

Development of sustainability in the public sector

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Actors and factors influencing the speed of implementation in healthcare



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June, 2014

Acknowledgments

This master thesis is the result of my graduate research within the Master Degree Program Management Science at Open University Netherlands. The thesis was carried out at four healthcare institutions in the Netherlands.

Conducting scientific research is a tough job and requires perseverance. It took me about ten months to accomplish this research. During this period I have had the good fortune to experience what is like to conduct a research with all the certainties and uncertainties the process entails. To me the whole process of learning to conduct a thesis is also about confrontation with myself. The guidance of skilled people is important in this process and I had the experience of a master and apprentice relationship with my supervisor. This experience enriched my process of conducting this research. Every conversation between my supervisor and me gave me new insights, focus and energy and made me more excited about conducting research.

It is very appropriate to thank my supervisor in this process Kees Gelderman. You did not always make my struggle easier but definitely worthwhile the effort. I would also like to thank my second supervisor prof. dr. Tuninga. Your feedback in the beginning and at the end of my journey was very clear and to the point and completed this thesis. Furthermore I would like to thank all participants in this research, who made it possible for me to take a look in their organization. You all were very open about all the positive elements but also about the more negative elements. This research would not be possible without your time, effort and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife and two little girls for their patience and their understanding for all the hours of studying and the periods I was less able to participate in family time. Maartje you supported me even in the most uncertain periods of my study and always gave me the support I needed to continue my work. Sophie and Louise, thank you for asking me to play with you. Playing with you made it possible for me to relax and generate new energy and unending curiosity.

Rob Vluggen

Scherpenseel (D), June 2014

Contents

Contents	3
Summary	5
1 Introduction	8
1.1 Problem statement	8
1.2 Research method	9
1.3 Structure of the thesis	9
2 Literature review	10
2.1 Sustainability in the public sector	10
2.2 Implementing sustainable initiatives	10
2.3 Drivers and barriers	12
2.4 Stakeholders	15
2.5 Research model	19
3 Methodology	22
3.1 Research design	22
3.2 Data collection	22
3.3 Operationalization	24
3.3.1 Actors influencing sustainable initiatives	24
3.3.2 Factors influencing sustainable initiatives	24
3.4 Data analysis	25
3.5 Methodological issues	25
4 Results	26
4.1 Organization of sustainability	26
4.2 Actors	27
4.2.1 Influence actors on implementation	27
4.2.2 Influence actors on each other	29
4.3 Factors	30
4.3.1 Management support	31
4.3.2 Information and communication	31
4.3.3 Organization	31
4.3.4 External pressure	32
4.3.5 Influence factors on implementation	32

4.4 Drivers	33
4.5 Barriers	34
4.6 Overview of relationships	34
5 Conclusions, discussion and recommendations	37
5.1 Conclusions	37
5.2 Discussion	38
5.2.1 Actors	38
5.2.2 Factors	40
5.3 Recommendations for practitioners	41
5.4 Recommendations for further research	42
References	44
Appendices	49
Appendix 1 Interview schedule	49
Appendix 2 Checklist features of successful initiatives	55
Appendix 3 Sustainable initiatives in case organizations	56

Summary

Problem statement

The need for sustainable development has stimulated many organizations in the public sector to include environmental and social aspects into their strategic agenda. Many studies have investigated the drivers and barriers to sustainable practices in organizations. However, the vast majority of these studies are concerned with organizations in the private sector. There is a limited body of research on drivers and barriers of sustainability initiatives in the public sector. Most commonly, this research is performed on leading public organizations, reporting on successful implementation of sustainability. However, despite the urge for sustainable initiatives, many public organizations still struggle with the implementation of sustainability. Therefore, more research is needed amongst public sector organizations that lag behind in developing sustainable initiatives.

Management in public agencies is faced with procedural, legal and political constraints. In addition, many internal and external stakeholders have an impact on the success of sustainable initiatives. These multiple stakeholders are likely to pursue conflicting goals. A study to the development of sustainability in the public sector should therefore include an investigation of factors (drivers and barriers) and actors (multiple stakeholders). This study is aimed at answering the following problem statement: *What actors and factors influence the speed of implementation of sustainability in the public sector?*

Research method

A qualitative research design was selected for this exploratory study that investigates the relationships between actors and their impact on sustainable initiatives. The case study included four organizations within the public sector, more specific, within the healthcare sector. These organizations are specialized in mental care and care for disabled people. In each organization semi-structured interviews were conducted with three types of actors: institutional top management, budget owners and procurement professionals. A review of the extant literature resulted in four main categories of factors: management support, information/communication, organization, and external pressure. The theoretical expectations about the impact of actors and factors are derived from the stakeholder theory.

Results

The most important actor appeared to be the institutional top management. This actor has very high salience and is able to have a major influence on the implementation process of sustainability. In all organizations top management is able to make a topic strategic and important. Budget owners have a certain power within their own business unit and are able to create positive or negative incentives on any subject. Budget owners have an advisory role to the institutional top management and in relation to the procurement professionals they are the leading party. The procurement professionals have to follow the top management and budget owners and only accomplish an advisory role and have little influence on the implementation process of sustainability.

Top management and budget owners are the main actors, impacting the (un)successful implementation of sustainability. Particular top *management support* is a main driver for the implementation of sustainability in the leading organizations. Top management is in the position to set the right incentives and make sustainability a part of the strategic agenda. In a way the top management must show their involvement and support on the subject to make it real and alive. The intention of wanting to be sustainable does not end with management support but it is an important precondition. The support of budget owners is needed to create successful initiatives in the business units. Budget owners are major influencers within a business unit. In the lagging organizations, top management does not prioritize sustainability and budget owners are not very interested in the development of sustainability.

They are main influencers in the inability to develop sustainability. Top management is a substantial influencer of budget owners and both are substantial influencers of procurement professionals. The procurement professionals are advisors for budget owners and top management. They are able to use their knowledge on sustainability to influence all actors in an organization. This influence is bigger in the leading organizations and very marginal in the lagging organizations. Knowledge on sustainability is important and procurement professionals are the designated party to adopt this knowledge. Procurement professionals are in the position to give good advice and share their knowledge with all organizational parties. Sometimes *external pressure* was needed to make top management and budget owners (more) aware of sustainability.

Leading organizations show active management support and open and transparent *communication* of information as well as attention for education of all staff. In the lagging organizations there is no active support of management and people are not motivated to start initiatives. Information and communication only reach a select part of the organization and education of employees on sustainability is not addressed. As far as organizational conditions concern, the development of a sustainable policy with clear objectives stimulate the implementation of successful initiatives. The leading organizations even developed the policy with stakeholders and keep adjusting the policy in corporation with stakeholders. In addition, they give extra attention to sustainability by generating a specific department or working with designated people as ambassadors. These initiatives have a positive effect on the implementation of sustainability in the progressive organizations. The less progressive organizations were not able to develop the policy together with their stakeholders.

Increasingly, external stakeholders are pressuring healthcare organizations to create sustainable initiatives. However progressive organizations developed sustainability with an internal drive and in this way were ahead of external demands. This resulted in the opportunity to generate favorable perceptions and believes with their external stakeholders.

Our study expands the body of knowledge by finding organizations are influenced by internal drivers rather than external drivers. Our study confirms the importance of management support and adds the importance of employees developing sustainable initiatives.

An organization can set all the right parameters but when employees do not participate, development is unlikely to occur. In addition it is notable that an explicit representative body for sustainability is very appreciated and an addition in the existing factors. We also found an addition on the theoretical context in the development of a vision on sustainability before setting a policy and goals. A vision gives the reason why an organization wants to develop sustainability, which is an important tool in creating awareness by employees. Also we found that the sharing of knowledge on sustainability is a driver for the development of sustainability.

Recommendations for practice

The lagging organizations need to consider creating a more incentive environment for the development of sustainability. Develop sustainability because you want to and make sure the whole organization supports the development. Also it is recommended to generate a structural budget for initiatives so they get a fair chance in growing to be successful. Make education a part of the structural educational agenda and support people in sharing their knowledge. Extra support and attention for initiatives is a driver and can be organized by facilitating a department or ambassadors on sustainability. The results of the study illustrate the limited role of the procurement managers. Organizations could make an effort to develop their procurement function in order to empower it so it can be a more driving and motivating actor, instead of merely performing an advisory role.

Recommendations for further research

The knowledge of the development of sustainability within the healthcare sector is very limited and the results and conclusions of our study are a beginning in exploring the status of sustainability within the sector. A major limitation of this study is the number of healthcare organizations involved and the number of respondents interviewed within these organizations. The study was limited to the perspective of institutional top management, budget owners and procurement professionals. The limitation of these actors does not exclude other actors and factors with a relationship to the implementation of sustainability. A promising line of research would be to include more stakeholders and their impact on sustainable initiatives. Research could also be focused on the interrelationships and interests of various internal and external stakeholders.

Regarding the external validity it should be noted that this study is performed in four selected healthcare organizations, with only a selected group of respondents. The external validity of the study research could be questioned. More research could be conducted amongst healthcare organizations that lag behind in developing sustainable initiatives. It would be useful to replicate this study to a larger number of healthcare organizations in order to establish relationships between actors and factors influencing the process of implementing sustainability.

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

There is an increasing recognition that organizations must address the issue of sustainability in their operations. Sustainability is usually defined as utilizing resources to *“meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (WECD, 1987).

Considering the ambiguities and vagueness that surrounds this definition, complications frequently arise when attempting to apply the principles of sustainability in practice. The term “sustainability” has been interpreted in a variety of ways, ranging from an inter-generational philosophical position to a multi-dimensional term for business management. Sustainability is conceptualized within the concept of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998; Kleindorfer et al., 2005). The concept involves simultaneous consideration of the economic, environmental and social effect of business activities (Elkington, 1998; Sikdar, 2003). Early sustainability initiatives tended to focus on environmental issues (Carter and Carter, 1998; Lamming and Hampson, 1996; Newman and Hanna, 1996), but as time goes on, the number of studies exploring sustainability is ever growing (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Giunipero et al., 2012; Oruezabala and Rico, 2012; Schneider and Wallenburg, 2012)

Many studies have focused on drivers and barriers with the implementation of sustainable initiatives. Drivers are the actors and factors that push firms forward into sustainability whereas the actors and factors that hinder a firm into sustainability are barriers. The majority of these studies have been conducted on sustainability within private organizations (Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Hoejmosse and Adrien-Kirby, 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993). In today's public sector, sustainability is an important topic (Oruezabala et al., 2012). The potential contribution of public procurement to sustainability is evident considering the size and impact of the sector in percent of the GDP of a country (Preuss, 2009). It is hard to interpret whether the focus on private sector studies indicates a lack of sustainable development in the public sector, or that the public sector is just being under-researched. A limited number of studies investigate the role of the public sector in sustainable development (Warner and Ryall, 2001; Swanson et al., 2005; Thomas and Jackson, 2007; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Brammer and Walker, 2011; Gelderman et al., 2013).

There is limited body of research on drivers and barriers in sustainability initiatives in the public sector. The research that has been performed is focused on positive cases that show a successful implementation of sustainability. Most commonly, research is performed on leading public organizations, which limits the generalizability of the findings (Gelderman et al. 2013, Walker et al., 2008). The results of those studies are therefore not representative for public organizations that are lagging behind organizations with many (successful) sustainable initiatives. More research could be conducted amongst public sector organizations that lag behind in developing sustainable initiatives.

The focus in this study is on sustainability in public organizations that are both successful and not very successful in implementing sustainability initiatives. We will try to identify which actors and factors have an impact on the development of sustainability in public organizations. Based upon the above the following problem statement is formulated:

What actors and factors influence the speed of implementation of sustainability in the public sector?

1.2 Research method

The research is designed as a qualitative study in which two cases are examined to find which actors and factors affect the ability to develop sustainability with a less successful effect. Also two cases are examined where sustainability is successfully on the agenda, to research which actors and factors affect the implementation in a positive manner. The case studies take place in the healthcare sector and all case organizations are non-profit healthcare organizations specialized in mental care and care for disabled people. Within these institutions, policymaking management, procurement professionals and budget owners are interviewed. Healthcare organizations are part of the public sector and need to develop sustainability within the purchasing function. The procurement portfolio of healthcare organizations has a broad and diverse character, stretching from medical supplies to facility services and from contracting contractors to contracting maintenance for buildings and installations.

