EDUCATING THE FUTURE – RESPONSIBLY

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY PERCEPTIONS IN EDUCATION WITHIN STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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Educating the future – responsibly

Abstract:

Given the sustainability challenges that the world faces today, understanding and having insight into the nuances of sustainability and sustainability implementation is more important than ever. Business schools, as an incubator for future leaders, have an important role in fostering sustainable leadership. This study focuses on analyzing and understanding how students and faculty perceive the sustainability implementation in the curricula at one prestigious Swedish business school, the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), by utilizing neo-institutionalism and legitimacy theory. We have conducted 16 semi-structured interviews, equally divided among faculty and students, at SSE. Our findings indicate that students and faculty largely share the view that business schools should focus on sustainability, but that there is a contrast in perception between students and faculty in how well the school lives up to espoused sustainability values. Furthermore, this discrepancy seems to be a consequence of the differing view between students and faculty on why the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum is legitimate.

Keywords:

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Definitions and Abbreviations

Term	Explanation
SSE	Stockholm School of Economics
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
Course Director	The main professor in charge of formulating a course, is the person who gives the lectures and prepares the curricula for their respective course
Teacher/Faculty	These terms are used interchangeably to note the "course directors" interviewed. Thus, top management and other researchers who are not responsible for formulating curricula are excluded from the definition, although they would also operate under the name "faculty".
Sustainability	This thesis exclusively adheres to sustainability in education. It does not include environmental elements such as reducing emissions etc.
Syllabus and Curricula	A pre-made plan and scope for a given course. They explain what the course will cover, what students will learn, and how they will be examined.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Organizational Sustainability and Education

Sustainability, in its comprehensive scope, encompasses all facets of a business's activities, ranging from its day-to-day operations to the compilation of financial reports. Businesses confront the imperative of aligning their practices with the combination of regulatory mandates and external demands in the context of sustainability. A frequently employed approach in this endeavor involves the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (Azmat, 2023).

Furthermore, the imperative for businesses to embrace sustainability extends to the realm of education, particularly within business schools. There is a growing demand for business schools to integrate sustainability into their core curricula, driven by institutional pressures such as the United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME). PRME emphasizes the need for business schools to design course structures that incorporate sustainability elements, with the goal of fostering future leaders who can contribute to a more sustainable global economy (UNPRME, n.d.).

While the introduction of PRME is a step in the right direction, research has shown that there are several negative aspects of this. Namely, there remains "works of individuals", "lacking of institutional support", and the fact that business schools are still prioritizing corporate outcomes "above social ones" (Russo, 2023). Sustainable education, therefore, remains an underexplored sub-topic when talking about business schools.

1.1.2 Sustainability at Stockholm School of Economics

The Stockholm School of Economics is ranked as the best business school in the Nordics, and has been for the last 20 years (Stockholm School of Economics, n.d). The school boasts high rankings for both of their bachelor programs, their 5 constituent master programs and their executive education. Although the school has been subjected to criticism for being a "hardfought con" (our translation. Sv:

"svårslaget bedrägeri") and a "quasi-university for bankers and businessmen" (Guilliou, 2019), the school upholds profound societal commitments, most notably within their dedication to sustainability (Stockholm School of Economics, 2022).

SSE asserts that "As one of Europe's leading business schools, SSE educates leaders and equips them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to pursue this global agenda for sustainable development" (Stockholm School of Economics, 2022, p. 1). Moreover, within the specific area of education, it is stated that the school has a mission to form students who are adherent to the 4-letter combination of "FREE": individuals who are "Fact and science-based" (F), "Reflective and self-aware" (R), "Empathetic, and culturally literate" (E), and "Entrepreneurial and responsible" (E) (Stockholm School of Economics, 2022).

Concretely, the goals formulated in the educational realm is to increase the number of participants in sustainability-relevant courses; to "explicitly" incorporate sustainability aspects and contents into all courses that are deemed fit. This will be done through stating which SDG the respective course adheres to (Stockholm School of Economics, 2022). The school also notes that they shall assist teachers in their endeavors of integrating sustainability. Regarding students, managing expectations is noted as being integral to formulating a continued sustainability strategy. "Transparency and full accountability" towards students is also a declared a goal for the institution (Stockholm School of Economics, 2022).

