The Challenges of Internal Communication about Environmental Sustainability

- An Exploratory Case Study -

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Abstract

This exploratory study aims to find out the challenges multinational corporations are facing when communicating about the ecological pillar of sustainability internally. By conducting an in-depth investigation of one multinational company, the study identifies three themes which imply potential drawbacks for the company’s goal to become an environmental pioneer within the operating industry. The first obstacle is related to the abstract content and intrinsic character of the sustainability idea. Furthermore, complex international business structures including different target groups hamper the internal sustainability communication, which pursues a peculiarly wide audience and is therefore dependent on the multiplier effect for the spread of information. Moreover, the intrinsic value of sustainability causes a priority lack, perception difficulties of the communicated messages as well as gaps between attitude and behavior. A long time period is required in order for the internal communication to achieve a change. All in all, especially the abstract, voluntary and intrinsic character of sustainability makes the communication uniquely difficult and thus demanding an overall change of the society’s attitude and prospect towards the topic.

Key Words: Communication, Multinational Corporation, Internal Communication, Environmental Sustainability, Communication Challenges
Summary

This thesis deals with the subject of internal communication of sustainability. Since the concept of the environmental sustainable business has becomes increasingly important, also the necessity of well-executed internal communication has been acknowledged to reach an understanding and commitment by employees regarding sustainability related business goals and practices. However, the internal communication is not always as efficient as it is desired to be, which indicates the existence of involved limitations. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the arising challenges related to the internal communication of environmental sustainability.

An inductive exploratory approach is used to study a real-life case of a multinational company, examining the challenges that are faced when communicating about sustainability towards their employees. Using a mixed method approach, the findings from a content analysis, interviews and an employee survey provide us with in-depth information about the case context.

The discussion of the empirical results identifies three main themes that make the communication of sustainability internally challenging, such as the abstractness of contents or the complexity of communication and business structures. One major challenge refers to the intrinsic value character of sustainability, which causes a lack of sustainability’s priority in corporations, but also influences the spread of information, causes perception gaps as well as gaps between attitude and behavior. In relation to this, the long-term perspective of change can be seen as problematic, as it takes time to modify the business culture towards a sustainable one.

Subsequently, the paper summarizes the empirical findings and draws conclusions on the role of society in the investigated matter. As one of the most challenging aspects is investigated to be the intrinsic character of sustainability, it can be assumed that as long as the society’s point of view, attitude and interest does not change, the internal communication about the idea will stay particularly difficult.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Due to increasing external pressures, a rising number of companies have adjusted their business models towards a sustainable development by integrating practices that intend to diminish environmental or social violation (Campbell, 2006). Sustainable Development is commonly referred to as “a development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). The concept of sustainability implies a shift from short-term business practices to long-term solutions that enables a balance between environment, society and economy (Elkington, 1997). Minimizing negative influences on the environment and society allows companies to achieve a competitive advantage and revenue growth (Burns, 2012; Peloza et al., 2012; Tan et al., 2015). However, especially the idea of environmental sustainability requires profound change and modification of companies’ actions and values (Emery, 2012).

A crucial success factor for achieving environmental sustainability can be seen in the company-wide identification and compliance with sustainable practices, which can be achieved by a well-executed information as well as education of all departments, managers and employees within the particular business (Dainton & Zelley, 2011; Lewis, 2011). Ziemann (2011, p.89) has argued that if “an awareness of ecological problems and sustainability is not communicated, then it is socially irrelevant, even non-existent”, which makes the importance of communication about this issue evident. Employees’ participation, support and common understanding of what the organization aims to work and stand for are necessary to improve a company’s overall performance (Kitchen & Daly, 2002) and to implement an idea such as a sustainability strategy, successfully. In terms of sustainability, the personnel’s understanding, participation and collaboration can be supported with the help of a regular, clear and broad spread of information regarding the related business strategies and activities, their underlying reasons, as well as individual contribution opportunities (Dawkins, 2005; Gray & Robertson, 2005; Quirke, 2008; Welch & Jackson, 2007). However, this internal communication about sustainability is often not perceived by the audience in a common, appropriate and satisfying way (Fielding, 2006; Peloza et al., 2012), which indicates existing hampering factors in the communication process.
1.2 Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this thesis is to study real life business context and find out more about these suggested factors hindering companies’ internal communication about sustainability to be spread widely and perceived by the personnel equally. Although the immense importance of communicating towards the employees has been widely discovered and acknowledged (Dainton & Zelley, 2011; Dawkins, 2005; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Welch & Jackson, 2007), little has so far been studied about how internal communication of sustainability is executed or the related limitations (Dawkins, 2005). As most available literature is rather prescriptive, this study objects to empirically inquire the challenges that businesses are facing while communicating about environmental sustainability towards their personnel. By investigating the case of a globally acting transport corporation, the thesis aims to examine the following research question:

What challenges are involved in the internal communication of environmental sustainability issues?

In order to answer the question, this thesis will subsequently review available sustainability and communication literature in order to provide an understanding of the necessities and challenges related to the internal communication of sustainability. After describing the used methodology, the results from studying the chosen case regarding how environmental communication topics are communicated and perceived will be illustrated. In the following discussion, several challenges will be identified, divided into three themes. In the final conclusion section, the findings will be summarized, implications discussed as well as ideas for further research suggested.

2 Internal Sustainability Communication

By reviewing available literature, the following section will firstly provide an overview on the character of sustainability and its role in nowadays’ society and business context. Subsequently, studies are examined about the process and components of internal business communication, before the section sheds light on the phenomenon of internal sustainability communication.
2.1 Role of Sustainability in Society and Business

When investigating internal communication of sustainability issues, it is important to firstly take a look at the role and perception of sustainability. In nowadays’ society, sustainability has become one of the most pressing global issues and is hence increasingly important in the business environment. It has become an integral part of companies’ business strategies rather than a peripheral compliance issue. More and more companies have integrated sustainability into their business mission, values, and often into their brand (Peloza et al., 2012). Thus, organizations increasingly pay attention to the social, environmental and economic aspects of their production line to achieve more sustainable practices (Campbell, 2006). However, the three pillars of sustainability are not easily combined. Although, the trend goes into the direction of sustainability in businesses, organizations in today’s economic business world struggle with the involvement of environmental and social responsibilities and still show the tendency of putting too much emphasis on the aspects of financial and economic growth (Soederbaum, 2008).

One reason for the often inferior role that sustainability plays in the business context can be found in the intrinsic social value character of the concept. The attitude and perception of society members regarding sustainability related contents vary due to “different images of the world and nature, different concepts of society, different interests and value preferences” (Ziemann, 2011, p. 94). However, sustainability values “do not enjoy – everywhere, all the time and without limit – priority over social structures, cultural habits, individual intentions and other values” (Ziemann, 2011, p.94). Furthermore, although often referred to the definition of sustainable development of the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), the term sustainability is “hard to define concisely [...] in ways that are unambiguous” (Hempel, 2009, p.33). The term does not have a universal and concrete meaning, which makes room for interpretations in different ways (Bell & Morse, 2008) and thus leads to the phenomenon being perceived in differing ways. Since there are a variety of specific definitions of sustainability, it seems to be important to create a common perception of the problem and commitment towards it. The diversified perception of sustainability, due to individual intrinsic interest, acceptance and understanding, states a challenge to the dealing with the topic in
business contexts and hampers especially the internal business communication about the special issue (Ziemann, 2011).

Furthermore, Ziemann (2011, p.94) identified a tendency of normalization and demoralization of sustainability issues and environmental threats:

The widespread recognition of sustainable development is leading to a normalisation of the concept. The time of ideologically laden struggles is over; objectives are still without doubt being controversially discussed but in general this is being done in a pragmatic fashion. To a great extent this is due to a de-moralisation of environmental issues.

It is mentioned that the higher the demand for sustainability, the less pressure for change can be created for economic actors or individuals. This tendency is problematic as the concept of sustainability’s normalization also affects the business world. An oversupply of sustainability information in the internal communication might lead to a saturation point, at which employees’ awareness of environmental sustainability issues is diminished, their perception of the internal communication about those matters decreased as well as the pressure to act accordingly potentially minimized (Peloza et al., 2012).

In relation to the varying level of acknowledgement, perception and awareness of sustainability issues, often a gap between attitude and behavior can be observed in our society and business context. As studies show, although people have a sustainable attitude, they do not behave accordingly (Antimova et al., 2012; Budeanu, 2007; Emery, 2012; Leiserowitz et al., 2006; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). This is often due to reasons of time or convenience (Budeanu, 2007; Emery, 2012). Also Peloza et al. (2012) discovered that even if the perception is right, the reality might be different. For the context of internal communication about sustainability, the existence of this attitude-behavior gap emphasizes the need for a communication that deeply touches and personally convinces people about the sustainability goals and measurements in order for them to act accordingly (Emery, 2012). Thus, also the process of internal communication within corporations aims for profound engagement and conviction of its audience, which will be investigated more detailed in the following section.
2.2 Internal Business Communication

In order to understand the concept of internal business communication, the following section introduces the term and its definition, before looking at the most relevant components of the process.