The cases in this study are examined at a corporate level where the sustainability policy is set. This data is collected by document analysis to get a view how the decisions to develop sustainability and how to develop sustainability are made. After the document study, the policymaking management is interviewed to investigate the need for setting a sustainability policy and whether stakeholders support the policy. At the purchasing level the procurement management is interviewed to investigate how the sustainability policy is implemented in the organization and to discover which actors and factors influence the development and implementation of sustainability. A third group is interviewed which are the budget owners, who have responsibility to spend the budgets at the best possible way.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This first chapter discusses the motive for this research, the problem statement and the research method. The second chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical concepts. This discussion leads to our research model which provides a view on how the different sections relate to each other. The methodological accountability is covered in chapter three. Here we discuss our research design, the data collection and are the theoretical concepts of chapter two operationalized. Finally the chapter covers the data analysis together with the methodological issues of our study. Chapter four describes the main empirical results from this study based upon the results of the semi-structured interviews. Chapter five provides the main conclusions based upon the insights of the results of chapter four linked to the theoretical concepts of chapter two. This chapter also provides a discussion where the main results are interpreted. The discussion makes clear how the results contribute to the existing knowledge. Finally chapter 5 covers recommendations for practitioners and further research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Sustainability in the public sector

The public sector is responsible for providing a range of services and could use its purchasing power for stimulating sustainable development (Preuss, 2009). Sustainability is usually defined as using resources to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987; Daly and Cobb, 1994). A main issue when implementing sustainability initiatives is to identify the various components of sustainability (Krause et al., 2009). The factors of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998) are acknowledged in the literature (Carter and Rogers, 2008): environmental stewardship, social fairness and economic achievement. Carter and Rogers (2008) use a conceptual theory building approach to combine the literature to introduce a theoretical framework of sustainability. The essence of this conceptualization is Elkington's (1998) triple bottom line where the boundaries of environmental, social, and economic execution are discovered. This is an effective and powerful concept to transfer what sustainability means for an organization. Carter and Rogers (2008) advocate that thinking about developing sustainability is not something to underestimate and needs to be taken seriously. Sustainability must be a part of the strategy process of an organization. Sustainability initiatives must be linked to the organization strategy instead of several individual projects and programs that are controlled independently of each other. Risk management refers to the ability of an organization to manage its economic, environmental and social risks. Sustainability needs to develop in the whole organization in order to become a part of the organization. Transparency is the active connection with internal and external stakeholders (Preuss, 2009) with the aim to improve processes, ensure cooperation and to encourage a wider vendor base for competing to public contracts. Preuss (2009) developed a comprehensive and integrated view of the broad variety of sustainability initiatives by public organizations. Brammer and Walker (2011) concluded that most public organizations do include sustainability criteria in their purchases, although many aspects of sustainability are not addressed properly yet.

2.2 Implementing sustainable initiatives

Views of sustainability are relative and differ from individual to individual, organization to organization, sector to sector and country to country (Nygren, 1998; Walker and Phillips, 2009). When asking respondents their views on sustainable procurement, whether through a questionnaire or interviews, they are often compelled to give a positive impression of their own and their organization's activities. The integration of sustainable development into a firm's purchasing strategies needs partnership and joint value creation methodologies with selected actors in the supply chain (Crespin-Mazet and Dantenwill, 2012; Carter and Carter, 1998). The body of knowledge on successful sustainability initiatives is not very large. A few studies have been conducted on sustainability initiatives in the public sector (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Gelderman et al., 2013; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008).

All studies show that the leading barrier to sustainable procurement is costs and top management support the leading facilitator. Walker et al. 2008 identify that drivers and barriers could be both internal and external to the organization and that more external drivers than internal drivers are identified. Preuss (2009) identifies that to make the implementation of sustainability successful indirect initiatives of development are necessary. Such initiatives include the compilation and dissemination of sustainability-related information.

A first step in this direction can be to draw up a "Sustainable Procurement Policy" with clearly stated goals and policies (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001). Successful sustainability initiatives are stimulated by good education and awareness of procurement officers (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Preuss, 2009). Senior management needs to provide a great support for procurement officers attempting to implement sustainable procurement (Walker and Brammer, 2009). In sustainable public procurement transparency also emerged as a key support aspect in the dissemination of sustainability information within and beyond the local authority and particularly in initiatives to encourage a broader supply base to tender for public sector business (Preuss, 2009). Walker and Brammer (2009) show in their study that four factors are important influences upon the successful implementation of sustainable procurement; familiarity with policies, perceived inefficiencies/cost of policies, supplier availability/resistance and organizational incentives/pressures. Successful implementation of sustainable procurement also needs including sustainable procurement within the formal planning and strategy processes in order that it is properly allocated within an organization (Brammer and Walker, 2011). Thai (2001) shows it is essential each level of management have well-defined authorities and responsibilities delineated throughout the structure, from the issuance of policies, regulations and standards of performance to the supervision and management of the workforce. Kamann (2007) states that there are three important elements that are needed to implement an organizational strategy; the policies, including goals, of the organization; the way everything is organized and the processes used, including the corresponding activities. Hence, to create an effective implementation, the three interdependent elements; policies, organization and processes have to fit each other and, as a set, have to be congruent with the external context. Walker and Brammer (2011) state that familiarity with the policy in the whole organization is necessary, perceived efficiency must be proven, the policy costs must be lower than the revenues, suppliers must be available and organizational incentives must be positive.

All the studies conducted on sustainability, approached sustainability initiatives at institutions where a successful implementation already had taken place. Our study looks at institutions where the implementation of sustainability was not successful yet and also institutions where sustainability was successfully implemented. In our study we try to interpret successful implementation of sustainability initiatives and try to investigate when implementation is successful.

Therefore in this study successful implementation is in order when a clearly stated policy on sustainability is drawn up, with clear goals, and the goals are measured and show a positive result.

In our study it is expected that all organizations have a sustainability policy (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001) and top management support (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008). Also it is expected that compilation and dissemination of sustainable information is well organized (Preuss, 2009). The difference between the progressive organizations and the laggards is to be found in the education and awareness of procurement officers (Brammer and Walker, 2009; Preuss, 2009) perceived inefficiencies/costs of policies and organizational incentive and pressures (Walker and Brammer, 2009). Less successful sustainability initiatives are expected to have a formal policy but the goals are not stated very well and the policy is not adapted in the formal planning and strategy process (Brammer and Walker, 2011). Also it is expected that organizational incentives are well represented in the progressive organizations, whereas the less progressive organizations have less incentives and more organizational pressure (Walker and Brammer, 2011).

2.3 Drivers and barriers

Many studies have investigated the drivers and barriers to sustainability in organizations. However, the vast majority of these studies are concerned with organizations in the private sector (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 2008). Different types of non-business actors and factors have been identified as influencing sustainable activities and legitimacy in the field; labeling organizations, technical experts, ecological foundations, the government, the media as well as standardization and regulatory agencies (Crespin-Mazet and Dantenwill, 2012). Sustainability initiatives and corporate strategy must be closely interwoven, rather than remaining independently managed programs and top management support is necessary and often a key driver for successful sustainability implementation (Crespin-Mazet and Dantenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008). Specific motives were found in regulatory compliance, competitive advantage, stakeholder pressures, ethical concern and top management initiatives (Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993). Barriers in profit-driven organizations were connected to a lack of top management support, the cost of sustainability, inappropriate standards and regulations and a lack of understanding among business leaders (Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009). Relatively little research has addressed sustainable initiatives in the public sector (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Gelderman et al., 2013; Preuss, 2009). In the study conducted by Walker et al. (2008) there are more drivers than barriers identified. Drivers and barriers are both internal and external. Internal and external drivers include; organizational factors, regulation, customers, competitors and society. Internal barriers include cost and lack of legitimacy, whereas external barriers include regulation, poor supplier commitment and industry specific barriers. Organizations seem to be more influenced by external rather than internal drivers and barriers tend to be both internal and external (Walker et al., 2008). A good understanding of the drivers and barriers is indispensable for developing better strategies that are able to promote sustainable development initiatives (Günther and Scheibe, 2006). Appropriate leadership and the implementation of concrete plans are considered as important drivers for sustainable development (Brammer and Walker, 2011). The risk of public embarrassment has been reported as a driver for sustainability, since the image of public sector organizations can be harmed by suppliers' poor environmental performance (Walker et al., 2008).

Another facilitator is a supportive governmental and legislative climate (Brammer and Walker, 2011). Financial constraints and perceived costs are regularly reported barriers to sustainable procurement (Min and Galle, 2001; Brammer and Walker, 2011). Policy makers are facing difficult decisions when they assess tradeoffs between conflicting procurement goals and policies, for instance between costs, quality, timeliness, risk, economic goals, social goals, competition, environment protection and green procurement (Thai, 2001). Barriers are likely to occur, considering the complexity and variety of public procurement in combination with multiple stakeholders and conflicting goals (Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010). The public sector even has more complex situations with a barrier like patient safety that often comes before sustainability concerns in procurement priorities (Walker et al., 2008).

Research so far shows that drivers and barriers on sustainability initiatives will be both internal and external to the organizations (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Gelderman et al., 2013; Giunipero et al., 2012, Walker et al., 2008). Sustainability initiatives must be linked to the organization strategy instead of several individual projects and programs that are controlled independently of each other. The theoretical expectations will lead our study to the identification of a concrete plan, clear goals, risk of public embarrassment and supportive governmental legislation as drivers of sustainability. Barriers within the public organizations will be found in the multiple stakeholders with conflicting goals, financial constraints and perceived costs. Suppliers will not have a significant role in the sustainability initiatives and the drivers will differ across organizations. Table 2.1 shows the theoretical concept of implementing sustainable initiatives, its drives and barriers and their sub dimension; management support, information/communication, organization, external pressure and the indicators generated from the theoretical body of knowledge.

Theoretical concept	Dimension	Sub dimension	Indicators	References
Implementing sustainable initiatives	<i>Drivers</i>	Management support	Top management support	Brammer and Walker, 2011; Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2008
			Top management initiatives / appropriate leadership	Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Brammer and Walker, 2011; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993
			Senior/middle management support for procurement officers with implementation	Ehrgott et al., 2011; Walker and Brammer, 2009
		Information / communication	Transparent compilation and dissemination of information	Preuss, 2009
			Good education and awareness of procurement officers	Brammer and Walker, 2011; Bowen et al., 2011; Paulraj, 2011; Preuss, 2009

		Familiarity with policies by actors	Walker and Brammer, 2009
	Organization	Sustainable procurement policy with clearly stated goals and well-defined authorities and responsibilities	Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001
		Organizational incentives	Walker and Brammer, 2009
		Inclusion in the formal strategy and planning process with good allocation	Brammer and Walker, 2011; Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008
		Regulatory compliance	Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993
	External pressure	Ethical concern	Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993
		Governmental regulation	Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 2008
		Risk of public embarrassment / legal risks	Kamann, 2007; Walker et al., 2008
<i>Barriers</i>	Management support	Lack of top management support	Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009
		Lack of understanding among business leaders	Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009
	Organization	Sustainable initiatives and corporate strategy are independently managed programs	Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008
		Inappropriate standards and regulations	Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009
		Multiple stakeholders with conflicting goals	Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010
		Perceived costs and inefficiencies of sustainability policies/initiatives	Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009
		Financial constraints	Min and Galle, 2001; Brammer and Walker, 2011
	External pressure	Governmental regulation	Walker et al., 2008
		Supplier resistance	Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008

Table 2.1 Factors influencing sustainable initiatives

2.4 Stakeholders

Stakeholder theory attempts to articulate a fundamental question in a systematic way: which parties are important for a matter and need appropriate management attention, and which are not (Mitchell et al., 1997). Freeman (1984, p. 25) cautioned that managers need to “take into account all of those groups and individuals that can affect, or are affected by, the accomplishment of the business enterprise”. In the stakeholder theory, stakeholders are categorized to come to a better understanding of their interests and predict their behaviors (Freeman, 1984). The theory posits that managers need to be aware of all of their stakeholders and not only focus on groups where there is a financial dependence (Kamann, 2007). One key point in the debate on sustainability is the inclusion of stakeholders and the integration of their respective demands. Stakeholder analysis is to make clear who decides on the issue of sustainability. Which stakeholders are in the position to have an impact on the implementation and success of sustainability? In the case of public bodies, usually some kind of single political actor represents the interests of a large group of other stakeholders, lacking power. Making the right decision and actions on the issue of sustainability with stakeholders, may be the difference between success or closure of the issue. Kamann (2007) states that stakeholders are of importance to any organization in reaching its goals and targets the way it has in mind to do. Stakeholder pressures and respective reputational and legal risks are usually seen as one key driver toward the implementation of standards and codes of conducts. Stakeholder management is crucial for driving sustainability performance as found by Asif et al. (2013). Business organizations are responsible for satisfying various stakeholders (Freeman, 1984), and therefore they can be the forces that can change business behavior. The parties that directly affect a firm’s activities with implicit and explicit contact such as customers, stockholders, competitors and regulators fall into a narrow definition of stakeholders. In a more expanded definition stakeholders can be seen as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the manifestation of an organization (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders can be classified into various groups based on the presence of the attributes power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Primary stakeholders are essential for the survival of firms and comprise suppliers, customers, employees and shareholders (Clarkson, 1995). Managing stakeholder relations is important, as Freeman (1994) argues, because from a legal perspective a firm had duties to a wider range of groups than just its shareholders. From an economic perspective, stakeholders can be instrumental in improving organizational performance, for example by contributing to innovation (Ayusso et al., 2006) or functioning as an early warning system for newly emerging social or environmental responsibilities (Elnick et al., 2001). The activities of strategy require a range of organizational stakeholders to become involved in designing objectives, agreeing targets and formulating plans and actions (Williams and Lewis, 2008). The importance of stakeholder management for sustainability or related corporate social responsibility efforts has been the subject of many articles (Barnett, 2007; Sen et al., 2006;) and is particularly well demonstrated in the definition of corporate sustainability by Dyllick and Hockerts (2002, p. 131) as *“meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders....without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well.”*