Moreover, SSE introduced its own "sustainability center" in 2015 called Misum. Essentially, the center is aimed at fostering an understanding and enabling new discoveries within sustainability. Misum is funded by the organization Mistra, which invested 120 million SEK to support such endeavors. The three pillars upon which Misum is founded to contribute are research, education, and engagement with Stakeholders (Misum, n.d). As previously noted, PRME has been a driving force behind the implementation of sustainability education at business schools. At SSE, Misum is the primary coordinator of "PRME activities" (Misum, 2022).

During 2023, SSE released a SIP (Sharing Information on Progress report) which highlighted how the work with PRME, Misum, and other sustainability endeavors has developed (Stockholm School of Economics, 2023). Here, the commitment to create responsible future leaders is reiterated, as well as the mandatory SDG integration within the curricula. The report notes that sustainability "features prominently" within the curricula as shown by the intended learning outcomes in course descriptions. Concretely, the introduction of the course "Global Challenges" has increased sustainability commitments within education, further increasing students' understanding of sustainability. The reports elucidates the future direction of SSEs sustainability strategies, highlighting a continued need to support teachers in the integration of SDGs as well as the plan to implement student perception into their work (Stockholm School of Economics, 2023).

1.2 Research Gap

The essence and impact of business schools on their students serve as fundamental inquiries in determining the institution's contribution to society through the knowledge and skills each student leaves with. While historically synonymous with financial prowess, contemporary narratives from business schools now underscore a deeper commitment. Official communication highlights the nurturing of sustainable and responsible leadership. Beyond producing investment bankers and management consultants, alumni are expected to be equipped with a profound understanding of sustainability regardless of their role in leadership, researchers, investment banking or other areas.

Amidst increased interest in sustainability education, current discussions primarily address the mechanics of integrating, and the driving forces behind, sustainability inclusion in curricula. The current scientific literature surrounding sustainability lacks unfiltered insights into student and faculty perspectives. Notably absent is a holistic view, particularly regarding the faculty's stance as they are the ones delivering the education and imparting their knowledge to students.

The identified research gap presents a critical deficiency in current academia, namely a comprehensive exploration into the perceptions of both students and

faculty. Understanding both viewpoints is vital for a nuanced assessment of educational strategies and their real-world impact on fostering long-term student engagement in sustainability.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

This thesis aims to delve into the complex realm of sustainability education in business schools, focusing on perceptions of students and faculty regarding sustainability within curricula and syllabi. The purpose is to bridge the research gap by exploring and understanding the perspectives of these stakeholders within business schools.

It is important to note that the study does not intend to assess SSE as an institution nor is it to be seen as a critique of the operational work that the school conducts. Rather, the overarching goal is to show unfiltered insights into the perceptions, attitudes and viewpoints of students and faculty concerning the perception of sustainability in curricula. By investigating these perspectives, the study seeks to nuance the intricacies and problematize sustainability inclusion in the curricula at SSE. The study formulates its research question in two parts:

i) How do SSE students and faculty perceive the sustainability commitments in the curriculum?

ii) How could this perception by students and faculty of SSE's be understood?

1.4 Delimitations

In this study, two key delimitations are made. First, the inquiry will be confined to an examination of the perception of sustainability commitments into academic courses and curricular materials, precluding an analysis of broader environmental factors such as the quantification of, for example, the institution's carbon emissions. Second, the focal point of this study will be singularly directed towards one academic institution, specifically the Stockholm School of Economics.

1.5 Rationale for Examining a Singular Business School

The decision to focus exclusively on the Stockholm School of Economics is underpinned by several reasons. Firstly, this approach allows for an in-depth and comprehensive analysis into the specific processes and mechanisms by which sustainability is incorporated into curricula and coursework of a business school. By concentrating efforts on one institution, the study will gain a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of incorporating sustainability in education.

Secondly, SSE serves as a representative case study that encapsulates a variety of sustainability initiatives and challenges encountered by contemporary business schools. By scrutinizing this institution, the research can draw valuable insights and lessons applicable to a broader spectrum of business schools seeking to enhance their sustainability education. Additionally, delving into the practices of one institution provides a more manageable scope for an in-depth investigation while ensuring that the research remains focused. Analyzing multiple business schools is deemed to be inconceivable in terms of scope and would require more resources and time.

2 Disclosure of Conflict of Interests

The authors declare the following conflict of interests: both authors are students at the intended study object (Stockholm school of economics, SSE).