2.2.1 Defining Internal Business Communication

Internal communication covers a wide spectrum and includes day to day communication, change communication and marketing communication (Smith, 2008; Welch & Jackson, 2007). The term is widely referred to as “the communication transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization that are intended to design and redesign organizations, to implement designs, and to co-ordinate day-to-day activities” (Frank & Brownell, 1989, pp. 5-6). However, the validity and applicability of this prominent definition can be questioned, since it does not distinguish appropriately between external and internal business communication. The inadequate portrayal of specific internal communication characteristics in this broad definition neglects the importance of the internal communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Even though blurry boundaries exists between external and internal environments (See Figure 1, Appendix A), internal communication requires a special attention (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The communication within organizations’ internal environment is highly important, in order to transmit a specific desired message towards the employees with the objective to achieve a common awareness and understanding of the communicated content, to create commitment as well as to generate an atmosphere of belonging. The achievement of these objectives requires the involvement of trusted and credible executives, the so called internal gatekeepers of a company. Since the relation between external and internal communication can be seen as a fluent transition, selected information is communicated in a well-directed way to stop unwanted implications and clarify contents before being spread within the company, but also to the external environment of the organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The understanding of internal communication has been developed over time and cannot be perceived as a “sending-receiving loop” anymore, but should be seen as “a social, meaning-building process that gives sense and meaning to social reality, organizational actions, events and organizational roles and processes” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 83).
All in all, the communication within a corporation is of fundamental importance for its performance (Viswanathan, 2010). However, the effectiveness of internal communication may vary, depending on “who communicates, to whom, in what way [and] with what content” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185).

2.2.2 Components of Internal Business Communication

The process of internal business communication involves several components, relating to the desired outcome, the communicated content as well as the communication structure and used channels (Kruse, 2011; Dainton & Zelley, 2011; Dawkins, 2005). Furthermore, the audience’s perception of the communication needs to be taken into consideration (Viswanathan, 2010; Dainton & Zelley, 2011). As there are further components that are part of the process, such as the sender or the communication design, it should be acknowledged that this paper does not provide a comprehensive list. However, in the scope of this study, the named aspects have been identified as the main components influencing the communication process and will therefore be discussed further in the following section.

Purpose and Desired Outcome

Dainton and Zelley (2011) identified the main purposes of internal business communication as establishing relationships, organizing and achieving change. By implementing an extensive internal communication, it is aimed for employees to feel engaged and empowered, which supports an increased level of productivity and innovation, but also minimizes transaction costs resulting from knowledge differences (Dainton & Zelley, 2011).

Content

One important component of the internal communication process is the communicated content and the communication design. According to Kruse (2011, p.75) “attitude and behavior changes are more likely if there is information that is accurate, easily understandable, personalized and vividly presented”. It is therefore important that the content of the message is “striking, relevant and understandable” (Dawkins, 2005, p. 112).
Communication Structure

Internal business communication can take place on and between different levels (Quirke, 2008, Smith, 2008, Welch & Jackson, 2007). On the one hand, horizontal communication can be seen as the communication that takes place between persons who are at the same level, namely, manager to manager or employee to employee. Dawkins (2005) underlines that companies tend to underestimate the power of its employees as a communication channel in this connection. Due to word-of-mouth communication among other things, employees “have a wide reach among other stakeholder groups and are considered as particularly credible information sources” (Dawkins, 2005, p. 118). Hierarchical communication on the other hand is the communication between different levels, such as from manager to employee (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The research by Dainton and Zelley (2011) reveals that an improved hierarchical communication trickling down from senior executives may improve employees’ satisfaction with the internal communication. This augmented spread of information on and between different levels within the company, also known as the multiplier effect, can increase the awareness of relevant topics, such as sustainability and thereby augment the perception by the audience (see for illustration Figure 2, Appendix A). Thereby it is crucial that the communicating person is seen as competent and credible in order to make the communication valuable (Kruse, 2011).

The communication can take place as a transmission, when information is simply transferred to the audience, as well as in terms of a dialogue, which enables the interaction of employees (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). Generally, the two-way structure is seen as more effective in communicating issues. However, especially in large companies, the one-way transfer of communication is considered to be more efficient in order to reach a wide range of employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Communication Channels

Different communication ways and channels can be used to spread the information about the sustainability idea, goals and strategies, each of which having different effects on the audience (Godemann, 2011; Dainton & Zelley, 2011). The purpose and aim of the communication influences which channels are used, i.e. aspects such as the size of the target audience or desired participation and interaction determines the media choice. New technologically advanced communication tools, such as intranet or information
screens, are progressively used by corporations to inform their employees, since they enable a wider reach and enhance the consistency of spreading contents (Dawkins, 2005). For the internal communication in businesses, commonly used channels are emails or intranet as these are cost- and time-efficient ways to reach a wide number of receiving employees (Sjöqvist, 2008; Smith, 2008). Meetings are preferred since they enable exchange and interaction and thereby a better understanding of communicated topics (Quirke, 2008).

An interactive communication design on these channels attracts the audience’s attention, encourages further interest about the communicated issues and can be considered as being perceived deeper as well as to be remembered more long-term (Kruse, 2011).

Perception by the Audience

Many of the classical communication theories can be criticized for granting the audience of internal communication a rather passive role and thus not taking into account all aspects of the circulating communication process (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005). Available models often neglect the two-way character of the communication process, which also involves how the receiver perceives and translates the message. The perception by the addressed audience should be considered an important component of the internal business communication process (Fielding, 2006), since according to Peloza et al. (2012, p.80), “communications are (or should be) created with an understanding of how receivers will decode and interpret those communications”. Speaking generally, it should be acknowledged that the intention of the communicator and the perception by the audience can widely diverge. This phenomenon is known as perception gap (Peloza et al, 2012) and represents a big challenge for communications. As outlined by Kruse (2011), different individuals will perceive the communicated information in altered ways, since existing personal interest and pre-knowledge of the audience facilitates the absorption of information and determines how communicated contents are perceived.

In relation to this component of the employee perception, which emphasizes the issue of the sender-receiver gap, the concept of translation intervenes. According to Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), the translation theory regards the connections between actors, ideas and objects by focusing on the phenomenon of differences between what
ideas exist and what is created out of them. The actors of an organization play a
defining role in the process of translation, since the received contents are differently
adapted, changed and translated into action mainly due to subjective attitudes and
behavior (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005). The connections
between those actors influence the routes for the ideas to travel as well as the rate and
speed of diffusion (Greenwood et al., 2008). The concept of translation acknowledges
that ideas need to be translated into an object, such as written rules or codes of conduct,
in order to be spread and appropriately put into action in other contexts (Czarniawska &
Sevón, 2005). “The translation model can help us to reconcile the fact that a text is at
the same time object-like and yet it can be read in differing ways” (Czarniawksa &
Joerges, 1996, p.23). Contents are perceived in various ways since in this process the
actors alter ideas and contribute to them in order to fit them their individual contexts
(Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

Since the perception of the audience can vary, the process of monitoring and feedback
conduction can be seen as crucial (Viswanathan, 2010). Next to communicating
regularly about inter alia the company’s goals, purposes and activities, executives are
advised to act as active listeners, pick up feedback from the audience and acknowledge
it in future communication (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). With the help of feedback
collection means, such as employee surveys, it is possible to gather in-depth information
about the employees’ perception of the contents and ways of communication, which
enables immediate action for improvement (Quirke, 2008).

The previous description of the chosen component emphasizes the variety of aspects
involved in the process of internal business communication. The next section intends to
highlight the particular aspects that also need to be taken into consideration when
communicating internally about the specific topic of environmental sustainability.

2.3 Internal Communication of Sustainability

The internal communication about sustainability issues in the business context is mainly
used to make employees aware of and educate them about related issues, to discuss
causes of unsustainable processes and to introduce solutions that can improve
sustainability within the company (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). The proper education and
information of employees is crucial, as they play a key role to communicate about those
sustainable practices towards other stakeholders, both internal and external (Dawkins, 2005). Generally, the departments and employees of companies need to fully understand how the sustainability measurements and goals affect their particular business functions in order for them to engage in the matter. Several challenges have been identified when communicating about sustainability within businesses. Sustainability associates need to clarify and spread the significance of this effort to the company’s future and the importance of everyone’s participation and furthermore encourage managers to spread the contents further. Since the sustainability program may be viewed as contradictory to other business goals and since a lack of understanding can result in employees’ resistance, a well-executed and clear communication about all matters related to sustainability is necessary (Fiksel et al., 2005). Moreover, the earlier named issues of sustainability, the differently perceived intrinsic social value as well as its tendency to normalization, lead to the problem of the target audience’s low involvement and rather passive processing of sustainability messages (Peloza et al., 2012). Since sustainability aims for a change in the long haul, the often occurring lack of processing and perception by the employees often “requires repeated exposure to generate attitude change” (Peloza et al., 2012, p. 89), which can be achieved when “firms regularly and consistently communicate their sustainability efforts over time” (Peloza et al., 2012, p. 89).

Thus, different fundamental elements and components need to be reflected on when communicating sustainability messages. According to Fiksel et al. (2005), the process of employee communication about sustainability involves several components, such as to find a common ground of understanding sustainability and define its core value to the company, translate the sustainability contents into various functions, use the multiplier effect of communication and to plan and use the sustainability communication in the long-term perspective. Firstly, the internal communication aims to create a shared understanding of what the term sustainability means by explicitly defining the concept, a clear vision as well as involved sustainability goals, strategies and tactics. In their article, Fiksel et al. (2005) give advice for how to execute internal communication of sustainability appropriately to achieve a common ground:

Search for language that resonates with employees, define it clearly, and above all, use frequent and consistent messaging. Be certain that the language chosen is interwoven
A clear core sustainability message is required to be communicated via various channels to engage the employees. Thereby, in order to achieve credibility, the communicated content should be in alignment with the company's' values and activities (Dawkins, 2005). Furthermore, it is of crucial importance to translate the general sustainability messaging into the various functions and departments of a business, such as environmental, safety and health, sales and marketing. Thereby, the values are specifically proposed to the utilities of different business departments, promising overall improved corporate performance. In different business areas, the sustainability communication targets an exchange with employees about sustainability concerns within their individual job functions, which helps to define individual roles and contribution opportunities in achieving the company’s sustainability goals (Fiksel et al., 2005).