In the context of sustainable sourcing, little previous research has approached stakeholder concerns explicitly (Ehrgott, 2009; Foerstl et al., 2010; Pagell et al., 2010), whereas the majority has focused on identifying drivers of implementing sustainable sourcing practices (Carter and Carter, 1998; Carter and Dresner, 2001; Harwood and Humby, 2008; Min and Galle, 2001; Roberts, 2003). These drivers refer to external actors of a company, such as government regulation, NGO pressure or customer requirements (Carter and Jennings, 2004; Sharma and Henriques, 2005) as well as internal aspects, such as supply management capabilities (Bowen et al., 2001; Paulraj, 2011). Internal stakeholder pressure can be a strong force of sustainable initiatives, particularly middle managers (Ehrgott et al., 2011). Freemans (1984, p. 46) definition of stakeholders: *“any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives”* (Freeman, 1984, p. 46), shows the drivers of sustainable sourcing mentioned above can also be considered to be stakeholders of the procurement function. It can be stated that (external) stakeholder orientation is of importance in order to integrate sustainability thinking into an organizations practices (Reuter et al., 2012). Combining the stakeholder concept with activities of the purchasing department in developing sustainability is useful in this research because stakeholder influence is an important driver for implementing sustainability at a corporate level (Brown et al., 2006; Handfield et al., 2005; Sharma and Henriques, 2005). Also the purchasing department has formerly been characterized by its distinct interaction with a broad set of stakeholders, including buyers, suppliers, contractors, the community and internal employees in most of the other functional areas of the company (Carter and Jennings, 2004). The positive effects of stakeholder management are explained by arguing that firms with good stakeholder relationships will have a competitive advantage over others due to reduced agency and transaction costs (Jones, 1995). Furthermore, stakeholder management is a key success factor for both environmental management (Hart, 1995) and social sustainability (Ehrgott, 2009). Hence successful implementation of sustainable sourcing can depend on good stakeholder management.

Stakeholders can be represented in a matrix using ‘power’ and ‘level of interest’ as axes (Johnson and Scholes, 1989; De Boer et al., 2003). The matrix differentiates four types of stakeholders, as is shown in figure 2.1. Stakeholders in section ‘a’ have a low level of interest and low power, stakeholders in section ‘b’ have high level of interest and low level of power, stakeholders in section ‘c’ have low level of interest and high level of power and stakeholders in section ‘d’ have high level of interest and high level of power.

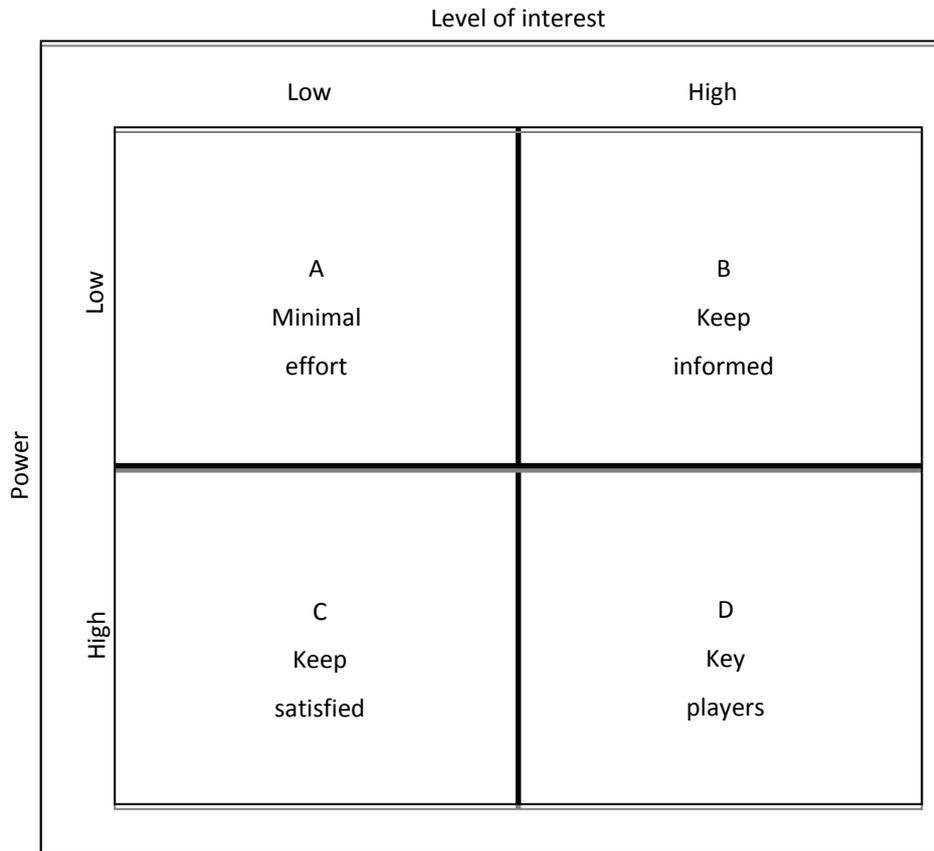


Figure 2.1 Types of stakeholders (Johnson and Scholes, 1989; De Boer et al., 2003)

Mitchell et al. (1997) identified three attributes stakeholders may possess: (1) the power to influence the organization; either coercive, utilitarian or normative; (2) the legitimacy of the relation with the organization; either individual, organizational or societal based; (3) the urgency of the stakeholders claim on the organization; calling for immediate action; either time sensitive or critical to the stakeholder. To fully understand the concept of stakeholders it is essential to understand the concept of salience in the stakeholder-manager relationship. It is crucial not to focus on one of the attributes but to categorize stakeholders based on an investigation of all three attributes. Stakeholders without or with less presence of one of the attributes could nevertheless be important to an organization. Mitchell et al. (1997) suggest that to better understand stakeholder identification and salience it is needed to evaluate stakeholder-manager relationships systematically, both actual and potential, in terms of the relative absence or presence of all or some of the attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. This means stakeholders change in salience, require different degrees and types of attention depending on their attributed possession of power, legitimacy and/or urgency, and that levels of these attributes can vary from issue to issue and from time to time (Mitchell et al., 1997). Salience will rise when stakeholders accumulate any combination of the three attributes (Neville et al., 2004). Establishing salience with stakeholders is a dynamic process that needs recognition of situational uniqueness and managerial perception to gain insight in how relations are prioritized.

The attributes; power, legitimacy and urgency, provide a framework for understanding how stakeholders can gain or lose salience (Mitchell et al., 1997). It is crucial to be aware of a few aspects applying to each attribute. Attributes are variable and not static, are socially constructed and not objective but a subjective managers reality and actions may or may not be conscious or intentionally.

Furthermore Mitchell et al. (1997) show that with stakeholder identification and salience it is evident to also identify latent stakeholders, because such identification gives organizations a comprehensive representation of its stakeholders and helps them to avoid problems and perhaps even enhance effectiveness. Based on the three attributes, it is not apparent managers interpret stakeholders in a correct manner. In the subjective view of managers, the stakeholders gaining attention will be only those rated with high salience (Mitchell et al., 1997). The framework provided by Mitchell et al. (1997) will be used in our study to identify different stakeholders and the salience given by firm's management to these stakeholders. The dynamics in the prioritizing of stakeholders by managers will be used to identify which influences different stakeholders actually have on the process of implementing sustainable sourcing. Table 2.2 shows the theoretical concept of stakeholders, its identification and salience and the indicators generated from the theoretical body of knowledge.

Theoretical concept	Dimension	Indicators	References
Stakeholders	<i>Stakeholder identification and salience</i>	Power	Mitchell et al., 1997
		Legitimacy	Mitchell et al., 1997
		Urgency	Mitchell et al., 1997

Table 2.2 Actors influencing sustainable initiatives

Stakeholder theory holds promise as theoretical foundation for analyzing which actors influence the speed of implementation of sustainable initiatives. Top management of a healthcare organization set the policy and goals for developing sustainability. They delegate the implementation of the policy to the purchasing department. The elements needed for successful implementation of sustainability are formal policy with clear goals (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001) and a clear dissemination within the organization (Preuss, 2009). Right decisions and actions with the right stakeholders are inevitable for successful implementation of sustainability (Asif et al., 2013). In our study we expect to find positive results on good stakeholder management in the leading organizations and less positive results on good stakeholder management in the lagging organizations.

Stakeholder pressure is one key driver for implementation of sustainability (Ates et al., 2012; Giunipero et al., 2012). Positive pressure will be exposed if stakeholders have power, legitimacy and urgency and this is what makes the difference between successful implementation and less successful implementation of sustainability.

There has to be familiarity with the sustainability policy in the whole organization, perceived efficiency must be proven, the policy costs must be lower than the revenues, suppliers must be available and organizational incentives must be positive (Walker and Brammer, 2009).

It is expected that the leading organizations have better familiarity of policies in the organization and that revenues are better marked and communicated. The different levels of hierarchy, top management, budget owners and the purchasing department strive after different goals. These differences can be crucial in making the implementation of sustainability successful (Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010). The organizations where the sustainable plan making is organized with all salient stakeholders are the progressive organizations. Big differences between stakeholders, little interaction between stakeholders or no good interpretation of salient stakeholders could mean a less successful implementation of sustainability. Also it is plausible that organizations that set organizational policies and goals (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001), organize the policy well (Kamann, 2007), use the processes well (Brammer and Walker, 2011) and make sure these elements are in line with each other (Kamann, 2007) are more successful in implementing sustainability.

Gelderman et al. (2013) shows that in municipal organizations three internal actors are important in relation to sustainable initiatives; municipal executives, procurement managers and department managers. In our study this division of important actors is translated to the case organizations, where the three important internal actors with a relationship to sustainable initiatives are; top management of the institution, procurement professionals and budget owners. Representatives of these three actors are interviewed in each case organization to get a clear view how these actors influence the speed implementation of sustainability initiatives and how they affect each other. Figure 2.2 shows the relationship between the main actors in the sustainability initiatives of the case organizations.

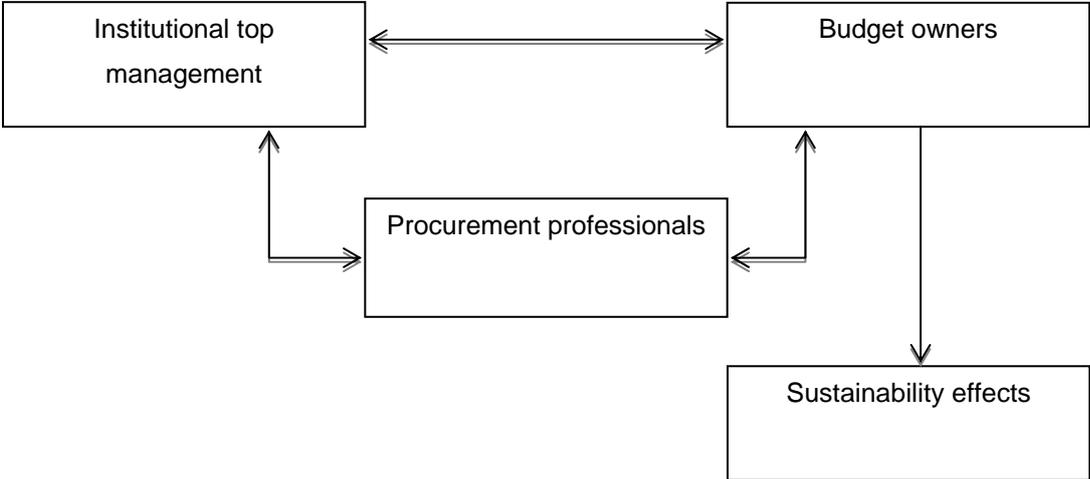


Figure 2.2 Sustainability initiatives and its main actors

2.5 Research model

The integration of sustainable development into a firms purchasing strategies needs partnership and joint value creation methodologies with selected actors in the supply chain (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Carter and Carter, 1998). Studies on sustainability initiatives show that the leading barrier to sustainable procurement is costs and top management the leading facilitator (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 2008).