We acknowledge that there may exist biases or other factors related to the conflict of interest that may affect the outcome and the findings of this report. We have taken the following steps in order to mitigate these effects: we have ensured that we have no relations to the students interviewed. We have no relations other than that of student and staff to the faculty interviewed. We are not currently engaged in any courses held or examined by the interviewed faculty.

3 Literature Review

While there currently exists no studies on students' and faculties' perception on business schools commitments towards sustainability that the authors know off, there is a large body of literature regarding sustainability, which can shed light on sustainability's relation with business schools. Organizations are known to respond to external pressures, which includes demand for increased sustainability (Bello-Pintado et al., 2023; Dubey et al., 2017; Wolf, 2014). However, external pressure is not the only driver for sustainability in organizations. The inclusion of sustainability in organizations may also arise internally as a consequence of perceived benefits by management (Wolf, 2014) or pressure from shareholders (Bello-Pintado et al., 2023). The organizational response to different pressures varies depending on the organizations' industry or sector as well as the groups from which the pressure originates (Bello-Pintado et al., 2023; Wolf, 2014).

The drivers for both the external and internal actors to push for sustainability in organizations are many. The literature has identified major external drivers to be areas such as political pressure, threat of legislation, brand reputation, negative publicity and customer demand and expectation (Lozano, 2013). Internal pressure amounts to areas such as proactive leadership and avoiding risks, ethical obligations, internal culture and business case (Lozano, 2013). Business schools are also organizations, in addition to being institutions. As such, many of the drivers identified have also been found to be applicable for business schools. Rankings, for example, have been shown to be an important external pressure related to brand reputation that shapes business schools and is a driver for funding and faculty availability (Kaltenecker, Okoye, 2023). In addition to this, Lozano (2013) identifies raising student awareness regarding sustainability as another key external driver for business schools. This increasing student awareness can be seen as a type of "customer" demand and expectation for business schools; with students expecting and demanding more sustainability as a result of the increased awareness (Lozano, 2013).

In recent years, there has been an increased interest towards the inclusion of sustainability in business schools. Many focus on how sustainability can be incorporated in the curriculum (e.g. Edwards et al., 2020) while others focus on how different school-specific variables may affect the school's sustainability commitment. Snelson-Powell et al. (2016) analyzed how different sized business schools differ in their implementation of sustainability and the implications this has for business school's legitimacy. By comparing and interviewing 40 deans at different UK business institutions, Snelson-Powell et al. (2016) arrived at the conclusion that larger and wealthier schools that lack sustainability expertise more often failed to fully implement their stated sustainability aims. Meanwhile smaller, more prestigious business schools were often better at implementing sustainability commitments, partly due to prestigious schools facing more scrutiny by external stakeholders and thus the need for smaller schools to remain legitimate in the eyes of the public. However, this study does not delve into how the conforment of sustainability commitments with sustainability practices are *perceived* by students or faculty.

Another study conducted by Montenegro de Lima et al. (2020) has found that sustainability research in higher education has increased dramatically during the last 10 years. Funding towards a particular topic has been found to greatly increase discourse and focus towards that topic within the scientific community by influencing research activity and publication trends (Thelwall et al., 2023). Scholars have attributed the lack of funding as a barrier for increased sustainability research as well as the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum and other sustainability-related initiatives within higher education institutions (Velazquez, 2005).

4 Theoretical Positioning

Given the institutional nature of business schools and with regards to the findings in the literature review related to the external and internal pressures (e.g. Lozano, 2013), neo-institutional theory together with legitimacy theory is believed to be especially useful in answering the research question. Specifically, neo-institutional theory is believed to be helpful as it is a suitable theory to analyze the pressure aspect. Meanwhile, legitimacy theory is believed to be insightful as it may help analyze the perception aspect of the research question. Both neo-institutional theory and legitimacy theory have been utilized in prior studies with research questions adjacent to the one in this thesis (e.g. Snelson-Powell et al., 2016) and have therefore been proven to be useful in similar settings.

4.1 Neo-institutionalism

Neo-institutionalism (also: new institutionalism) is a broad umbrella term that encompassess many different ideas; many of which may differ in significant ways. For example, theories within neo-institutionalism may not only make radically different basic assumptions from each other, but also take on different reference points and frames of views (Farrell, 2018; Hall, Taylor, 1996). One basic assumption shared among all ideas of neo-institutionalism, however, is the importance of institutions and how they both shape and are shaped by external, and sometimes even internal, agents, who themselves may or may not be institutions (Hall, Taylor 1996; North, 1990).