Spreading the sustainability ideas to the whole company requires leveraging the communication multiplier effect. Especially big companies often have structures containing separate organizational units that are focused on their specific financial results. According to Fiksel et al. (2005), the sustainability communication needs to “overcome the ‘silo mentality’ that persists in many companies”. Therefore, multipliers or so called internal gatekeepers are often involved to spread the word regarding sustainability goals and missions further to groups of personnel (Deutinger, 2013). Lastly, one important dimension that needs to be considered is the long-term perspective of change towards sustainability, which requires the communication about the issue to be consistently executed and continuously improved (Fiksel et al., 2005; Dawkins, 2005).

All in all, it should be remembered that internal communication consists of several components, such as the content or used channels, and is strongly influenced by the perception of the audience. This perception can differ widely from what has been aimed to send out, due to perception gaps and translational failures. The internal communication about sustainability issues requires to commonly define and to create a shared understanding of the term, to translate it into different context, to achieve a multiplier effect as well as to plan and use the sustainability communication in the long term.
haul. The achievement of commitment and according behavior resulting from this communication is challenged by the required intrinsic motivation and the concept sustainability suffering from normalization.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 An Inductive, Exploratory Study

Since the topic of internal sustainability communication has not been studied in detail within business contexts, this study aims for an inductive exploratory inquiry as it allows us to be flexible in the inquiry process and thus lead to new insights about the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2012). The investigation has started in the broad context of exploring how the internal communication of sustainability contents is executed, which is in align with Brown’s (2006) findings of how to conduct such a study. From the flexible interpretation of the primarily collected data, it has been decided to focus this research on the interesting findings regarding the specific underlying challenges of this communication process and developed a theoretical framework respectively in congruence to the data, which is according to Saunders et al. (2012) the typical way to do inductive research.

3.2 A Case Study Approach

By studying a chosen case, it is aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of internal sustainability communication and to investigate the determinants and perception in the context of a multinational company. Thereby, in as stated by Yin (2009), the focus on a single case enables to spend more time exploring and gathering in-depth and multi-facet information. In order to stay within the scope of the paper, the focus of investigation has been on the environmental pillar of the internal communication of sustainability. Compared to the social and economic pillar of the sustainability communication, the environmental communication actually targets action and desires profound change of the audience’s behavior, which makes the communication especially challenging and thereby most interesting for this case study. The details about the chosen internationally acting company, such as the company name, country of origin, launch year, employee numbers as well as the names of the employee chosen for the interviews, have been changed to ensure anonymization.
3.3 A Combination of Research Methods

In the context of this case study, qualitative and quantitative methods are combined to collect a holistic picture of the phenomenon of internal sustainability communication. Using this mixed-method design, the context of the chosen case has been interpreted by analyzing results collected from both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark; Saunders et al., 2012). The use of both approaches enables to “limit [...] personal and methodological biases and enhances a study’s trustworthiness” (Decrop, 2004, p.162), as the weaknesses of one method can be counterbalanced with the strengths of another (Saunders et al., 2012) as well as since different viewpoints create a better understanding of the internal sustainability communication (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Interviews, a content analysis and an employee survey are used to provide a deep insight of the sustainability communication within the investigated case.

3.3.1 Interviews

Firstly, interviews are conducted, in order to have a first impression of how the internal communication about sustainability is approached within the corporation. Telephone and personal interviews with four employees in charge of environmental sustainability and communication within the case company provided valid, reliable and elaborate insight information about how the corporation communicates internally about sustainability issues (Miller et al., 2010). The interviews are conducted with Christine Kent, who is the manager of the department environmental principles and communication, Patricia Cook and Richard Owen, who are environmental managers in the business department of passenger transport as well as Emily Ross, who works for the company’s sustainability project in collaboration with environmental organizations (See Appendix C).

As the purpose of the first interviews is to give a broad overview of the context, the semi-structured questionnaire addresses the purpose, structure, process, content, channels as well as strengths and weaknesses of the internal sustainability communication in the case company. The interviews provided respondents’ realities, experiences and attitudes regarding the communication of sustainability topics within the company, which would otherwise be inaccessible (Yin, 2009). The possibility to ask follow-up questions and clarify questions is advantageous for the exploratory character of the study (Miller et al., 2010). This initial investigation has shed lights upon
problems regarding different components of the communication process, which resulted in the decision to investigate in detail about challenges the company is facing when communicating about sustainability internally. Thus, the follow-up interviews are conducted with the primary focus on the peculiar challenges within the internal sustainability communication process (See Appendix D). For subsequent use in this thesis, the interview conversations have been translated into English.

3.3.2 Content Analysis

As specific challenges regarding the communicated content have been identified from the interviews, a content analysis of the information communicated through different channels is executed. In order to get an overview of the communicated topics as well as to find out more about the access and reach of the content, the various used internal communication channels have been investigated in regards to the topics of sustainability in the working environment of the depots and the main office. The aim was to investigate what contents are communicated via intranet, newsletters, emails, or the notice board as well as how well these sustainability related messages are visible or accessible by the audience (See Appendix B). Thereby, the primarily used communication channels are examined and firstly evaluated regarding the accessibility to employees. Within the channel, the involved communicative texts are systematically examined regarding the occurrence and the essential content of sustainability (Mayring, 2004; Dainton & Zelley, 2011). Subsequently, the findings by the content examination are compared to the interviews and survey results, in order to detect inconsistencies and gaps between what is targeted to be sent out, what is actually sent out and what is perceived to be sent out.

3.3.3 Survey

Moreover, a survey has been conducted with the aim to gain information about the employees’ perception of the communicated contents and their intrinsic attitude regarding environmental sustainability. Survey questionnaires can be seen as both time and cost efficient as it enables the reach of a large sample. Surveys are often simple to answer and most people are familiar with them, which makes detailed instructions on how to fill them in rarely needed (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). This method has targeted to give insight about the opinion of employees on the role of sustainability, their feeling about the current level of information, their expectations regarding favored content and
appropriate communication channels as well as their recommendations for improvement. Using descriptive statistic methods, the survey evaluation has provided us with quantitative results, which have been used to underline and support the qualitative findings.

The inquiry occurred randomly and out of convenience, involving those employees entering one of the company’s main offices between 7.15am and 9.45am as well as all employees working in one randomly chosen depot nearby the main office. Since not all employees have computer access, the questionnaires have been personally handed out to 820 employees within the main office, as well as to 52 employees in one depot. The response rate in the main office was 20% and around 46% in the depot.

The questionnaire (attached in Appendix E) contains 14 questions and mainly includes fixed response questions that are simple and fast to answer, but also involves fields for comments for improvement suggestions. The survey’s main intention has been to find out the perception of the employees towards environmental sustainability issues. Thereby, the purpose of the questionnaire can be understood as a predominantly support for the qualitative data gained from the interviews. The study thus foregoes the provision of a holistic quantitative analysis, but instead offers a descriptive analysis of the results. The evaluation of the results can be found in Appendix F. Thereby it should be noted that not every response sums up to 100%, as the survey provides the possibility to give more than one answer to some of the questions and some questions have not been answered at all.

3.4 Research Limitations

Next to the strengths arising from the mixed-method approach, the research methodology also shows limitations. Firstly, only 7 interviews have been conducted, which might limit the depth of information. Furthermore, due to spatial distance, the study deals with limitations arising conducting interviews over the phone. Although considered a cost efficient tool, studies point out various disadvantages of telephone interviews in comparison to personal interviews, mainly in terms of missing visual communication such as the observation of the respondent’s body language (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Further research limitations might be found in the extent and objectiveness of the analysis of communicated contents, since
the analysis was done in only one of the business segments of the company at one point of time and executed according to subjectively chosen patterns.

In the context of the employee survey, one limitation can be seen in the rather low response rate of 20% in the main office. According to Christine Kent (8 May 2015) usually the response rate of the company’s employee surveys is about 60%. The unusually low rate could be due to the rather short time of only one day to return the questionnaires. Another explanation could be that only interested personnel took their time to fill in the survey, which would be in line with the findings since over 90% of the respondents indicated personal interest in the topic of environmental protection. The question therefore is how much the outcome is distorted by this fact. Therefore, as the survey captures merely a fraction of the company’s personnel, the results cannot reflect the whole company.

Moreover, the outcome of the conducted surveys might be slightly distorted due to different contexts in main office and depot, such as the fact that inside the depot no monitor exists.

4 Case: Green Movement Company

The following section intends to present the case of the Green Movement Company, focusing on its internal communication about environmental sustainability. After introducing general background information, the findings from the case study regarding the different components of the communication will be described, highlighting occurring limitations.

4.1 Company’s Background

The multinational Green Movement Company was founded in the early 1990s, acting in the transport industry with the main business segments of passenger transport involving train and bus transport, logistic transport as well as infrastructure business. Within their country of origin, the Green Movement Company is market leader for passenger train transport and second biggest logistic transport business. Nowadays, approximately 400,000 employees work for the corporation around the world.