In our study it is expected that all organizations have a sustainability policy and top management support on the policy. It is necessary to include the compilation and dissemination of sustainability-related information (Preuss, 2009), which is expected to be well organized in the case organizations. Organizations with successful sustainability initiatives have a “Sustainable Procurement Policy” (Thai, 2001) and stimulate good education and awareness of procurement officers (Brammer and Walker, 2011). Four factors are important in the influence on successful implementation of sustainable procurement; familiarity with policies, perceived inefficiencies/cost of policies, supplier availability/resistance and organizational incentives/pressures (Walker and Brammer, 2009). The difference between the progressive and less progressive organizations is expected to be found in the education and awareness of procurement officers, perceived inefficiencies/costs of policies and organizational incentives and pressures.

A driver for successful implementation of sustainable procurement is the inclusion of this topic within the formal planning and strategy process (Brammer and Walker, 2011). It is essential that each level of management have well-defined authorities and responsibilities delineated throughout the organization (Thai, 2001). Sustainability initiatives and corporate strategy must be closely interwoven, rather than remaining independently managed programs and top management support is necessary and often a key driver for successful sustainability implementation (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008). These drivers with a positive effect on the implementation of sustainable procurement will be found in the progressive organizations while the lagging organizations will have problems including the topic within the formal planning and strategy process.

The lagging organizations will show independently managed programs instead of closely interwoven policy programs. It is necessary to know the drivers and barriers to promote sustainable development initiatives and develop strategies that enable sustainability (Günther and Scheibe, 2006). Brammer and Walker (2011) show appropriate leadership and the implementation of concrete plans as important drivers, as well supportive and legislative climate. Barriers are likely to occur, considering the complexity and variety of public procurement in combination with multiple stakeholders and conflicting goals (Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010), such as financial constraints, perceived costs (Brammer and Walker, 2011) and patient safety (Walker et al., 2008).

A key point in the debate on sustainability is the inclusion of stakeholders and the integration of their respective demands. Stakeholder analysis is to make clear who decides on the issue of sustainability. Hence organizations need to know which stakeholders have actual influence on the implementation and success of sustainability.

Making the right decision and actions on the issue of sustainability with stakeholders, may be the difference between success or closure of the issue. Stakeholder pressures and respective reputational and legal risks are usually seen as one key driver toward the implementation of standards and codes of conducts. Internal stakeholder pressure can be a strong force of sustainable initiatives (Ehrgott et al., 2011). Stakeholder management is crucial for driving sustainability performance (Asif et al., 2013).

The activities of strategy require a range of organizational stakeholders to become involved in designing objectives, agreeing targets and formulating plans and actions (Williams and Lewis, 2008). Mitchell et al. (1997) suggest that to better understand stakeholder identification and salience it is needed to evaluate stakeholder-manager relationships systematically, both actual and potential, in terms of the relative absence or presence of all or some of the attributes: power, legitimacy, urgency. Stakeholder identification and salience can help organizations avoiding problems and enhance effectiveness (Mitchell et al., 1997), perhaps even in implementing policies like sustainability.

Considering the theoretical framework it is clear actors and factors influence sustainable initiatives. The actors influence each other as they are closely related to each other. The actors prioritize relationships and recognize salience with managerial perception (Mitchell et al., 1997). Besides influencing each other the actors also influence the factors and the relation of the factors on a (un-) successful sustainable initiatives. The factors have a stimulating or countering effect on the implementation of sustainable initiatives and are divided in four sub dimensions as shown in table 2.1; management support, information / communication, organization and external pressure. Figure 2.3 is the model which shows the relations between actors, factors and implementation.

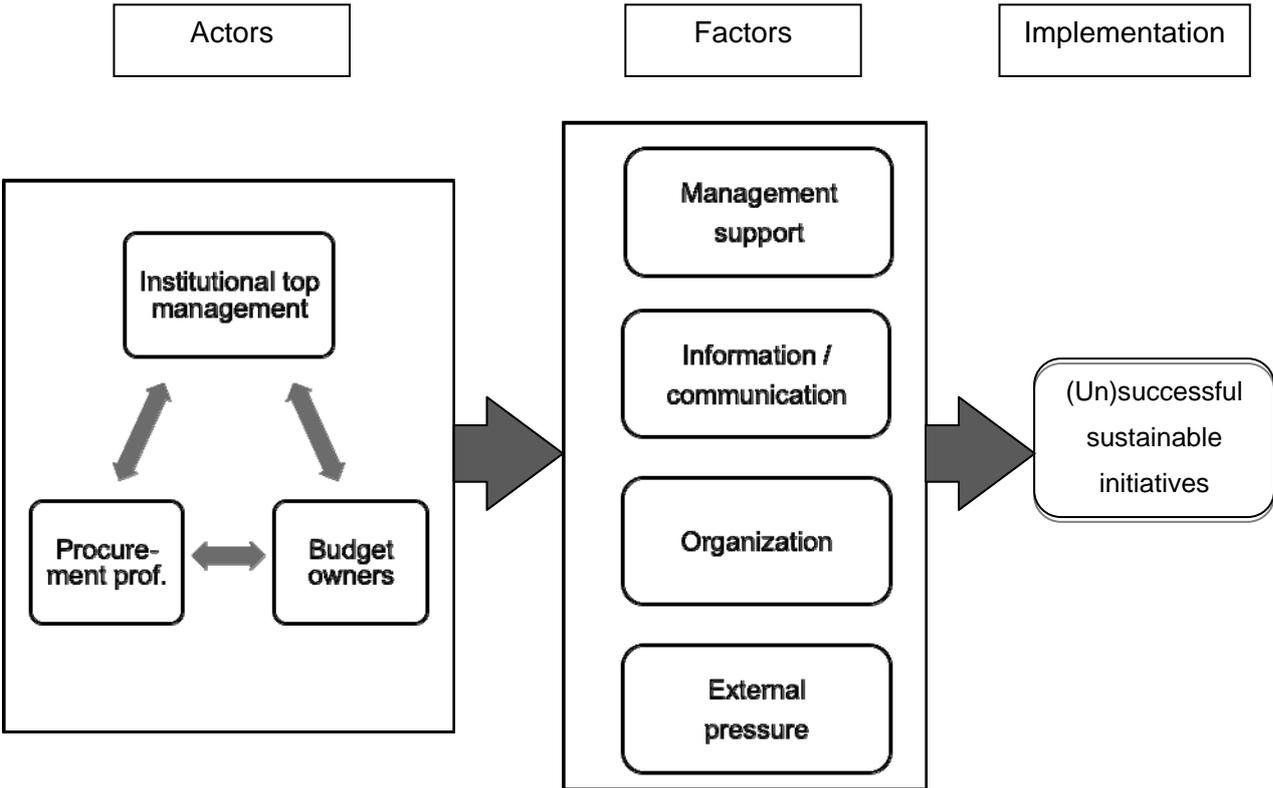


Figure 2.3 Relations between actors, factors and implementation

3 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research strategy and the empirical techniques applied. The chapter defines the scope and limitations of the research design as well how the concepts are operationalized. Chapter two developed the theoretical framework that serves as the basis for this study. With regard to the theoretical framework expectations were formulated to test the expected relationships. This study is executed through case study design, which is the best-suited design to study the problem statement.

3.1 Research design

A case study approach is best suited for an explorative study that contains the investigation of actors and factors that influence the speed of implementation of sustainable initiatives in the public sector. Yin (2009, p11) states: “the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated”. The case study design makes it possible to study four cases closely to investigate what influences the speed of the implementation of sustainability, and which actors and factors influence the process of sustainability implementation. This study aims to increase the body of knowledge on the implementation of sustainability initiatives, in testing its findings based on a theoretical framework and studied in four unique cases. This study addresses a knowledge gap in studying sustainable initiatives in public organizations. These initiatives are in a state of successful or less successful implementation of sustainable initiatives. In comparing the results of successful and less successful implementations of sustainability initiatives, the study tries to expose which actors and factors make a difference in the speed of implementation and sustainable initiatives effective.

3.2 Data collection

The cases in this multiple-case study can be divided into two groups based upon the status of sustainability implementation in the organization, namely: (1) progressive organizations and (2) less progressive organizations. This section will discuss the selection of specific cases for each status of sustainability and elaborate on the targeted respondents.

A selective sample was chosen from healthcare organizations in the Netherlands. Healthcare organizations are active in the semi-public sector. This means these organizations are mainly funded with public money and therefore have to deal with direct governmental regulations. However these organizations are not restricted to comply with all governmental legislation. This aspect makes the case organizations unique compared to other public organizations. Another point is that healthcare organizations are the last station of all processes of a human being. Decision-making is always influenced with this aspect in mind. Two healthcare organizations were selected, based on their leading position on sustainable development. These organizations have a clear sustainable agenda and give sustainability a strategic position.

Their purchasing departments are aware of the corporate sustainable agenda and manage a positive development on the initiative.

Also, two healthcare organizations were selected, where the development on sustainability lag. These organizations have stated sustainability as important to the organization and their purchasing departments are working on sustainable initiatives, but the implementation is not very successful.

The degree in which organizations are progressive on developing sustainability is measured by a limited number of questions that are submitted to the case organizations before the interviews with stakeholders. This checklist gives insight in the degree of implementation of sustainability by looking for specific features of successful initiatives. The features were selected from the Dutch municipal sustainability ranking (<http://www.duurzaamheidsmeter.nl/LDM>). The information and questionnaires regarding this ranking is very extensive and for this research specific features were selected that give an insight in successful initiatives (Table 3.3).

The selected features can be linked to the theoretical framework in Chapter two and represent items like the sustainable policy is developed and kept up to date with stakeholders (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Carter and Carter, 1998). The drawn up of a sustainable procurement policy with clearly stated goals and policies (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001) is found in measurable and ambitious sustainable goals. The realization of these goals is important, stated as regulatory compliance (Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993). Good organizational incentives (Walker and Brammer, 2009) can be found in a structural budget regarding sustainability. Schneider and Wallenburg (2012) show the importance in using environmental and social criteria in procurement projects. The attention for social return in sustainable initiatives in corporation with suppliers (Walker and Brammer, 2009), has an effect on the status of sustainability. For each organization the features were measured with a five-point scale, which made it possible to categorise the organizations as progressive or less progressive.

Checklist
The organization has measurable and ambitious sustainability goals?
The goals are realized by the organization?
The organization has a structural budget for its sustainability policy?
The organization uses environmental criteria in tenders?
The organization uses social criteria in tenders?
The organization makes sure suppliers involve clients in their processes (social return)?
The sustainability policy is kept up to date together with the most important stakeholders?

Table 3.3 checklist features of successful initiatives

Semi-structured interviews were the data collection method of choice. The semi-structured interview enabled us to direct the answers and cover the relevant topic while remaining open to the broadness of the subject, each organizations specific context and the richness in the interviewees' perceptions. The interviews were conducted with preselected members of top management of the institution, procurement professionals and budget owners.

Top management is responsible for setting the concern policy and therefore responsible for placing sustainability on the concern agenda. The implementation of sustainability is designed by purchasing professionals in dialogue with budget owners. The purchasing professionals are the advisory body for top management and budget owners and do not own any decision-making power. These three groups of actors have an influence on each other and on the implementation of sustainable initiatives.

In general, interviews are suitable for investigating behaviour about decision-making (Ghauri, 2004). Prior to the interviews, we studied and analysed the publicly published policy documents of the case organisations. The information in these documents was used as input for the interviews. Before any interview took place, we were informed about the sustainability initiatives in each specific organization.

3.3 Operationalization

Chapter two outlined and defined the theoretical concepts that were the foundation for this study. These concepts that were visualised are: implementing sustainable initiatives, drivers and barriers with sustainable initiatives and stakeholders. Solely offering theoretical definition and elaboration is insufficient to enable empirical measurement and therefore operationalization is required. Indicators are identified for each dimension as actual empirical measures. The visualized concepts are broken down into the concept of actors and factors, which have an influence on the implementation of sustainable initiatives.

3.3.1 Actors influencing sustainable initiatives

The concept of actors influencing sustainable initiatives is outlined and defined in chapter two paragraph four with the concept of stakeholders. Stakeholder management is crucial for driving sustainability performance as found by Asif et al. (2013). The activities of strategy require a range of organizational stakeholders to become involved in designing objectives, agreeing targets and formulating plans and actions (Williams and Lewis, 2008).