Neo-institutionalism has its origins in papers by Meyers and Rowans (1977) and Zucker (1977). Together with DiMaggio and Powell (1983), these three papers lay the foundation for neo-institutionalism (Alvesson, Spicer, 2018). According to Meyers and Rowans (1977), acting in accordance with the accepted operational procedures is the source of an organization's legitimacy, which is what ultimately enables the continued survival of the organization. Consequently, organizations act to maximize their legitimacy by conforming to the normative pressure from other agents to act in accordance with the accepted state of affairs; even if this does not result in the most rational choice (Meyers, Rowans, 1977; DiMaggio, Powell, 1983).

While neo-institutionalism has traditionally been divided into three main branches: historical, sociological and rational choice institutionalism (Farrell, 2018; Hall, Taylor, 1996), this thesis will be based on models and theories that build up the framework of discursive neo-institutionalism (discursive institutionalism). Following this, and while it has proven difficult to clearly define the concept of institutions with multiple definitions existing (Alvesson, Spicer, 2018; Farrell, 2018; Schmidt, 2010), this thesis will follow the definition of institutions according to discursive neo-institutionalism discussed below.

4.1.1 Discursive Neo-institutionalism

Described as a potential fourth branch of neo-institutionalism, discursive institutionalism was proposed by Schmidt (2008) as a consequence of the growing interest in ideas and discourse within neo-institutionalism. According to Schmidt (2008), discursive institutionalism differs from the traditional branches of neo-institutionalism by endogenizing the process of institutional change. While neo-institutionalism has been criticized for being unable to explain gradual institutional change, instead turning to exogenous shocks as the explanatory model, (Mahoney, Thelen, 2012), Schmidt (2008, 2010) leverages the idea of ideas and discourse as a driver for institutional change from within. Schmidt (2008, 2010) defines discourse as the dissemination of ideas, whatever the medium. While speech and conversation are obvious aspects of discourse, Schmidt (2008, 2010) adds that text, symbols, and any way to mediate ideas can be seen as part of the discourse.

While some definitions exclude organizations (e.g. North, 1990), Schmidt (2010) views organizations as possible institutions. Discursive institutionalism views institutions as structures that are enabling and constraining constructs of meaning internal to agents (Schmidt, 2010). Crucial to this is the idea that agents have a "background ideational ability" and a "foreground discursive ability". The foreground discursive ability is what enables agents to critically communicate about institutions as if they existed outside the institution, even if they are inside it, distancing themselves from the institution (Schmidt, 2008). This, in turn, enables the framing of

actions even from agents within the institution, resulting in the possibility of changing (or maintaining) the institution by allowing for action (Schmidt, 2008).