According to Christine Kent, the Green Movement Company is a sustainably operating business, not only because it uses environmentally-friendly transportation means, but
also due to responsible and social benefits for the personnel. As one of the first companies, it integrated their sustainability performance with their annual report. The motivation behind is that “sustainability performance and overall performance of the company cannot be separated anymore” said Richard Owen (8 Apr 2015), manager for environmental protection. “In 2007, the first sustainability report was published, which at the same time marks the starting point for the internal sustainability communication. However, it really accelerated when in 2012 the company strategy 2020 was published” (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). The company’s new business strategy can be equated to a sustainability strategy, since it aims to achieve goals from the social, environmental and economic pillar combined. “To be a sustainable company is in our genes, but through the new strategy it is now systematized and binding, e.g. now the executives not only have economic targets, but also ecological and social requirements for their commissions” (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). Regarding the ecological pillar, the company set the goal to become an environmental pioneer of sustainably acting companies within the field of transportation. However, according to Patricia Cook (21 Jan 2015), the environmental targets and measurements of the new strategy did not reach everyone sufficiently, thus a regular exchange and communication about sustainability was implemented.

4.2 Internal Sustainability Communication

In order to create an understanding of how sustainability is communicated about within the Green Movement Company, the following section describes the findings regarding purpose, contents, structure, channels and employee perception of the communication.

Purpose

The purpose of the internal sustainability communication is to inform employees about the strategic goals and measurements and involve employees from different business departments to work together towards the set targets. According to Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015):

The aim is to create a uniform basic understanding, but also to achieve a multiplier effect. Since there are a lot of employees in the company who also have external touch points, it is important that each employee is informed about the progress that the company does in regards to sustainability in order to be able to communicate that to the external environment as well as to stand behind it. The communication serves also to
convince the employees to identify with the company and to make them recognize that it is not all about economic interest, but that also other values are important.

Furthermore, it is desired to achieve an identification and commitment by the employees regarding the topic. Christine Kent (20 Feb 2015) said:

So far, our first aim is to reach out to the employees in a way that they can identify themselves with our new strategy, because it does not work if it is implemented from top to the bottom. It needs to be ‘lived’ and this only works through the employees. That is why it is so important to highlight that this is something everyone concerns and not pressed upon them from the top. But that it is also in the interest of the employee how to participate. Thus the highest goal of our communication is to create identification, involve the employee and show the importance of each person.

Communication Content

The communicated contents of the Green Movement Company vary from general information on sustainability and environment topics via information about the company’s strategy, environmental measurements and goals to education about how everyone can contribute to fulfill the goal of becoming environmental-pioneer by giving advices on how to behave ecologically at the workplace (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015; Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). Overall, the content of the communicated messages varies related to whom it is directed at. The communication towards managers for instance contains mainly strategic information about the company’s sustainability measurements, while the communication addressed at the employees instead involves content such as how every single one can contribute to the company goal of becoming environmental pioneer (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). The content analysis, as can be found summarized in Appendix B, has revealed that highly relevant contents such as the mentioned emission campaign or conserving resources are often repeatedly communicated not only over time but also on different channels. The intranet suggested that the communication about environmental contents has increased. In 2012 two posts were published on current environmental topics, in 2013 there were four and in 2014 already seven contributions.

By acknowledging that “the more concrete the content is, the easier it is to identify with it”, Christine Kent (20 Feb 2015) affirmed Kruse’s (2011) and Dawkins’ (2005) theory. According to her, in this context the Green Movement Company faces a “particular backlog demand”. One challenge with the internal sustainability communication lies in the term sustainability itself, as it “is not per se equally understood and different
meanings are read into it. One needs a lot of words to describe the term sufficiently. Also, the term sustainability is nowadays overused” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). According to Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) another “problem is often the complexity of the topics. There are a lot of sustainability related topics, simply because the company is so widely positioned. It is not easy to communicate it comprehensibly in a way that employees can classify which relevance each topic has”.

Communication Structure
On the group level, the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) is responsible for the organization of sustainability concerns, supported by a committee steering topics and projects across each business division and unit. Nevertheless, the communication is delegated to the responsible departments within each business segment, also showing complex sustainability communication processes. In the investigated passenger transport area, “there is not one ‘sustainability manager’ as you call it, but different departments taking care jointly of the sustainability topics and their communication, for example, the department for environmental protection and the department for business strategy are involved” (Patricia Cook, 21 Jan 2015).

Advantageous for the internal communication of relevant environmental sustainability issues is that the corporation is well structured and provides many possibilities and resources to extensively spread information via different channels. However, the various possibilities and communication ways also propose challenges and create high uncertainty about “how to give the employees an understanding of the content, how to ensure that it reaches all employees in need for the information and how to send the message in a way that they can use it” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). According to Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) and Christine Kent (20 Feb 2015), the communication within the Green Movement Company consists of mix of transmitting information in a one-way direction and creating an exchange with the audience in terms of meetings or discussion rounds. Although various interactive measurements are taken, the focus can still be seen as being on the transmission of information to an audience as broad as possible. As this involvement of a great bandwidth of employees is enhanced through a multiplier effect, executives are encouraged to communicate about the issue in their departments. According to Christine Kent (20 Feb 2015), it is primarily the responsibility of the managers to pass on important information. Although there are
many activities and initiatives actively directed at getting all employees involved, it is always better when managers also support the idea. However, the managers’ involvement in the sustainability communication is still on a voluntary basis (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). Therefore, the participation is not always as high as desired. Christine Kent (8 May 2015) mentioned:

> We notice strongly that the environmental sustainability idea is well implemented at the Green Movement board of executives, but the commitment decreases towards the lower management levels. Hereby, the focus lies often still on the economic numbers. We have experienced that employees try to accomplish sustainability actions, but do not get the desired support by their managers

The lack of support by the managers is also partly reflected in the survey results. In the depot, only one executive responded, indicating he was personally not interested, nor uninterested in the topic. This might be the reason why 57% feel not well informed about ecological sustainability, regardless if they are personally interested or not.

As stated by Patricia Cook (21 Jan 2015), the complexity of the Green Movement Company and each business segment make the communication process challenging. Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) and Christine Kent (8 May 2015) identified it as particularly demanding to send out universally relevant sustainability contents, as the company has a rather heterogeneous employee structure and therefore different target groups among the various departments with individual needs and interests. “Employees in the depot have different interests and needs compared to the office executives or the train personnel” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). This is also reflected in our survey. In the depot, people are mostly working with hazardous materials nearly on daily basis, thus they are strongly concerned about waste disposal, whereas in the headquarter people care more about resource efficiency and conservation of resources, such as paper or energy savings. In relation to this, a more severe problem becomes obvious, which regards the obstacle of using the perceived information. Only 11% have used the communicated information in their daily work life, while 57% indicated they can barely use the apprehended messages (Appendix F, Figure 8). Thus, there seem to be a gap between the perceived information and desired ecological behavior at the workplace. Interestingly, the results do not reveal any significant difference of preferred and
currently used channels, which indicates that the reason for this gap cannot be found within the communication channels (Appendix F, Figure 10).

Taking all these factors into account, both, Christine Kent and Patricia Cook (2015), remarked concerns that the internal messages about ecological sustainability might not reach all employees equally.

**Communication Channels**

With this objective to reach all employees sufficiently, various channels are used for the communication about ecological sustainability within the company. Patricia Cook (21 Jan 2015) stated that “for the department of passenger transport, environmental sustainability topics are mainly communicated via email”, whereby the recipient list is so far limited to around 55 interested employees. Christine Kent (20 Feb 2015) furthermore mentioned “I would say our main medium is the employee magazine. We also communicate via intranet, but from 190,000 employees in the main office only 60,000 have computer access, thus our main media is the magazine. It is released once a month and each edition communicates about sustainable topics”. On the intranet, next to pure text information, also a short cartoon about sustainable workplace behavior, a small emission saving competition, namely the campaign of CO2-Compass or an online quiz about waste management aim to make the communication more creative and interactive. Also, other communication channels, such as a notice board, internally known as Green Board, as well as posters or the Eco-Etiquette (a small advisor of how to behave ecological friendly at working place), are utilized to communicate about the company related environmental issues, goals and contribution possibilities. Thereby, the posters or the monitor communicate about specific environmental topic or goals and give advices in specific areas such as water, emissions or hazardous substances.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the survey results identified that the mainly used channels of emails, magazines and intranet, are also the ones that are used by most employees. Around 64% get their information about environmental protection through the employee magazines, 39% through the intranet and 31% via email. Further, the finding by Quirke (2008) that meetings are preferable over emails could be rejected in this case as only 7% currently get information via meetings. It should be noted, that employees are also influenced by the external micro environment, through public conferences,
advertisements, etc., which is partly reflected in our survey as around 5% of the respondents answered they get their information about ecological sustainability through external news as well as from the external magazine published by the company (see for more information Appendix F, Figure 10).