Mitchell et al. (1997) suggest that to better understand stakeholder identification and salience it is needed to evaluate stakeholder-manager relationships systematically, both actual and potential, in terms of the relative absence or presence of all or some of the attributes: power, legitimacy, urgency. Stakeholders have an influence on the degree of sustainability implementation. The identification of the stakeholders in this study is operationalized in figure 2.2 where three main actors are identified; institutional top management, procurement professionals and budget owners. Setting the power, legitimacy and urgency of each actor operationalizes the salience of these actors.

3.3.2 Factors influencing sustainable initiatives

The concept of factors influencing sustainable initiatives is outlined and defined in chapter two paragraphs two, three and four with the concepts of implementing sustainable initiatives, drives and barriers and stakeholders. Table 2.1 gives a view of the drivers and barriers that influence the implementation of sustainable initiatives, which can be recognized by the mentioned indicators.

3.4 Data analysis

For this explorative multiple-case study the primary output is the results of the interviews. The interviews tried to capture the participants' perceptions of the specific cases and position the outcome under the headings actors or factors. Because this study is exploratory the strategy was to come up with a number of headings under which the evidence will be grouped. The main reason to use this strategy is that this study investigates variables that influence the speed of implementation of a strategy, it tries to answer a 'what' question, and is very explorative and therefore it is to consider how to organize the report and then come up with a number of headings under which evidence will be grouped (Yin, 2009). The output of the interviews was analyzed by coding the transcripts. We organized this process in an organic way, by searching for concepts and patterns in the answers of the respondents. We labeled relevant pieces that were repeated or surprised us and based on this labels we managed to create a few categories. The themes we generated were; organizational incentives, knowledge (sharing), role of actors, influence of actors, drivers, barriers and origin of sustainable projects.

3.5 Methodological issues

The validity in the study is constructed by using multiple sources of evidence per case to establish a chain of evidence. The internal validity is ensured as the measurement is based on careful operationalization based upon a coherent and comprehensive body of literature. Additionally, pattern matching contributes to internal validity.

This study has worked on the external validity, by developing multiple case designs in which the case organizations can be compared and results applicable on all cases. The external validity outside the case organizations is limited because the results are not just applicable on the whole healthcare sector.

Reliability was developed by thorough documentation of the case study procedure, enabling future researchers to follow the same procedures and replicate similar results and conclusions. The research is designed on the existing body of knowledge and operationalized based upon this knowledge. The interviews were developed by using the existing body of knowledge. The interviews were semi-structured to make sure all interviewees' were asked the same questions.

4 Results

The research started with analyzing policy documents of each case organization and linking this information to the checklist with features of successful initiatives (table 3.3.). This first phase of the research gave us input for the interviews. The interview schedule and the completed checklist are included in appendix 1 and 2. This chapter presents the results of the execution of the research.

4.1 Organization of sustainability

The organizations are active in healthcare and are specialized in mental care and care for disabled people. All organizations have a very comprehensive purchasing portfolio, from products to services, like hiring external expertise, software applications, utilities, automobiles, greening, cleaning, office supplies, wound care, etc. The organizations developed many different sustainable initiatives that covered environmental protection, social affairs and economic (regional) topics (appendix 3 gives an impression of the different topics).

All healthcare organizations have defined a sustainable policy with clear environmental, social and financial objectives. Table 4.4 shows the scores of each organization on the selected features of successful initiatives in this study. Each selected feature was scored on a five-point scale, where one (1) means this feature was not present at all and five (5) means this feature is very present.

	Org 1	Org 2	Org 3	Org 4
The organization has measurable and ambitious sustainability goals?	5	4	4	4
The goals are realized by the organization?	4	4	2	1
The organization has a structural budget for its sustainability policy?	5	5	2	2
The organization uses environmental criteria in tenders?	4	4	5	4
The organization uses social criteria in tenders?	5	4	2	1
The organization makes sure suppliers involve clients in their processes (social return)?	1	5	1	1
The sustainability policy is kept up to date together with the most important stakeholders?	5	5	2	1

Table 4.4 Scores of case organizations on features of successful initiatives

Three organizations made the policy an integral part of the strategic agenda. These organizations developed the policy before initiating sustainable projects. One organization only developed a policy to be used as a guideline but did not make it an integral part of the strategic agenda. This organization first had some small successful sustainable initiatives and then decided to develop a policy.

A respondent stated: ***“Development of sustainability gives our institution a unique selling point towards the government and our funders and puts us in the position to create extra value for our stakeholders.”*** Three organizations developed sustainability together with important internal stakeholders. One organization did not ask stakeholders to participate in the development process. Sustainable initiatives are developed on all kinds of organizational levels. Most organizations start initiatives on a local level in small projects. When these projects are successful more overarching corporate projects are developed. One organization developed overarching initiatives right away and supported sustainability on a large scale.

All organizations use environmental criteria in their tenders and judge suppliers not only on their answers in the tenders but also after contracting. Social criteria are only used in half of the organizations and only one organization makes sure suppliers involve clients in their processes. Only two of the organizations actually keep the policy up to date with important stakeholders. All policies have goals and targets that are measured. Only two organizations measure their performance on a regular basis and are able to report if goals are realized. The other two organizations are not very active in measuring variables and are not able to report if goals are realized. It is remarkable the two leading organizations have a structural budget and other resources allocated while the two lagging organizations do not have a structural budget nor allocated resources.

4.2 Actors

In organizations different actors take part in the process of creating and implementing policies. These actors influence the process of implementation of a policy but also have an influence on other actors. Our research looked for features of actors influencing the implementation of sustainability and influencing other actors in the process.

4.2.1 Influence actors on implementation

There is a diversity of actors involved in the process in all organizations. Notable is that the board in every organization has the biggest influence on the implementation of sustainability. ***“Only the will to develop sustainability is not enough...also specify the subject and make employees believe you really want it...”*** In all organizations the board has an idea and makes sure this idea is developed. The board is a powerful actor and is able to decide which policies are important to an organization. In a way the boards all made sure sustainability is a topic in their organization.

One board believes sustainability is so important they have an active stimulation program where employees are supported in all kinds of ways to develop sustainable initiatives. Some small resistance is taken away and all organizational parties are positive on sustainability.

The personal involvement of the board is enormous and to them it is important that the organizational vision is achieved. In another organization the board is positive on sustainability and even supports some initiatives openly by participating. Top management is very helpful to employees ***“...personal involvement inspires people to give something extra...”***

The top management is a big influencer and facilitator for the implementation of sustainability. Top management is rated with power, legitimacy and urgency in all organizations, which gives them high salience. The top management of one organization develops sustainability in two ways. The top management gives different signals, first by asking to develop sustainability and second by not giving active support. At first employees are very positive but eventually there is no expansion of the initiatives and employees lose their confidence. Roles and responsibilities are not clear and employees are not sure how to act. The top management in one organization developed a sustainability policy driven by external pressure. After developing the policy the organization was not stimulated to execute the policy and motivation for further development instantly disappeared.

The directors are integral responsible for the business of their division and are in a position to decide which projects to fund and which not. They are rated with power, legitimacy and urgency in almost all interviews. Only once power and once urgency was not linked to the budget owners. The actor 'budget owners' is rated with high salience. In the leading organizations they are committed and supportive with different kinds of incentives. Successful initiatives are insistently highlighted in order to make them visible. Initiatives are not only supported but there is active genuine participation. Management is proactive in asking for advice and is open for feedback. ***"The focus of the top and middle management has changed from budget driven towards quality and perception."*** In the lagging organizations budget owners are committed as well but particularly in the own division in small local projects and less in overarching projects. Commitment is mainly given when financial benefits are at order. Most budget owners in the lagging organizations are not able to ask the right questions to the procurement department and do not create the right incentives. Despite of the positive attitude towards sustainability not all budget owners focus on the right elements but remain focused on financial benefits. There still is little understanding on sustainability.

Procurement professionals are active in developing sustainable initiatives in all organizations. Not all procurement professionals are equally committed but they all have a role in relation to suppliers and other partners. The environment is changing where the clients' interest is demanding different qualities procurement departments have to follow. It takes time to get used to this new interest and it is tempting to hold on to the habit of financial quick wins. In both leading organizations the top management and budget owners rate the procurement professionals with power and legitimacy while the procurement professionals rate themselves with only legitimacy. In the lagging organizations the top management, budget owners and procurement professionals all only rate legitimacy. The salience of the procurement professionals is mediocre to low.

In all organizations the procurement professionals are supportive to primary business units of the organization. In this supportive position they are able to advice project teams and management on sustainable topics as they are the linking pin between the expertise of suppliers and the internal organization.

In this position they are also able to generate innovative ideas, with a focus on the organizational concern with all perspectives and stakes in mind. **“Often are initiators of sustainable ideas and share these ideas in the organization.”** Procurement professionals experience it to be difficult to influence the implementation of sustainability because of stakeholders with different interests and goals. **“...to break through barriers, we need a different mindset...”**

One organization has formed a specific department with focus and commitment for sustainability. This department is responsible for keeping the sustainable knowledge up to date, to give support to employees and communication on the topic. The department has a big influence on the implementation of sustainable knowledge and progression of sustainable projects. A second organization did not form a specific department but did form a group of sustainable ambassadors. This group of people is responsible for the support of sustainable initiatives.

4.2.2 Influence actors on each other

Chapter two paragraph five we discussed our research model, figure 2.3. The model shows three main actors (top management, budget owners and procurement professionals) with a relation to the process of implementing sustainability but also with a relation towards each other. The top management in all organizations has great influence on all other actors. Specifically the board has the biggest influence in all organizations. In the progressive organizations it is clear that success is related to the participation and acceptance of employees. Directly or through different management layers the top management in all organizations is able to influence budget owners and procurement professionals.

The budget owners are able to influence procurement professionals and make own decisions compared to the advice of procurement professionals. In relation to the board, budget owners act in a far more depending position. Non-the less budget owners are able to implement a policy from their own perspective and give projects a unique local dimension. Budget owners are able to advice the board in strategic processes and in this position can have influence on the decision making process.

In the leading organizations top management and budget owners give procurement professionals a bigger influence in initiatives because of their knowledge on sustainability, in contrast to the lagging organizations. Budget owners are not always content and advice is not always obeyed. The greatest influence procurement professionals can apply is in the own processes, in small local initiatives within their own division. Procurement professionals are not able to influence the board at all. In the leading organizations the procurement professionals are enabled to generate power by the other actors. In the lagging organizations this is not the case. The most important results of the section actors are outlined in table 4.5.

Actor	Influence actors on implementation	Influence actors on each other
Top management	Main influencer in all organizations	Big influence on all actors
	Personal involvement	Are able to create all the right incentives
	Clear vision and motivation	Direct or indirect involvement with procurement department
	Internal motivation for development is very positive	Have power, legitimacy and urgency
	External influence for development is not enough on long term	Saliency is very high
Budget owners	Committed and supportive with different incentives	Influencer in own business unit
	Large attention for successful initiatives	Give other actors mandate to start initiatives or not
	Active participation	Influence on procurement department is great because of independent decision making
	Proactive management and open for feedback	Advisors of the top management
	Only focus on local initiatives	Have power, legitimacy and urgency
	Commitment when financial benefits are at order	Saliency is high
	No creation of the right incentives	
	No active involvement of procurement department Understanding of sustainability is low	
Procurement professionals	Active in developing initiatives	Advisors for internal parties
	Have to follow clients needs	Only influence on process and mainly by using knowledge
	Linking pin between suppliers and internal organization	Advice is not always followed by top management and budget owners
	Generators of innovative ideas	Influence in own processes in small local initiatives
	Confronted with different internal interests and goals Focus on small local projects	No influence on top management Have legitimacy and saliency is low
Sustainable department / ambassadors	Keeping knowledge on sustainability up to date	
	Communication of initiatives and successes	
	Training employees	
	Support employees with knowledge Coaching of employees / projects	

Table 4.5 Actors main results

4.3 Factors

Chapter two paragraph five we discussed the research model for this study, figure 2.3. The model shows four main factors (management support, information/communication, organization, external pressure), with a relation to the process of implementing sustainability.

4.3.1 Management support

The support of management is an important part in order to achieve a good implementation. The level of management support in the leading organizations is very high. These organizations show management that has commitment and is open minded for feedback. The management is active in looking for innovative ideas and supports employees in their self-consciousness. Sometimes the management is not proactive enough but employees are able to give feedback that is picked up by management. Besides being supportive management is purposeful in creating all the right conditions for initiatives to be successful and even has active participation in some projects. The level of management support in the lagging organizations is low. Employees find themselves confronted with a management that at first supports the development of a sustainable policy but on the long-term the support fades away. Management does not participate in projects at all and is primarily interested in short-term financial profit. The management is not willing or capable of creating the right incentives nor stimulates employees. ***“Top management agreed on the importance of developing sustainability but employees are the actor generating the actual implementation.”*** and ***“When employees are not supportive, the implementation cannot be successful.”***

4.3.2 Information and communication

The progressive organizations show a good and frequent distribution of information. The information is transparent and available for all employees. These organizations also are active in giving employees a proper education and successes are celebrated and communicated with all stakeholders. On the other hand the laggards do not communicate a lot about sustainability. The organizations are not informed about the advantages of sustainability and top management has no view on local initiatives. Employees are not trained and knowledge on sustainability is limited. The communication that does take place is not very active. Small local successes are not communicated on a corporate level. Management expects employees to find information on the corporate intranet or quality portal.

