten lähestymisesi muutoksen edistämiseen on kehittynyt vuosien aikana?

5. Muut kysymykset
    a. Miten yrityksen toimiala vaikuttaa työhösi?
    b. Miten yrityksen yritysrakenne ja liiketoimintamalli vaikuttaa työhösi?
    c. Miten yrityksen monikansallisuus vaikuttaa työhösi?

6. Yhteenveto
    a. Millaisen yhteenvedon tekisit kokemuksistasi tehtävässäsi?
    b. Onko sinulla mahdollisia muita ajatuksia aiheeseen liittyen?
    c. Onko sinulla kysymyksiä minulle?