![Communication Channels](image)

**Figure 3: Internally Used Communication Channels by Personnel, Own Illustration, 2015**

**Employee Perception**

The survey findings point out that 63% of the employee respondents and 71% of the responding executive feel well-informed by the communication about sustainability within the Green Movement Company. However, as can be seen below in Figure 4, 11% of the responding operatives feel rather badly or badly informed and 7% of the responding managers feel rather badly informed.
Even though, the communicated content includes various topics regarding the ecological pillar of sustainability, one setback of the communication can be found when looking at the perception of the topics. For example, the survey results show that around 80% pointed to topics of renewable energy, when asked what information they perceived since the last year. This topic might have been communicated extensively over the year. However, at the time of the content investigation, this has been the least apparent matter and has been only communicated via the notice board, which only 8% of the respondents paid attention to. It has been observed that the interactive campaigns are not always accepted and embraced. Another example, the “CO2-Compass more or less failed due to stress factors, registrations and high commitment, moreover, most had the feeling of paternalism and abandonment” (Emily Ross, 8 Apr 2015). Nevertheless, it has been picked up and prolonged within the company and its communication - each channel poses information about the CO2-Compass but is remembered only by 2% of the respondents of our survey. Furthermore, although the communication aims to connect all environmental topics to the company's strategy, it has not always been perceived accordingly. “One also tries to integrate the term ‘environmental pioneer’ in the communication, e.g. ‘Use the CO2-Compass, so that we become environmental pioneer’, this would be a typical statement. We always try to put the selected environmental topics in connection to the strategy” (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). Therefore, it is remarkable, that only 6% of the survey respondents indicated the strategy as being communicated (Appendix F, Figure 9). A survey respondent even
stated that until reaching the end of the survey “it never occurred to [her] how important environmental protection is within the company”, even though the topic regarding sustainability is highly apparent in each channel and integrated in the strategy since 2012. Overall, 12% of the respondents, who filled in the comment box, indicated the wish to receive more information on sustainability and stated that too little is communicated. This is confirmed by Christine Kent (8 May 2015), who estimated that the sustainability content is represented in 20% of the internal communication, while approximately 80% the communication deals with other contents. “I think the challenge with sustainability communication is the competition with other contents within the company. It is such a big company where lots of business related information is spread. Therefore, the sustainability messages rarely achieve top priority” (Emily Ross, 4 Apr 2015).

Moreover, Christine Kent believes there is always an intrinsic motivation of how sustainability is perceived. Thereby the situation within the company is related to the societal attitude and recognition of sustainability (Patricia Cook, 28 May 2015). “Right now [the employees] focus lays upon social benefits they can get from the company - the center of attention is on economic and social points of view, we still struggle with ecological topics” (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). According to Patricia Cook (28 May 2015), the employees consider the train traffic with the renewable energy sources already as very sustainable, which results in employees not focusing on how to improve the environmental sustainability of the company even further. In regards to the intrinsic motivation, the question is whether there is a connection of those who are personally interested and well informed. Our investigation showed that most channels require high intrinsic motivation and personal interest, since for example on the intranet employees have to actively search for and click through the information. This is however only partly congruent with our findings. 45% of all respondents feel very interested in sustainability, 48% of which indicated they feel rather well and 17% well informed. Only one person, representing 0.5% of the respondents, specified no interest in the topic, but feels moderately informed. When differentiating between the main office and depot, it is interesting to see, that within the headquarter 92% of the respondent employees indicated a high personal interest. However, against the assumption that personally interested employees are also the ones who feel better informed about topics
surrounding environmental protection within the company, only 67% of the sample indicating interest feels very well or well informed. It means that around a quarter of interested employees feel less informed about ecological sustainability. Within the depot this indicated perception gap is even higher as of 88% who are personally very interested, only 57% feel very well or well informed.

![Information Level of Very Interested Personnel]

**Figure 5: Degree to which Very Interested Employees Feel Informed, Own Illustration, 2015**

According to the survey, the employees, regardless of their level of interest in the environmental aspects of sustainability, do not necessarily communicate about sustainability with other personnel. Only 10 out of 191 respondents, representing 5% of the sample, stated they would talk to their colleagues often or very often about the topic of sustainability. Almost 40% of the respondents indicated they would talk seldom about this issue with their colleagues or 34% only from time to time (See Figure 6 in Appendix F). Unsurprisingly, the uninterested respondent does not talk about this issue.

Overall, the requirement in the Green Movement Company is to harmonize the three pillars of sustainability and to achieve implicitness for looking after social and environmental outcomes when conducting any business measurement. “It is desired for the employees to not regard the issues side by side, but to consider them as conglomerated. This is firstly not easily done and secondly needs a long time” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). However, the perception and sustainable development of the audience, including what contents the audience wants, what communication way they prefer, but also who sticks to the sustainable practices or attends further
sustainability trainings, has not been monitored (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015; Richard Owen, 8 Apr 2015; Emily Ross, 8 Apr 2015).

5 Discussion

From the case description that highlighted how environmental sustainability is internally communicated within the Green Movement Company, the following discussion part aims to analyze the influencing aspects that make the internal communication of sustainability contents particularly challenging. Three main themes have been identified as representing potential limitations to the well-executed communication of sustainability contents towards employees.

5.1 Abstractness and Complexity of Sustainability Content

The first theme that has been identified as a challenge for the internal communication of sustainability is the abstractness and complexity of the content related to the idea of sustainability. Accuracy and comprehensibility have been identified by Kruse (2011) and Dawkins (2005) as crucial for an unobjectionable communication. In the case study, however, all three interviewees described the sustainability contents as too abstract, intangible, complex and not easy to explain. This can be related back to the concept of sustainability involving various aspects, which makes it notably hard to clearly define and makes the related contents at some points inapprehensible to some employees (Hempel, 2009; Bell & Morse, 2008). The challenge is that the term sustainability is interpreted in different ways and also considered as overused and worn-out (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).

The Green Movement Company tried to minimize translation issues and content misunderstandings, which have been highlighted in translation theory (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005). Instead of communicating about the intangible idea of environmental sustainability, the communication spreads messages related to the more concrete term of environmental protection. In the Green Movement Company it has therefore been tried to use and inform about more specific phenomena and practical goals in areas like climate protection, water, hazardous substances or waste management. In accordance with Fiksel et al. (2005), the meaning of those might be better comprehensible and more tangible for the majority of employees as not as many different definitions exist and the relation to the work context becomes more
explicit. Also, individual contribution possibilities are better applicable to the concrete goals of the different areas of environmental issues (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). According to Fiksel et al.’s (2005) finding of the importance of intertwining language and branding message, the Green Movement Company tries to always interrelate the communicated environmental topic to the company strategy and goals by integrating the term environmental-pioneer (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). The integration of two-way communication channels such as personal meetings also aims to minimize the effect of the audience misunderstanding the content (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015), since immediate feedback opportunities ease the interactive communication (Quirke, 2008).

However, as highlighted by Christine Kent (8 May 2015), the Green Movement Company still struggles with the challenge of breaking down the requirements of sustainability, but at the same time conveying the big picture and understanding how each contribution is weighted.

### 5.2 Complexity of Business and Communication Structures

Another identified theme refers to the complexity of business and communication structures within the Green Movement Company. The communication of sustainability contents demands for a wide audience, which is challenged by complex structures as well as various target groups within the firm, requiring different types of information.

**Desired Audience Size and Complexity of Company Structures**

In order to achieve significant results and change towards greater sustainability in a business, all employees and departments need to collaborate to carry out more sustainable business practices (Emily Ross, 4 Apr 2015). While other business communication contents, such as news in the area of human resources or the implementation of a new accounting system, might rather concern and affect specific departments at a time without requiring everyone’s attention and participation, sustainability change depends on the participation and collaboration from all employees jointly. Reluctance of sustainability, even from only parts of the personnel, will affect the outcome of the Green Movement Company becoming environmental-pioneer negatively. It is therefore desired to commit the various departments to pull together and act according to sustainable practices towards the sustainable goals (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015; Emily Ross, 8 Apr 2015).
Resulting from this need of a great audience, also in the investigated case specific challenges have become obvious for the communication ways, structures and designs of the company. Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) confirmed that for the communication of sustainability there is no uniform or consistent way of communicating to the wide audience of all departments. To investigate properly, who communicates to whom is therefore difficult, as the communication ways and structures in the Green Movement Company are intricate. Generally, the Department for Environmental Protection and specifically the Department for Environmental Principles and Communication take care of the internal communication of environmental sustainability topics. In quarterly conferences the communication actions are discussed with contact persons from different business areas, who carry out the contents into the various departments. This suggests that the corporation struggles to overcome its complex business structure with the mentality of various departments working individually. In order to manage this intricacy, the communication for different business sectors is taken care of by different responsible employees.

In order to reach every employee with the relevant sustainability contexts, it is of importance to use various channels and ways. By using various communication channels such as emails, employee magazines, intranet, notice boards, monitors as well as meetings or events, the Green Movement Company involves both the transmission as well as the dialogue approach of communication (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). The dialogue-approach can be considered as so far mainly used for internal sustainability communications on the manager level and thus shows improvement potential (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). Due to time and logistical reasons, the focus so far can be seen as relying on information transmission channels (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). Thereby, mainly the size of the target audience determines the media choice. Since the target audience in the Green Movement Company is huge, the transmission approach is considered as more effective form of communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Thus, with most of the used communication channels, the employees have the possibility to be elaborately informed about environmental topics and the company strategy, but miss the option of discussions and exchanges about the communicated topics. Thereby, it is of great importance to find out which channel is mainly used by the employees in order to reach the majority (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The interviewees Patricia Cook and
Christine Kent revealed the importance of newsletter emails and employee magazine, mainly due to the advantages of reaching a wide audience at relatively low timely and financial efforts (Dawkins, 2005; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Sjöquist, 2008; Smith, 2008). The favored communication channels match the survey results concerning channels preferred by the employees. As there is a variety of other media used as well, it seems they have found a good way to reach a high number of employees.

Different Needs and Desires of Target Groups

Not only a wide audience and complex structure within the company propose a difficulty to the communication, but also the heterogeneous personnel. The case study has exemplified the challenge to find the right degree as well as the right sort of information for the communication to meet the needs and wants from different departments and individuals. According to Fiksel et al. (2005), the internal communication is often hampered by the various subdivisions with opposing desires for information. Differences on an individual level occur mainly due to varying levels of personal interest and unequal needs for information arising from the multifaceted positions in the company.