4.3.3 Organization

The organizational conditions are developed in all organizations. All organizations developed a sustainable policy with clear objectives. In three organizations sustainability is a subject on the strategic agenda. The difference between the progressive and less progressive organizations is the active involvement of stakeholders in the process of developing sustainability and adjusting goals. The progressive organizations have a department or ambassadors who have time and expertise to help and support employees with initiatives and projects. The leading organizations also make sure goals are measured and frequently adjusted. These organizations are able to create an inspiring climate for employees to develop good initiatives. The lagging organizations have a policy with clear goals but do not measure the progress on a regular basis. ***“Sustainability is good window-dressing... but is just entrusted to paper...”*** Mainly the focus is on financial profit and not on long-term profit. Striking is the comment of one of the respondents: ***“There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”*** There is no stimulating environment for employees to develop initiatives and people are not involved.

4.3.4 External pressure

One organization developed sustainability because of external pressure. This organization looks at sustainability, as something that needs to be developed in order to secure future funding. There is little internal motivation to create value through sustainability. The other organizations all developed sustainability because they wanted to without external pressure. It is clear external parties are increasing pressure on healthcare organizations to create sustainable initiatives. The three organizations that developed sustainability from intrinsic motivation are ahead of external demands and this could give them the opportunity to generate a competitive advantage. ***“Marketing is getting more and more important in healthcare.”***

4.3.5 Influence factors on implementation

A positive environment stimulates employees to be innovative and creative. Management support is essential for creating a good sustainable organization. It shows that creating a specific department or working with designated people as ambassadors generates extra expertise, time and manpower to help employees initiate projects. Employees need to be aware of their responsibilities and stimulate colleagues. Good education and dissemination of information helps employees in developing sustainable initiatives. After gathering the sharing of knowledge is important to make initiatives successful and also has a positive influence on the contact between people. Besides good education and dissemination of information also early involvement of employees in the strategy process has a positive influence on the implementation of sustainability. All factors have an influence on the implementation of sustainability. It is necessary to combine actors to create a stronger implementation. ***“The point is to make it a total package and not just a few stand alone actions.”***

The most important results of the section factors are outlined in table 4.6.

Factor	Influence factors on implementation
Management Support	Commitment and open minded for feedback
	Active in looking for innovative ideas
	Supportive for employees
	Purposeful in creating right conditions
Information and communication	Interest in short-term financial profit
	Good and frequent distribution
	Transparent and available for all employees
	Proper education of employees
	Advantages of sustainability are not known
	Top management has no view on local initiatives
	Knowledge on sustainability is limited
	No active communication
Organization	Sustainable policy with clear objectives
	Sustainability is part of strategic agenda
	Stakeholders are active involved in process and updating goals
	Department for sustainability with expertise

	Ambassadors for sustainability
	Measuring and adjustment of goals
	Inspiring climate for employees to develop good initiatives
External pressure	Only present in one organization and development of sustainability has little internal motivation

Table 4.6 Factors main results

4.4 Drivers

Many drivers have been put forward with a positive impact on implementing sustainability. Top managers stressed the importance of starting with a good vision on sustainability. Why does the organization want to develop sustainability? Besides vision they emphasize a clear and uniform strategy and the fact that education on the subject is well designed to make sure employees understand the subject very well. To realize a successful implementation of sustainability top managers feel that an integral approach and activation of employees are necessary. **“Successful is when people want to join, most of all when you have not asked them to do so...”** Budget owners are focused on visible success in financial terms and social terms. Sustainable initiatives need to show positive financial results and they stressed that this can be realized with enthusiast and committed employees. Budget owners also give high priority to education to make employees aware of the possibilities of sustainability. Procurement professionals discussed different factors with a positive influence on their organizational environment. Procurement professionals have a supportive position in all organizations and they are continuous looking for possibilities to influence budget owners who make the decisions in their business units.

Procurement professionals stressed the importance of an open climate and a broad mindset. They also made clear that awareness and the right attitude are important. Proper education of purchasers is essential and also sharing knowledge with other business units. To make a good start initiatives have to be small but visible and communication of successful initiatives is an important condition. Small initiatives have a greater chance of leading to success. **“Simple projects are often easiest to start with and show short term success,...gives extra moral to expand to bigger projects.”**

Communication of successful initiatives is a method for internal sales and is contagious to the rest of the organization.

Drivers

Proper vision

Clear and uniform strategy

Well designed education

Good understanding of subject

Integral approach

Activation of employees by organization

Visible successes

Positive financial and social results

Open climate

Broad mindset
Awareness and right attitude
Sharing of knowledge
Starting with small but visible initiatives
Communication of successful initiatives

Table 4.7 Drivers main results

4.5 Barriers

The implementation of sustainability is not always easy. Some processes are implemented with great ease and others need more struggle. There are factors with an inhibitory influence on the process of implementing sustainability. Top management emphasize that a lack of results is a barrier to the success of sustainable initiatives. **“Only drive is cost reduction.”** In addition, top management sees that not supporting initiatives by management and a lack of knowledge have a negative influence on initiatives. **“Organizations must be willing to see beyond the obvious to be innovative and short term business cases are not a winning deal for sustainability.”** Processes in healthcare organizations have a large viscosity and this does not stimulate the implementation of sustainable initiatives. Budget owners are mainly focused on financial results and if these are not realized by initiatives support decreases. Another barrier mentioned by budget owners are the political considerations of different parties within an organization. Parties involved in sustainable initiatives with different interests are not focused on making an initiative successful. **“Being able to create sustainability means to invest and not just saying you want to be sustainable but also doing it...”** Procurement professionals focus on the political agenda of different stakeholders as a barrier. Besides this, also projects with a long turnaround are mentioned as a barrier. When projects have a long lead success is not realized within a short period and different stakeholders become less interested. Financial issues are often the main driver for parties, which means projects with greater financial benefits get more support. Also the lack of knowledge on sustainability and not sharing of available knowledge are seen as negative factors for the success of sustainable initiatives.

Barriers

Lack of results
No management support
Lack of knowledge
Large viscosity in decision making
Focus on financial results
Political considerations / agenda stakeholders
Projects with a long turnaround
No sharing of available knowledge

Table 4.8 Barriers main results

4.6 Overview of relationships

In chapter two we developed a research model based on a theoretical framework. The model is shown below in figure 4.4. In this section we will discuss how the different variables actually merge based on the results of our research.

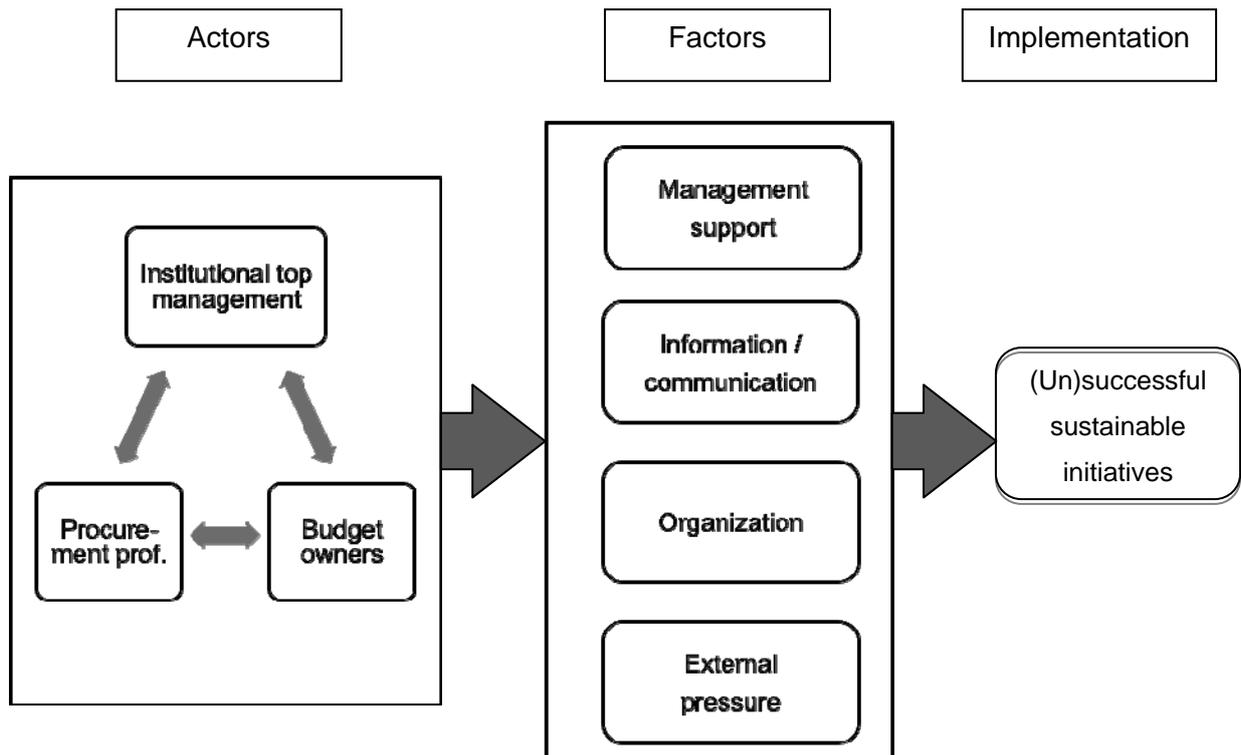


Figure 4.4 Relations between actors, factors and implementation

First we would like to focus on the actors. The three main actors in our research are the institutional top management, budget owners and procurement professionals. The most important actor is the institutional top management. This actor has very high salience and is able to have a major influence on the implementation process of sustainability. This actor is able to make a topic strategic and important in all organizations. Budget owners are a party not to underestimate.

They have a certain power within their own business unit and are able to create positive or negative incentives on any subject. This group has frequent contact with the institutional top management and is able to discuss matters but eventually only give advice to the top management. In relation to procurement professionals the budget owners are open for feedback but do certainly not always adopt the advice. This gives budget owners a position with salience, especially within their own business unit. The third actor is the procurement professionals. This actor has to follow the arguments, views and ultimately the decisions of the top management and budget owners. As an advisor they support the organization in decision-making processes by sharing their knowledge and their network. They are not in a position to enforce sustainability.

All in their own way, the actors all influence the factors. Top management is in the position to set the right incentives and make the organization aware of sustainability. In a way the top management must show their involvement and support on the subject to make it real and alive. The intention of wanting to be sustainable does not end with management support but it is an important precondition.

The top management must be capable of inspiring other management layers like budget owners and middle management. All management layers must be aware of the importance of sustainability and supportive on the subject in order to generate the right environment for employees to generate successful initiatives. Information and communication are inevitable in every organization. People need to know what topics are important and which decisions are made. Knowledge of sustainability is important and procurement professionals are the designated party to adopt this knowledge. Procurement professionals are in the position to give good advice and share their knowledge with all organizational parties. In this way the understanding of sustainability is spread within the organization and people get more aware of the possibilities of sustainability.

The organization of sustainability shows in the way sustainability is defined in a policy and stakeholders are involved in the creation process. The policy is part of the strategic agenda and has clear and measurable goals. All actors have a role in the organization of sustainability. Top management is responsible for making sustainability a part of the strategic agenda. This process needs to be developed in corporation with important stakeholders to create support. Budget owners need to support the strategic agenda and create the right environment in their business units for sustainable initiatives. Procurement professionals need to share their knowledge and advice the top management and budget owners in the development of sustainability. Finally external pressure makes organizations more aware of possibilities at first they did not know of or did not want to see. External parties are able to enforce the development of sustainability where internal parties try to convince the organization for years without success. Sometimes external pressure is needed to make top management and budget owners more aware of sustainability and the many features it can have for an organization. A positive input of the actors on sustainability and a good balance of the forces between the actors is needed for successful initiatives. When the actors are able to make a joint effort on sustainability the needed factors are easily created and successful initiatives are inevitable.

5 Conclusions, discussion and recommendations

In the previous chapter we discussed the results of our study and the relation between actors, factors and the implementation of sustainability. This chapter, based on the knowledge derived from the research, provides conclusions, discussion and recommendations.