While some employees are personally interested in the topic and want to gain as much information as possible, others might be annoyed by the information overflow about sustainability contents. This gap between those employees that want to know more about contribution options and others, who do not want to be patronized, can be related to the general phenomenon of some people not appreciating to be told how to behave and what to do (Emery, 2012). Although the communicated contents about sustainable behavior at the workplace surely help to teach employees how each one can personally contribute, employees either do not appreciate the demanding character of the communication or have the impression that little actions like switching off lights or heaters are not sufficient to achieve change (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015).

Also, the Green Movement Company faces the challenge of having a heterogeneous employee structure. The different employee types, such as the workers in depots, the office executives or the personnel working in trains, are in need for altering information (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). In line with this challenge, the survey indicated a mismatch regarding the applicability of contents. Although, one of the internal
sustainability communication goals, as stated by Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015), is to spread contents and advisory information that relate to the common work context of the different departments, only 11% of the survey respondents said they could use the communicated content in their daily work routine. The fact that 89% of the respondents rated the environmental communication content as not always applicable to their work life indicates that the content type is rather insignificant for their daily working practices. Some employees therefore expect more communication about how the sustainability issues relate to everyone’s work as well as how each department as a whole can engage and thus how employees can contribute on a bigger scale to more sustainable work practices (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015).

5.3 Sustainability as Intrinsic Value

The third major challenge identified is the intrinsic character of sustainability. In the business world, the assertiveness of the sustainability idea still suffers from an overall lack of priority and requires, due to the voluntary character, intrinsic value and motivation from employees in order for them to understand and comply with the sustainable goals and practices. Since this intrinsic motivation is not equally given to all employees, perception gaps and attitude behavior gaps exist. Furthermore, the differing levels of interest in the topic also pose a challenge for the achievement of the company-wide spread of information through word-of-mouth.

Intrinsic Motivation

The case study results add to Ziemann’s (2011) findings, which identified sustainability as intrinsic social value and explained the differing perception of the issue with different interests and attitudes towards the idea. Concluding from the investigated case, the awareness, translation and perception of the communicated messages refers to each employee's values, principles and depends on personal attitudes and interest towards the topic (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). The internal communication of sustainability therefore desires to address the employee’s specific intrinsic values, so they are committed to the new strategy, are aware, feel understood and belonging towards the company and its goals (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

In the case of the Green Movement Company, one explanation for that not all employees feel equally well informed could be drawn from the often apparent need for
self-inquiry and active search for the relevant content. The commonly used communication channels for information transmission are rather suitable for employees that are personally interested in the topic and therefore are willing to seek out information. While 91% of the respondents of the survey were rather or very interested in the topic, indicating a willingness to inform themselves, only 66% of them regard themselves as actually being well-informed. Those 66% can be assumed to put active self-effort into collecting information about the topic, since the inquiry, specifically the information search for the content analysis, has shown that immense time investment is needed to gather sufficient information about all matters. The result that 33% of the interested respondents feel not well informed might be interpreted in different ways, such as that the interested personnel expects to get better informed than the status quo or that they do not have the time to actively search for information.

**Missing Priority of Environmental Sustainability**

In relation to the intrinsic character of environmental sustainability, the rather low priority of the topic in the context of business needs to be noted. Christine Kent (8 May 2015) estimated that only 20% of the internal communication is about sustainability issues. This can be traced back to the problem of competing contents and values within the company (Emily Ross, 4 Apr 2015). In line with Soederbaums (2008) finding of the remaining importance of economic over environmental aspects, problems mentioned in the case study include the pressure to accomplish financial targets in the departments and employees. Although the desired ecological behavior is aspired to be amalgamated with everyday production, often the importance of sustainability disappears next to other topics. Even though, especially in operative departments, time and convenience reasons are responsible for the insufficient integration of sustainable ideas into work contents, the absent priority could also be traced back to a missing intrinsic voluntary motivation of employees (Christine Kent, Patricia Cook 2015). The internal communication therefore can be considered to struggle with getting the personnel sufficiently involved.

**Achievement of Multiplier Effect**

This lack of priority and intrinsic interest has also been found to challenge the employee to employee communication, which is crucial for the widespread distribution of sustainability information. As described in available literature, one efficient way to get a
high bandwidth of employees involved in the topic of sustainability is to use the multiplier effect and involve trusted internal gatekeepers (Fiksel et al., 2005; Deutinger, 2013). In the Green Movement Company, the employees responsible for environmental protection are in charge of forwarding and spreading the information and ideas to other departments in their business area, which indicates a horizontal communication structure (Dawkins, 2005). As it is important that each employee is informed about the sustainability progress, a multiplier effect is desired to be achieved (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). However, the survey identified a major problem in relation to the employee to employee spreading, as 93% of the respondents do not talk often about the issues to their colleagues. This finding highlights that the multiplier effect does not work sufficiently. It can therefore be concluded that it is especially challenging to not only make people aware of the issue of sustainability, but furthermore to make them committed in order to make them want to communicate about the matter further.

In relation to this, the findings from the study showcase the important role of managers’ engagement and their personal interest in sustainability for reaching a multiplier effect, relating to a hierarchical spread of information (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Within the Green Movement Company, managers of all departments are encouraged to assume their responsibility to spread the sustainability information among their employees, since the managers’ engagement supports the sustainability communication (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015). In order for this communication structure to work out, it is important for the manager to actually exemplify the sustainability idea in their work practices, since it has been identified as crucial that the communicating person is seen as competent and credible (Kruse, 2011).

Although the sustainability idea is considered as well-anchored in the Green Movement board of management, the identification with the topic decreases towards lower management levels. It has been experienced that sustainable practices of departments were hindered, as executives did not support sustainable campaigns initiated by the employees (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015). Also the survey results somewhat support the importance of the managers’ personal attitude in support of sustainability, underlining the role model function of leading employees. However, the top-down sustainability communication from manager to employees so far remains mainly on a voluntary basis.
and might therefore not be carried out as extensively as one could wish for (Patricia Cook, 21 Jan 2015).

Perception Gaps

The described aim of the employees’ dedicated participation and willingness to spread the idea of sustainability highly depends on the conviction and commitment of the personnel (Welch & Jackson, 2007), but also on the understanding and correct perception of the communicated messages. However, the case study suggests that the communicated sustainability contents are not only neglected, but often also misperceived. As pointed out by authors such as Peloza et al. (2012), Kruse (2011) and Czarniawksa and Joerges (1996), the perception by the audience might not always match reality or what has been targeted to be sent out. In the Green Movement Company, 91% of the respondents rate the importance of environmental sustainability within the organization as high or very high. It can be stated that the missing 9% therefore misperceive the important role that is aimed to be conveyed through the extensive communication. Moreover, the survey results suggest that the majority of employees do not feel well informed about the strategy, which highlights a discrepancy to the aim of relating contents to the strategy goal of becoming an environmental pioneer.

Furthermore, in relation to the communicated content, one can find gaps between the desired outcome of the communication and the perception by the audience. One example for the communication perception gap is the CO2-Compass. The campaign, which represented an option to actively contribute and therefore extensively communicated on different channels as substantial part of the internal sustainability communication, was apparently not absorbed sufficiently by the audience, as only 2% of the respondents actively remembered the communication about it. This proves the ideas of sender-receiver-gaps and translation theory, as the idea behind the communicated content is not always coherent with what is understood (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Peloza et al. 2012; Kruse, 2011).

Attitude Behavior Gap

In the Green Movement Company, as pointed out by Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015), the sustainable behavior and compliance with sustainable practices is still on a voluntary
basis. The compliance and further education in this field is not always reviewed and monitored (Richard Owen, 8 Apr 2015; Emily Ross, 8 Apr 2015). Once the information is given, it is up to the employees how to implement the advice in their work context. The survey results have shown that the sustainable attitude does not always align with people’s behavior. Although the personal attitude is promising as 91% survey respondents indicated personal interest in the topic of environmental sustainability, only 11% have applied the communicated contents and advice in work life. Some contents might not be applicable to each employee’s work context, but other general advisory contents such as to take the stairs or switch off lights when possible, should be applicable for everyone. Therefore, a gap between the existing interest in the topic and the behavior in reality, as has been described by Peloza et al. (2012) becomes apparent. One possible explanation for this result can be related back to the general issue of society showing a gap between sustainable attitudes and unsustainable behavior (Antimova, et al., 2012; Budeanu, 2007; Emery, 2012; Leiserowitz et al., 2006; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Even people with a desirable attitude might not act sustainable, in case higher inconvenience or time extensions are involved (Emery, 2012; Budeanu, 2007). Also the previously mentioned issue regarding the normalization of the sustainability concept (Ziemann, 2011) might induce this gap as the continuing communication of the same sustainability content lead to employees’ being increasingly blunted and desensitized which results in a diminished willingness to act accordingly. Nevertheless, a change towards sustainable behavior cannot be accomplished rapidly and thus requires a frequent communication process.

Character of Desired Change
As outlined earlier, sustainability generally targets change in the long run and thus also the internal communication about sustainability takes a long-term perspective when aiming to achieve a change of employee behavior and even the corporate culture (Fiksel et al., 2005). This is in line with the findings of the investigated case, as the purpose of the internal communication of sustainability is to achieve a long-term change performance towards a more environmental-friendly behavior at work and in everyday-life (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015; Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). Consenting to Peloza et al. (2012) and Fiksel et al. (2005), who previously identified consistent communication as important for achieving change, the Green Movement Company communicates about
the issues, goals and strategies of sustainability repeatedly and regularly over a longer time period. Thereby it is desired to highlight the relevance of the topic and to ensure a deep internalization of the issue among the employees. It is desired for the employees to apprehend sustainability as implicitness, which is linked to all business measurements taken (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).

In order to avoid normalization, as described by Ziemann (2011), as well as making the sustainability communication well-perceived over a long-time, creativity, alternation and monitoring is necessary. The quarterly changing focus of the communicated contents ensures alternation and supports that a majority of employees keep being well informed about a variety of different topics (Patricia Cook, 21 Jan 2015). Furthermore, as Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) explained in accordance with the reviewed literature (Viswanathan, 2010; Dainton & Zelley, 2011; Quirke, 2008), it requires an extensive monitoring and feedback process in order to improve the communication content, channels and design over time according to the perception and interests of the target audience with the aim to reach them faster and more efficiently. However, according to Patricia Cook (4 Feb 2015) a monitoring process is so far non-existent, which hinders the effectiveness of the communication, and thus reaching the goal of becoming environmental pioneer.

The following table gives a summarized overview about the identified themes that challenge the internal communication of environmental sustainability as well as the involved components and arguments related to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Arguments from Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstractness and Complexity of Content</td>
<td>Intangibility and Broadness of Sustainability Term</td>
<td>“Sustainability is not per se equally understood and different meanings are read into it” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There are a lot of sustainability related topics, simply because the company is so widely positioned” (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Identified Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Arguments from Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of Communication and Business Structure</td>
<td>Need for Wide Audience</td>
<td>“[I]t is important that each employee is informed about the progress” (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex Business and Communication Structure</td>
<td>“There is no uniform or consistent way of communicating about sustainability to the wide audience of all departments” (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different Target Groups</td>
<td>“Employees in the depot have different interests and needs than the office executives or the train personnel” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>“The topic needs to be taken on by executives on a voluntary basis” (Patricia Cook, 4 Feb 2015). The awareness and perception of communicated contents depends on each individual’s values, attitudes and interest (Christine Kent, 20 Feb 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing Priority of Sustainability</td>
<td>Christine Kent (8 May 2015) estimated that only 20% of overall internal communication regards sustainability. “[...]the focus lies often still on the economic numbers” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement of Multiplier Effect</td>
<td>“We have experienced that employees try to accomplish sustainability actions, but do not get the desired support by their managers” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception Gaps</td>
<td>The survey revealed gaps between the desired outcome of the communication and the perception by the audience, e.g. the communication about the strategy was not perceived sufficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude Behavior Gap</td>
<td>91% survey respondents indicated personal interest in the topic of environmental sustainability, but only 11% have applied the communicated contents and advice in work life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-Term Character of Change</td>
<td>“It is desired for the employees to not regard the issues side by side, but to consider them as conglomerated. This is firstly not easily done and secondly needs a long time” (Christine Kent, 8 May 2015).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Summary of Identified Challenges, 2015*
Table 1 illustrates the three identified main challenges and their underlying components, representing the intricacy of clear sustainability communication. The motive of sustainability’s intrinsic value character can be considered the most severe one, as it unites several subcomponents that are not easily approached. Especially the level of intrinsic motivation to act sustainably can hardly be influenced by the internal communication, as it is rather related to and impacted by the societal recognition as well as individual external environment of employees (Patricia Cook, 28 May 2015).

6 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the challenges when communicating about sustainability within multinational enterprises. The case study examined the context of the Green Movement Company, which provided in-depth information about particular challenges this company is facing when communicating about the issues of the ecological pillar of sustainability.

Thereby, three themes have been identified and discussed. One major challenge is the abstract and complex content of sustainability, which makes it intricate to create tangible and understandable messages that are relevant for the personnel. Furthermore, complex company and communication structures represent a challenge, as the need reach of an extraordinarily large target audience is hindered. Altering needs and desires by the diverse target groups within a company make different contents relevant and hamper the common communication. Moreover, the intrinsic character and personal perception of sustainability topics can be considered the most challenging theme, taking into consideration various aspects. The topic of environmental sustainability is often not prioritized over the economic targets, since the attitude and personal interest of employees thereby determines how well and to what extent the information is perceived. Gaps between what has been sent out and what is received and perceived by the audience can occur and limit the communication outcome. Furthermore, also gap between the employees’ attitude and actual sustainable behavior have been identified as limitation in relation to the intrinsic character of sustainability. As the intrinsic adaption to the sustainability idea and the internalized execution of sustainable practices takes time, the long-term character of the change that is desired by the sustainability communication has been discussed as another challenge.
From the last identified theme of the challenging intrinsic character, it can be concluded that one of the most challenging aspects for the internal communication of sustainability lies in the roots of society, as the business context reflects the societal situation in which still not everyone cares personally enough about the topic. As long as environmental sustainability is not an universally recognized and valued idea, it will subsequently remain hard in the business context to effectively communicate about it, as mostly the interested and intrinsically motivated audience will perceive the communicated messages in an appropriate and sufficient way.

6.1 Practical Implications

From the challenges that have been identified, practical implications can be made. In the context of internal environmental sustainability communication, it can be recommended to create contents that are as specific and tangible as possible in order to create a common understanding and to avoid perception differences. Moreover, important contents should have a regular presence in the communication and be spread in a way that the information is easily accessible to everyone. A regular monitoring process is crucial in order to find out the diverse needs and wishes of the target audiences as well as to detect potential perception gaps. Thereby, the contents can be optimized according to the internal business contexts and perceptions corrected before the information spread.

The implementation of more interactive communication approaches, such as educational workshops, can enhance the understanding of communicated issues and should be at least accessible to those who are interested to participate in them. This approach gives meaning to the abstract word of sustainability and potentially enhances the multiplier effect as employees are increasingly engaged.

The study suggested that the communication character of mainly voluntary information might not suffice in order to also involve uninterested personnel. Companies could therefore think about minimizing the intrinsic voluntary character by introducing more compulsory measurements, such as regular obligatory meetings and training sessions, as well as by monitoring the employee’s compliance to sustainable practices better.
6.2 Limitations and Further Research

One can generally conclude that this study has shown limitations in terms of generalization, since the results from studying one case company are difficult to be universalized. Further companies would need to be analyzed in depth, in order to conclude on a general pattern of how international businesses communicate about sustainability internally and about the specific challenges that they are facing.

Since the paper has not studied the influence of gender and age on the perception of sustainable issues, further investigation might reveal a possible dependency that would add up to the list of challenges. In relation to the multiplier effect, further investigation can be suggested about the role of executives and their influence on how well employees can carry out sustainable actions can be raised. Also the challenges of the companies’ internationality could be researched, e.g. regarding how different national conditions and contexts demand for individually adapted communication campaigns and measurements. In comparison to the environmental sustainability approach, it would also be interesting to investigate the communication of the social economic pillars and look for similarities and differences in how the communication is approached and perceived as well as what challenges thereby arise.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Illustration Internal Communication
Appendix B: Notes Content Analysis
Appendix C: Table Interview Partners
Appendix D: Interview Questions
Appendix E: Survey Questionnaire
Appendix F: Survey Diagrams
Appendix A: Illustration Internal Communication

As can be seen from the figure, the internal and external business environment show blurry boundaries, which emphasizes the ongoing information exchange between those environments. However, the focus of this paper lies on the communication within the internal environment. Strategic managers send out wanted information towards the employees (illustrated with dots) with the intention of creating commitment, awareness, belonging and understanding. The arrows represent a transfer of information, showing that employees are mostly influenced by the information sent from managers, but are also affected by the external environment (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The propositions from the model could be proven in the case study, as some employees stated, they received sustainability information not only by internal communication channels, but also from external media, such as advertisements or the company’s magazine for customers.
As seen from Figure 2, the multiplier effect is about the spread of information within a company. Gatekeepers or Strategic Managers hereby distribute information towards managers, who are responsible to send out the received information towards their employees. Ideally, as employees also communicate with each other, the content will be multiplied and spread among the corporation.

Figure 2: Multiplier Effect, Own Illustration, 2015
## Appendix B: Notes Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newsletter Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Email Newsletter within department passenger transport, recipient list of only 55 employees; Not accessible for everyone as many employees are without computer access</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In irregular intervals, email newsletter are sent to around 55 interested employees, containing information about general environmental topics, company news, invitations for sustainability events and trainings/educations etc. The emails contain short teaser texts that are linked to more relevant information about the specific topics.

Some chosen examples sent during the last year shed light on which contents were picked up.

In October 2014, the newsletters gave current information about environmental protection in the company, such as the conversion to recycling paper, the extension of the project CO2-Compass, the publishing of the brochure about the sustainability operating figures as well as an invitation to the event for the goal of being “environmental-pioneer”. Also the new animated movie about environmental protection and the company’s Top position at the Carbon Disclosure Project climate protection ranking was highlighted.

In November, resource efficiency was at focus by highlighting the development of an optimized and modern Waste- and Resource-Management as well as the Eco-Design Award winning initiative of the CO2-Compass and presentation slides regarding the strategy 2020 goal to become environmental pioneer. The December newsletter contained primarily an invitation for a Discussion-Event about Communication & Environmental Protection.