5.1 Conclusions

This research is based on the motive that organizations must address the issue of sustainability in their operations. A limited number of studies investigate the role of the public sector in sustainable development (Warner and Ryall, 2001; Swanson et al., 2005; Thomas and Jackson, 2007; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Brammer and Walker, 2011; Gelderman et al., 2013). This limited knowledge on sustainability in the public sector gave us a motive to investigate the development of sustainability in this sector. Specific we focused on the development of sustainability in public organizations that are both leading and lagging in implementing sustainable initiatives. The following problem statement was formulated:

'What actors and factors influence the speed of implementation of sustainability in the public sector?'

Our study provides insight in the way the actors influence the implementation of sustainability and in the way the actors influence each other. It also provides insight in the way the actors relate to the factors and how the factors influence the implementation of sustainability. The influence of the three actors on the implementation of sustainability is present. Not all actors have the same influence on the process of implementation. The top management and budget owners are the main influencers. Particular top management is a main driver for the implementation of sustainability in the successful organizations. The support of budget owners is needed to create successful initiatives in the business units. Budget owners are major influencers within a business unit. In the lagging organizations top management does not prioritize sustainability and budget owners are not very interested in the development of sustainability. They are main influencers in the inability to develop sustainability. Top management is a substantial influencer of budget owners. Top management and budgets owners are substantial influencers of procurement professionals. The procurement professionals are advisors for budget owners and top management. In this role they are not very powerful influencers of the process of implementation. They are able to use their knowledge on the topic to influence other actors. This influence is bigger in the leading organizations and very marginal in the lagging organizations.

The four categories of factors all have influence on the implementation of sustainability. Management support is very distinguished for the development of sustainability. The need for good information and communication is very important. Next to good distribution of information, proper education on sustainability as well as celebrating successes is important. The progressive organizations show

active management support and open and transparent communication of information as well as attention for education of all staff.

The laggards do not develop active support of management and people are not motivated to start initiatives. Information and communication only reach a select part of the organization and education of employees on sustainability is not addressed. As far as organizational conditions concern, the development of a sustainable policy with clear objectives is needed. A policy that is part of the strategic agenda has a more influence on the status of sustainability.

The progressive organizations manage to develop a policy and keep adjusting in corporation with stakeholders in contrast to the laggard who are not able to develop this process. Generating a specific department or working with designated people as ambassadors, gives the development of sustainability an extra stimulant. External stakeholders are increasing pressure on healthcare organizations to create sustainable initiatives. One organization developed sustainability because of external pressure and three organizations developed sustainability without external pressure as main influencer. The organizations with an internal drive for developing sustainability are ahead of external demands which gives them the opportunity to generate competitive advantage with their external stakeholders.

5.2 Discussion

Sustainability is a topic on the agenda of all case organizations. We found that the development of sustainability is either organized out of internal motivation with a clear image of the value of sustainability or with more external focus, which makes organizations have less ownership on the topic.

5.2.1 Actors

In our study it shows the top management in all organizations is the most powerful actor because they accumulate all three attributes (cf. Neville et al., 2004). The top management influences all other parties in the organizations. The progressive organizations show the development of sustainability is designed in partnership between different actors (cf. Crespín-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Carter and Carter, 1998). The top management in these organizations is a leading facilitator and involves budget owners and procurement professionals in the development of sustainability (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 2008). The top management even participates active in some initiatives. The active involvement activates and inspires employees in starting initiatives and doing everything in making their initiatives successful. Inspiring leadership makes employees enthusiast about sustainability and motivates in initiating sustainable projects (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Crespín-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2008). Top management in the lagging organizations makes sure sustainability is contained within a policy but is not interested in co-operating the implementation of the policy (cf. Crespín-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008). Sustainable initiatives are developed as small local projects in business units. When a small local project becomes successful, this is not translated into an integral

project to create a corporate advantage. The interest of the top management is decisive in relation to the interests of budget owners and procurement professionals.

With the active and supportive attitude of the top management, budget owners are equally motivated in developing successful initiatives. Budget owners are also a powerful actor in all organizations and they have a major influence in their business units. In the progressive organizations budget owners are committed and supportive to sustainability with different kinds of incentives. The active participation of top management and budget owners generates a very strong internal pressure for sustainable initiatives (cf. Ehrigott et al., 2011).

In the lagging organizations focus and commitment on small initiatives is only given when financial benefits are at order (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011, Min and Galle, 2001; Walker et al., 2008).

Budget owners in the lagging organizations are not concerned with creating an incentive environment for employees. Budget owners and employees have different interests and goals (cf. Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010), which does not have a positive effect on the development of sustainable initiatives. Budget owners are not able to initiate the debate on sustainability because they have too little knowledge on the subject and therefore are not able to ask the right questions or create the right circumstances (cf. Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009). The results indicate that the budget owners in the lagging organizations have a negative impact on the implementation of sustainability. We found that these budget owners have a significant impact on decisions with respect to sustainable initiatives (cf. Günther and Scheibe, 2006). The main focus in the decision-making is related to financial aspects (cf. Min and Galle, 2001; Brammer and Walker, 2009).

The procurement professionals operate in the position as advisor, which makes this actor not a very big influencer. The salience of the procurement professionals is rated low. The only aspect every actor associated with procurement professionals is legitimacy. Procurement professionals have an important role by linking the external knowledge to internal needs. In this position procurement professionals are able to influence sustainable initiatives but they have to be very subtle in doing so. Their knowledge of sustainability and organizational awareness are important instruments in the support of sustainable initiatives (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Bowen et al., 2011; Paulraj, 2011, Preuss, 2009). The procurement professionals in the progressive organizations are equipped with the right knowledge and tools to facilitate this process this in contrast to the procurement professionals in the lagging organizations. The challenge for all procurement professionals in our study is to stay aware of all perspectives within the organization, including the different interests and goals of actors (cf. Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010).

The leading organizations showed an extra dimension in creating attention for sustainability. Each in their own way they created a visible body, employees can identify themselves with. These bodies are highly motivated in making sustainable initiatives a success and have knowledge and the right resources to help employees with their initiatives. The creation of these sustainable officials is

something the lagging organizations do not have. In our study this attention is seen as an extra stimulant in the development of sustainability.

5.2.2 Factors

The factors influencing the implementation of sustainability have a relation to the actors. The results of our study show that the leading organizations have good management support (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2008). Management also shows the appropriate leadership (cf. Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Brammer and Walker, 2011; Giunipero et al., 2012) and creates the right incentives (cf. Walker and Brammer, 2009). The lagging organizations are more focused on short-term financial profits and show difficulty in changing this point of view (cf. Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Nidumolu et al., 2009).

The top management in the leading organizations considers it very important an organization has a good vision on sustainability in advance. To them it is important to have a good vision before developing a policy because they want to make clear what the purpose is of the development for the organization? Next to the importance of having a vision, the top management in all organizations is focused on making sustainability very visible. The leading organizations focus on both internal and external visibility, while the lagging organizations focus on external visibility. The internal and external marketing aspect of sustainability is paramount (cf. Walker et al., 2008).

The leading organizations are very focused on transparent information and make it available for internal and external stakeholders. (cf. Preuss, 2009). The laggards are not very active promoters of sustainable initiatives and do not inform their own organization about this subject. The top management in these organizations is not even aware of the local sustainable initiatives and the fact if these initiatives are successful or unsuccessful. Another strong developed part in the progressive organizations is the education of employees on sustainability (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Bowen et al., 2011; Paulraj, 2011; Preuss, 2009). Educating employees makes them more concerned on sustainability and certainly when the organization celebrates successful initiatives with all stakeholders. The focus and attention of good education and celebration of successful initiatives is very appreciated by employees and gives them motivation in continuing the development of sustainable initiatives. The progressive organizations also show the sharing of knowledge is a stimulating factor in developing sustainability. Gathering knowledge is an important element but in the interaction between people and sharing of knowledge between these people the right atmosphere arises for initiatives to become bigger than intended at first.

All organizations developed a sustainable policy with clear objectives (cf. Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001). Three organizations even positioned sustainability on the strategic agenda (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008).

The leading organizations are able to develop sustainability together with their most important stakeholders. All set goals are evaluated together with the stakeholders and adjusted in mutual consultation. All different processes and resources in the progressive organizations make them able to create an inspiring and incentive environment for sustainability (cf. Walker and Brammer, 2009).

The regulatory compliance in these organizations is very high (cf. Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993). The lagging organizations are not able to develop sustainability in the right way after setting the policy. They show the development of sustainability remains independently managed from the corporate strategic agenda (cf. Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Zhu et al., 2008). These organizations do not manage getting the various interests on the same level. When stakeholders keep their own interest in mind and are not willing to yield, it is very difficult to make sustainability a success (cf. Uyarra and Flannagan, 2010).

The interference of external parties in the development of sustainability is getting more important. Healthcare organizations also notice this development and increasing pressure of external parties. The leading organizations developed sustainability from internal motivation and are not very engaged with external pressure. The development of sustainability is more an ethical concern to these organizations (cf. Ates et al., 2012; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Berns et al., 2009; Giunipero et al., 2012; Vredenburg and Westley, 1993). Nevertheless they are very open about their advantage with external parties because they developed sustainability. The external forces are, like governmental regulation (cf. Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 2008) and regulations by funding parties very important to all organizations.

In contrast to the findings of Walker et al. (2008) we see organizations are influenced by internal drivers rather than external drivers. Our study confirms the importance of management support but in order to make the implementation of sustainability successful more is needed. The role of employees developing sustainable initiatives is crucial in the development of sustainability. An organization can set all the right parameters but when employees do not participate, development is unlikely to occur. In addition it is notable that an explicit representative body for sustainability is very appreciated and a welcome addition in the existing factors. It creates an extra stimulant in the development sustainability. We also found an addition on the theoretical context in the development of a vision on sustainability before setting a policy and goals. A vision gives the reason why an organization wants to develop sustainability, which is an important tool in creating awareness. Also we found that the sharing of knowledge on sustainability is a driver for the development of sustainability.

5.3 Recommendations for practitioners

Sustainability is a trending topic in today's society. Also public bodies need to invest in sustainable initiatives in order to create value to their own business and for their stakeholders. The integration of sustainable development into a firm's strategy needs partnership and joint value creation methodologies with selected actors (Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Carter and Carter, 1998).

The explored organizations have a need to develop sustainability. They should be aware to develop this need out of internal motivation.

The development of sustainability takes great organizational effort in terms of time, money and resources. The lagging organizations should be focused and dedicated to sustainability.

Sustainable initiatives should be guided by the development of a policy (Thai, 2001; Warner and Ryall, 2001). This policy should include well-defined targets, which should be used by the organization and frequently updated in corporation with important stakeholders (Thai, 2001). Management support is an important part in developing sustainable initiatives (Brammer and Walker, 2011, Crespín-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2008). The level of management support is not very high in the lagging organizations and we recommend giving this factor good attention. Besides support, active participation has a positive effect on the success of sustainable initiatives. To drive the implementation of sustainability, indirect initiatives of development are necessary like the compilation and dissemination of sustainability-related information (Preuss, 2009). Our research shows that a good and frequent distribution of information has a positive effect on a successful implementation. The information needs to be transparent and available for all employees. Next to good information and communication a proper education (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Bowen et al., 2011; Paulraj, 2011, Preuss, 2009) is essential to create awareness. A proper education on sustainability gives employees a better preparation on the subject and more arguments in internal discussions. Also the knowledge about the purchasing role in healthcare organizations could be expanded. The procurement function is organized as an advisory role in all organizations. The results of our study show the influence of the procurement role on the implementation of sustainability is minimal. Organizations could focus on the role of the procurement function and how this function could be developed as a more driving and motivating actor. Celebrating successful initiatives and communicating these successes with all stakeholders are stimulators for the development of sustainability. Sustainability is gaining importance and this development will go on. The external pressure of stakeholders on organizations to develop sustainable initiatives will increase. Sustainability will become a prerequisite for stakeholders and organizations can create advantage in developing sustainability.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

The knowledge of the development of sustainability within the healthcare sector is very limited and the results and conclusions of our study are a beginning in exploring the status of sustainability within the sector. Our study continued on existing theoretical concepts of actors and factors influencing the implementation of sustainability. We explored four case organizations to learn more about the actors and factors influencing the speed of implementation of sustainability in healthcare.

A major limitation of this study is the number of healthcare organizations involved and the number of respondents interviewed within these organizations. Our study was limited to the perspectives of institutional top management, budget owners and procurement professionals (Gelderman et al., 2013). These actors are examined with semi-structured protocols which was the most appropriate design for this study. The semi-structured protocols together with the prior analysis of published policy

documents assume a good internal validity of our research. Our study shows that there is a relationship between actors and factors and the speed of implementation of sustainability.