The year 2015 started with information about environmentally consciousness at the workplace by introducing the Eco-Etiquette, the CO2-Compass or Environmental information training. The march newsletter contained information on the Photo-Competition dealing with saving energy, an announcement of the Earth hour as well as news and sustainability related appointments from other business segments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intranet</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Intranet not accessible for everyone as many employees are without computer access; connected to active search for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the front page teaser Sustainability and the sub-heading Environment, the intranet-user finds different related contents. There are information about general environmental topics, on training options or the internal structure of the environmental department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also interactive initiatives, such as the CO2-Compass, which enables employees to save emissions by little actions, a noise-quiz, an online game driving simulator to test how to drive a train in an environmental-friendly way as well as the animated cartoon for environmental-consciousness at the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The intranet gives best practice examples from the company as well as summarized tips and tricks on how to save the environment in everyday-work life by using recycling paper or saving water. It also asks for employees’ opinion and offers the possibility to ask questions about sustainability and the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also contemporary issues of the company’s sustainability practices are published at the intranet. The Forum Ecology, its contents and presentations available for downloads, contemporary information from the environmental center as well as newly available information devices such as the Environmental-Etiquette or the Brochure of company’s sustainability project are presented here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Employee Magazine</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Employee Magazine well accessible, printed version is weekly handed out to individual work places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employee magazine, which is handed out weekly to all employees, provided some contents. Especially the yearly published green edition from November reports extensively about sustainability issues, such as general climate issues, company related sustainability topics such as the CDP rating, invention of recycling paper or future sustainability trends of the company, but also on the personal level by reporting about colleagues saving for environment with the CO2-Compass or a forum question: What do you do to reduce waste?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Notice Board</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Greenboard in main office, normal notice board with sustainability information in depot; Well accessible in the entrance areas, updated every 2 months with new topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the notice board or green board, mainly contact persons and environment-news such as extension of CO2-Compass, alternative powers and energy recovery processes were presented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poster

Mostly accessible at the notice boards, updated every 2 months with new topics.

The Environmental Posters hang out at the Green Board with themes and topics changing every 2 months, such as waste, water endangering substances, energy and heating in offices, ISO 14001 Certification or the introduction of contact persons. The motives are humorously informing about the environmental sustainability threats occurring in everyday work life.

Monitors

Conveniently accessible for everyone in the main office in the canteen entrance area, however, so far not available at the depot.

The monitors in front of the cafeteria are weekly supplied with changing contents, such as information about the company’s Sustainability Project in collaboration with environmental organizations or appeals to use stairs instead of elevators, to eat vegetarian, to use the book exchange shelf instead of buying more books, to use actual cups instead of paper cups for the coffee, etc.

Eco-Etiquette

New tool, made available at the notice board for employees to take away.

The new eco-etiquette, that is about to be integrated in the internal communication process, is a little book with tips for the everyday office ecology. It is supposed to be made available at the green board in office buildings and contains tips and advices on how to behave to minimize energy, water or resource use and thereby help the environment. It deals with topics such as energy & office-technology, heating & ventilation, lights on/lights off, water, printing & paper, recycling & resources as well as business travel. General information are given and supported by statistics about general use in the country, e.g. a comparison on how much planes/cars/trains are used, the amounts of waste in comparison to other countries. It not only gives tips for environmental protection but also for reducing energy costs, managing waste and reduces office supply needs.

Table 2: Summarized Notes of Content Analysis
## Appendix C: Table of Interview Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Interview Partner</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Briefly about the Encounter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 21st, 2015</td>
<td>Patricia Cook</td>
<td>Environmental Manager, Department of Passenger Transport</td>
<td>Introductory Conversation, First overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 4th, 2015</td>
<td>Patricia Cook</td>
<td>Environmental Manager, Department of Passenger Transport</td>
<td>Details about environmental sustainability within passenger transport sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 4th, 2015</td>
<td>Emily Ross</td>
<td>Associate of Sustainability Project</td>
<td>Challenges of Internal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 20th, 2015</td>
<td>Christine Kent</td>
<td>Manager of the Department Environmental Principles and Communication</td>
<td>Details of environmental sustainability within the Green Movement Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 8th, 2015</td>
<td>Richard Owen</td>
<td>Environmental Manager, Department of Passenger Transport</td>
<td>Brief encounter about internal sustainability trainings and the monitoring of those</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 8th, 2015</td>
<td>Emily Ross</td>
<td>Associate of Sustainability Project</td>
<td>Perception by the employees; Trainings and further education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 8th, 2015</td>
<td>Christine Kent</td>
<td>Manager of the Department Environmental Principles and Communication</td>
<td>Specific Challenges when communicating about sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28th</td>
<td>Patricia Cook</td>
<td>Environmental Manager, Department of Passenger Transport</td>
<td>Discussion of the identified themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Interview Information*
Appendix D: Interview Questions

1) Personal questions: What do you do / how long have you been in the company? / What is sustainability for you?

2) Since when is the sustainability topic part of the company’s internal communication? How did the integration develop?

3) What was triggering the start of the communication about the issue?

4) Why is it important to communicate about sustainability addressed to the employees? What is the aim and purpose of the communication?

5) Do you have the impression that employees are open to the topic of environmental sustainability?

6) What topics are communicated? Does the communication relate to the sustainability work?

7) Who decides for the topic and how are the topics chosen?

8) How would you describe the communication structure (who communicates to whom? hierarchical or horizontal?)

9) How often do you communicate about the issue?

10) What channels are you using for the communication of sustainability topics? (Why were those channels chosen? What are advantages and disadvantages of the channels? Do you think the channels are effective in regards to reach a wide audience and establish an enduring message?)

11) Where do you see the strengths and weaknesses in your communication? How could the potential problem factors be minimized?

12) How do you evaluate or monitor how the content and the communication means are perceived by the employees? Are improvement suggestions considered and incorporated?
Follow Up Questions

Which significance has the communication of sustainability in relation to the overall internal communication?

In your opinion, what are the specific aspects that make the communication of environmental sustainability especially challenging? (e.g. do you see problems in the internationality of the company?)

What is usually the response rate of employee surveys within the Green Movement Company?

Do you think the identified themes and the underlying components cover the essential challenges?

Would you consider the communication to be primarily directed at the interested personnel, due to the intrinsic aspect of sustainability?

It has been pointed out that the sustainability idea is quite well anchored in the board of directors, but the commitment decreases in lower management levels. Why do you think is that?

Is the multiplier effect somehow supported and strengthened? If not, do you have ideas how that could be done?

Would you say that the challenges of the internal communication of sustainability are strongly related to the societal attitude towards sustainability?
Appendix E: Survey Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Internal Communication of Environmental Sustainability

1. Please fill in your date of birth (e.g. 1967): _______________________________

2. Please specify your gender:  
   O Male  
   O Female

3. What is your position in the company?  
   O Employee  
   O Official  
   O Manager  
   O Trainee  
   O Intern  
   O Other: _______________

4. Which significance has environmental sustainability at your company?  
   O Important  
   O Rather important  
   O Neither Nor  
   O Rather Unimportant  
   O Unimportant

5. Which significance has environmental sustainability for you personally?  
   O Important  
   O Rather important  
   O Neither Nor  
   O Rather Unimportant  
   O Unimportant

6. How well do you feel informed about environmental sustainability within your company?  
   O Good  
   O Rather Good  
   O Neutral  
   O Rather Bad  
   O Bad

7. How often and with which specific topics regarding environmental sustainability do you get in touch with in your daily work life?  
   O Daily: ____________________________________________
   O Sometimes: _______________________________________
   O Seldomly: _______________________________________
   O Never

8. From your point of view, which contents have been communicated most often in regards to the topic of environmental sustainability (in 2014/2015)?  
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
9. At which channels do you usually perceive the communication about environmental sustainability within your company best? (Multiple choices possible)

- Email
- Print Magazine
- Notice Board
- Intranet
- Online Magazine
- In-House Mailing
- Meetings
- Info-Monitor
- Other __________

10. How often have you been able to use communicated contents in your everyday working life?

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

11. How often do you talk to fellow employees about the communicated environmental contents?

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

12. Which information are you most interested in? Information about….(Multiple choices possible)

- … general Environmental and sustainability topics (e.g. conservation, water, etc.)
- … environmental sustainability goals, strategies and projects of the company
- … activities within own business segment
- … environmental-friendly behavior at the workplace
- None
- Other: ___________________________________________________________________

13. Which channels do you prefer to be informed about environmental sustainability within your company? (Multiple choices possible)

- Email
- Print Magazine
- Notice Board
- Intranet
- Online Magazine
- In-House Mailing
- Meetings
- Info-Monitor
- Other __________

14. Would you like to convey something regarding the topic?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F: Survey Diagramms

Figure 6: Frequency of Communication between Employees, Own Illustration, 2015

The communication between employees is important as it can create a multiplier effect. It is desirable that the personnel talk about the issue often, in order to increase the awareness and the importance of the topic. With the intention to become a sustainable corporation, it is necessary to start within the company, thus the personnel need to be convinced about the issue and talk about sustainable and unsustainable behavior with the aim to tackle the issue.

Figure 7: Degree to which Interested Employees Feel Informed, Own Illustration, 2015

The information level of interested personnel included the employees who are very interested and interested in the topic. This is slightly different from Figure 5, as here only the very interested personnel has been included.
Figure 8: Frequency of Information Usage at Workplace, Own Illustration, 2015

Figure 8 responds to our question number 10 and illustrates how often employees can use the perceived information about environmental protection. As can be seen in the picture, the overall level of usage is rather low, indicating that different topics should be transmitted. Though, in the depot the perceived information seems to be more useful as employees see the perceived topics more applicable to their work life.

Figure 9: Employees’ Awareness of Transmitted Topics, Own Illustration, 2015

Figure 9 presents what topics have been perceived and remembered most often of all respondents. Interestingly, as also mentioned before, 84% pointed to renewable energy, though the topic has not been very present in the communication channels.
As can be seen from Figure 10, the difference between the currently used and preferred communication channels is quite low. The highest alteration of 10% can be found for emails, we advise the company therefore, to include more employees in the recipient list.

*Figure 10: Difference of Currently Used and Preferred Channels, Own Illustration, 2015*