The limitation of the three actors included in our study does not exclude other actors and factors with a relationship to the implementation of sustainability. A promising line of research would be to include more stakeholders and their impact on sustainable initiatives. Research could also be focused on the interrelationships and interests of various internal and external stakeholders. The results of our study show the external pressure to develop sustainability is increasing in healthcare. Our research did not include the role and influence of external parties on the implementation process of sustainability.

When organizations are able to create the right environment and incentives for sustainability, this has an positive effect on the development. Employees working in small projects and making an effort for sustainability are responsible for the actual development of initiatives. Future studies could examine how these project teams really manage the success of their initiatives.

Regarding the external validity it should be noted this research is performed in four selected healthcare organizations, with only a selected group of respondents. The external validity of our research can naturally be challenged. Two organizations are progressive in the implementation of sustainability and two organizations are less progressive. More research could be conducted amongst healthcare organizations that lag behind in developing sustainable initiatives. It is interesting to obtain more knowledge on the actors and factors that limit the development of sustainability and to learn more about the specific motives and ideas behind the inability to develop sustainability. It would be useful to replicate this study to a larger number of healthcare organizations in order to establish relationships between actors and factors influencing the process of implementing sustainability. At the same time it would be interesting to involve more internal respondents, including budget owners of primary and secondary business processes and officers specifically focused on sustainability, and external respondents, including funding parties for healthcare organizations (municipalities, care agencies, healthcare insurers) and suppliers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview schedule

Introduction

First of all I would like to thank you for your corporation in this research. This research tries to find out what actors influence the factors and/or their relation on the implementation of sustainable initiatives in a positive or negative manner. Also we try to find out what the impact is of the actors on each other. After completing the interview, we will have discussed actors and their salience, the influence of actors on the factors and how actors and factors influence the implementation of sustainable initiatives. This interview approximately will last one hour. The results will be anonymous and cannot in any way be related to your company.

Open questions

I would like to talk about the sustainable initiatives in your institution. Your institution has a sustainable agenda and a policy on sustainability. Could you tell me how sustainability is organized in your institution?

The interviewee tells his/her story and the interviewer asks questions when needed to give the interviewees story more depth. When the interviewee makes a statement the interviewer asks questions like: "How do you know this.....?" and "how can you prove your statement.....?"

Actors

You have told me how sustainability is organized in your institution. Now I would like to talk about actors in the process of implementing sustainability. Actors are parties in your institution which take part in the sustainability process, this can be in an active or more passive manner. Can you tell me more about your role in the organizing of sustainability? I would like to ask you to be specific about your role and your possibilities to influence the process?

The interviewer is alert on the comments of the interviewee. The interviewer expects the interviewee to talk about his support for sustainable initiatives and how the policy on sustainability is set. If not mentioned by the interviewee, the interviewer asks about management support, policy setting with clearly stated goals and how sustainability is placed on the strategic agenda?

We have talked about your role and your possibilities to influence the process. Now I would like to talk about other actors in your institution and the way they take part in the process. According to you, what actors take part in the process on implementing sustainability? Can you explain why these actors take part in the process? How do they take part in the process?

The interviewer pays good attention and if not mentioned asks questions about the role and influence on the sustainability process of the actors mentioned. And why these actors take part in the process? Why do these actors have influence on the process and how this is shown?

After talking about different actors influencing the process of implementation of sustainability. Can you tell me something about the influence of the actors on each other? How do you recognize the influence actors have on each other? Can you explain this process for me and give examples?

The interviewer pays good attention to the arguments of the interviewee, and asks questions like: "How do you know this....? and "How does this show.....? If not mentioned the interviewer asks explicit for management involvement, the role of the procurement department and the role of budget owners and how these three actors influence each other in the institution. According to theory these three actors are important to the sustainability process and influence each other.

Factors

After talking about actors their influence on sustainable initiatives and their influence on each other, I would like to talk about factors. Factors are drivers and barriers on the process of implementing sustainability. Drivers have a positive impact on the process of implementing sustainable initiatives and barriers do the opposite. What drivers and barriers do you recognize in your institution?

And when recognizing these factors what do you think are key components influencing the sustainability process in a positive or negative manner?

The interviewer pays attention to the arguments and asks questions how the interviewer defines the drivers and barriers and asks for examples. If not mentioned ask the interviewee about management support, information and communication, organization and external pressure. Each of these factors are known as drivers and barriers and the interviewer wants to know how they are represented in the process in the institution?

We have talked about actors and factors and their influence and relation to sustainability in your institution. Would you say the implementation of sustainability in your institution is successful or unsuccessful? How does this show? Can you give examples of the success of un-success?

The interviewer pays attention to the arguments why the implementation is successful or unsuccessful. What is successful or unsuccessful according to the interviewee? When does the interviewee call something successful? Can you give some examples? The interviewer asks questions about the success on the basis of the checklist as presented in chapter three and presented below.

The organization has measurable and ambitious sustainability goals?

The goals are realized by the organization?

The organization has a structural budget for its sustainability policy?

The organization uses environmental criteria in tenders?

The organization uses social criteria in tenders?

The organization makes sure suppliers involve clients in their processes (social return)?

The sustainability policy is kept up to date together with the most important stakeholders?

Checklist features of successful initiatives

More structured questions

In the previous section we discussed the position of sustainable initiatives in your organization. How the initiatives are organized and how actors and factors influence the implementation of sustainability. Also we discussed the influence actors have on each other and how this has an influence on the implementation of sustainability. In the last section we talked about whether the implementation of sustainability is successful in your institution or not and what makes the initiative successful or unsuccessful. In this section I would like to talk more specific about actors, factors and the influence on sustainable initiatives.

Actors

Actors influence each other and influence the factors and therefore influence the sustainable initiatives in your institution. You have mentioned some actors in the process of sustainable initiatives. I would like to talk specifically about three actors who have an important role in the implementation of sustainable initiatives. These actors are: the institutional top management, procurement professionals and budget owners.

First I would like to talk about the institutional top management. Can you tell me how this actor participates in the process of sustainable initiatives?

The interviewer asks questions like: How does this actor influence the process of sustainable initiatives? How does this show? And how does this actor influence the other two actors in this process? Can you give some examples? When the interviewee makes statements, the interviewer asks how this is known?

After talking about the institutional top management I would like to talk about the procurement professionals. Can you tell me how this actor participates in the process of sustainable initiatives?

The interviewer asks questions like: How does this actor influence the process of sustainable initiatives? How does this show? And how does this actor influence the other two actors in this process? Can you give some examples? When the interviewee makes statements, the interviewer asks how this is known?

The last actor I would like to talk about is the budget owner. Can you tell me how this actor participates in the process of sustainable initiatives?

The interviewer asks questions like: How does this actor influence the process of sustainable initiatives? How does this show? And how does this actor influence the other two actors in this process? Can you give some examples? When the interviewee makes statements, the interviewer asks how this is known?

After discussing the actors and their participation in the process of implementing sustainable initiatives I would like to talk about the salience of these actors. I would like to explain the concept of salience. Theory shows us three attributes stakeholders may possess can be identified (Mitchell et al., 1997): (1) the power to influence the organization; either coercive, utilitarian or normative; (2) the legitimacy of the relation with the organization; either individual, organizational or societal based; (3) the urgency of the stakeholders claim on the organization; calling for immediate action; either time sensitive or critical to the stakeholder. Salience will rise when stakeholders accumulate any combination of the three attributes. Salience is explained in the way the attributes (power, legitimacy and urgency) are assigned by employees for each stakeholder. This is a dynamic process, which makes it possible to recognize the distinctive situation and perception of management to explain how relationships are prioritized. How do you think the mentioned actors relate to these attributes? Can salience be set for these actors? Can you explain your opinion and give some examples? After talking about the actors and their salience, can we conclude what the current situation is for the three actors? Can you explain how this corresponds with your view on the current situation? Who do you think is the most important actor in the process? Why is this the most important stakeholder to you?

Stakeholders	Institutional top management	Procurement professionals	Budget owners	Conclusion
Power				
Legitimacy				
Urgency				

So far we have established that the actors influence the factors. I would like to talk about the factors. If we look at the theoretical framework, factors are divided in drivers and barriers to implementing sustainable initiatives. The indicators of drivers and barriers can be divided into four categories;

1. Management support
2. Information / communication
3. Organization
4. External pressure

First we will explore, management support. This category includes how management takes part in the process of implementing sustainable initiatives. Can you tell how management in your institution takes part in the sustainable initiatives? How does this show in the organization?

Is there top management support for sustainability? How does this show? Can you give some examples? What is the effect of this attitude on the initiative? Would you say there is appropriate leadership for the initiative of sustainability? Please explain and give some examples. Does management support the procurement officers with the implementation of sustainability? How does this show? Please explain and give some examples.

The interviewer pays attention how the interviewee explains himself and recognizes drivers or barriers in the answers and verifies these findings with the interviewee.

Second there is the category information and communication. This category includes how the communication and information on sustainable initiatives is organized. Can you tell me how the sustainable process is communicated within your institution? How does this show in your organization? Is information transparent and disseminated in the institution? How does this show? Please give some examples. Are procurement officers good educated and aware of sustainability? How is this organized? What is the effect of communication and information on sustainability in your institution? Would you say there is a good familiarity of sustainable policies by different actors? Can you explain why this is?

The interviewer pays attention how the interviewee explains himself and recognizes drivers or barriers in the answers and verifies these findings with the interviewee.

The third category is organization. This category includes the organization of the sustainable initiatives in your institution. Can you tell me how sustainability is organized in your institution? Do you have a policy with clearly stated goals and well defined authorities and responsibilities? How does this show? Can you give some examples? Is sustainability included in the formal strategy and planning process or are the sustainable initiatives and corporate strategy independently managed programs? Would you say the institution has good incentives for sustainability? Why are these good incentives to you? Can you explain with some examples? Would you say there is regulatory compliance in your institution or would you say there are multiple stakeholders with conflicting goals? Can you explain your position and give some examples? How does this show in your institution? Do you have insight in the perceived costs and inefficiencies of sustainability? Would you say the financial part of sustainability has constraints? How does this show for you, please explain. What is the effect of the organizational initiatives on the sustainable initiatives?

The interviewer pays attention how the interviewee explains himself and recognizes drivers or barriers in the answers and verifies these findings with the interviewee.

The last category is external pressure. This category includes mechanisms that influence the institution from the outside. Can you tell me how sustainable initiatives are influenced by external factors? Does your institution take governmental regulation into account? Is this regulation a motive for the institution to develop sustainable initiatives? How does this show? Are ethical concern, public embarrassment and legal risks factors for your institution to develop sustainable initiatives? Can you give examples for these factors? Would you say suppliers are corporative with your intentions on sustainability or are suppliers more resistant to this development? Can you be specific and give some examples? What is the effect of external pressures on your institution and the sustainable initiatives?

The interviewer pays attention how the interviewee explains himself and recognizes drivers or barriers in the answers and verifies these findings with the interviewee.

Reviewing

After running through all the questions and looking back at the answers to the questions we have established some findings. What is your perception of the status of sustainability within your institution? Are the three mentioned actors the most important stakeholders in the process of sustainability? And after considering everything we spoke about, what do you believe is the status of the implementation of sustainability in your institution? Can you be specific and also give examples why you believe this?

This brings us to the end of this interview. Do you have any additions or comments you would like to share?

Closing

This conversation and your input are very valuable to my research. Your answers to the questions and opinions on everything we spoke about will be processed and once again I want to point out they will be made anonymous. Thank you for your time and effort.

Appendix 2 Checklist features of successful initiatives

	Org 1	Org 2	Org 3	Org 4
The organization has measurable and ambitious sustainability goals?	5	4	4	4
The goals are realized by the organization?	4	4	2	1
The organization has a structural budget for its sustainability policy?	5	5	2	2
The organization uses environmental criteria in tenders?	4	4	5	4
The organization uses social criteria in tenders?	5	4	2	1
The organization makes sure suppliers involve clients in their processes (social return)?	1	5	1	1
The sustainability policy is kept up to date together with the most important stakeholders?	5	5	2	1

This table shows the scores of each case organization on the selected features of successful initiatives in this study. Each selected feature was scored on a five-point scale, where one (1) means this feature was not present at all and five (5) means this feature is very present.

Appendix 3 Sustainable initiatives in case organizations

Environmental initiatives	Developing property with less energy consumption
	Sustainable energy
	Cradle to cradle office furniture
	Electric cars
	Project on waste in food consumption
	Switching light from TL into LED
Social initiatives	Social firm cleaning
	Social firm greening
	Social firm catering
	Regulation on social return
	Participation of own clients in processes
	Creating own fair trade coffee facility
	Cycling team with clients for promotion good conduct with less medication
	Own bakery with fair trade products and participation of clients
Economic initiatives	Opportunities for local entrepreneurs in tenders
	Policy on procurement in groupings
	Tenders are developed on agreed topics
	Tenders are always appointed on EMVI