Meanwhile, the background ideational ability is what allows agents to think and reflect upon institutions in the first place (Schmidt, 2008). Described not only as an individual's knowledge of the world, Schmidt (2008) explains that the background ideational ability is also what makes individuals able to make sense and navigate the world. Ultimately, the background ideational ability is what creates and maintains institutions: as agents come into collective agreements about the facts and rules of the world, institutions are created and cemented (Schmidt, 2008).
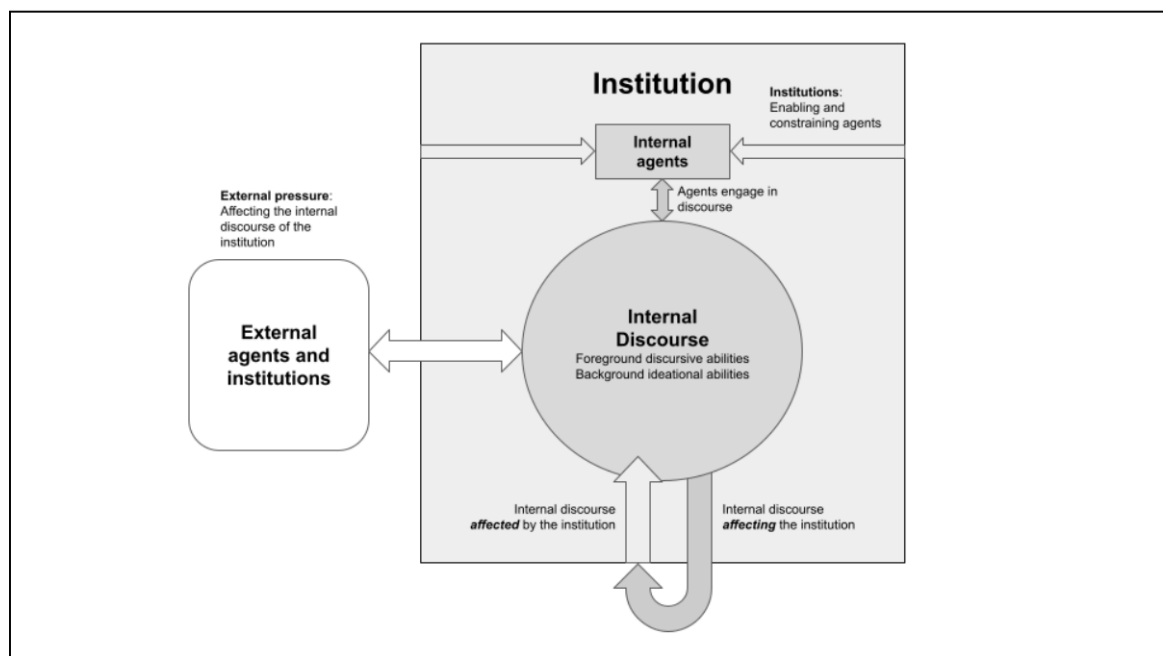
Figure 1: Discursive institutionalism as proposed by Schmidt (2008) where internal agents engage in discourse that drives institutional change from within. External agents may affect the internal discourse through various pressures.

In summary, through the process of discourse, discursive institutionalism allows for gradual institutional change from within, in addition to the external pressure typical of neo-institutional thought. Figure 1 summarizes the main ideas behind discursive institutionalism.

4.2 Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy theory concerns how agents maintain legitimacy. Sometimes viewed as a resource that entities can shape and utilize (Schiopoiu Burela, Popa, 2013), Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as "a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Viewed from this definition, organizations and institutions can be seen as highly dependent on legitimacy for survival as legitimacy justifies the actions of the agent in the eyes of the general public. In essence, legitimacy is what allows the entity or project to continue to operate. Without legitimacy, the agent, be it institutions or other entities, may face severe sanctions from society (Schiopoiu Burela, Popa, 2013).

Many different attempts at classifications of different varieties of legitimacy have been made. Suchman (1995) divides legitimacy into three main categories: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy is viewed as a legitimacy based on the self-interest of the people; individuals are ready to accept a set of actions if the actions align with their interests. Moral legitimacy is gained if the actions are viewed as the "right thing to do" and cognitive legitimacy is legitimacy based on the view that something is inevitable, a must, or necessary based on a taken-for-granted cultural reference point.

In addition to this, Suchman (1995) identifies multiple different subtypes of legitimacy based on the three major categories. Figure 2 below summarizes this.

	Subtypes		
Cognitive legitimacy Legitimacy gained through the notion that something is inevitable or necessary	**Comprehensibility** Legitimacy gained due to the activity appearing to be predictable and plausible in reference to a specific cultural reference frame		**Taken-for-granted legitimacy** Legitimacy gained as something is perceived as inevitable or necessary, it is more or less inconceivable that this "something" would not exist
Pragmatic legitimacy Legitimacy arising from an alignment of interests	**Exchange legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate because the individual is expecting immediate value creation from that thing	**Influence legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate due to responsiveness from it towards the individual's larger interest	**Disposition legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate due to individuals relating to something's "good character" or "good characteristics"
Moral legitimacy Legitimacy gained because an agent is doing that which "are the right things to do"	**Consequential legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate due to it resulting in or having good consequences	**Procedural legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate due to its processes aligns with acceptable societal standards.	**Structural legitimacy** Something is perceived as legitimate due to being part of a specific category or classification · **Personal legitimacy** Legitimacy gained because leaders are charismatic

Figure 2: Summary of the topology of legitimacy as introduced by Suchman (1995).

4.3 The Theoretical Framework

While discursive institutionalism provides a useful macro framework for the understanding and analysis of how agents create institutional change, and more importantly, interact with institutions through discourse, the framework provides little insight into the discourse itself. By introducing legitimacy theory, it is possible to get a rich framework that encompasses both the macro and meso levels.
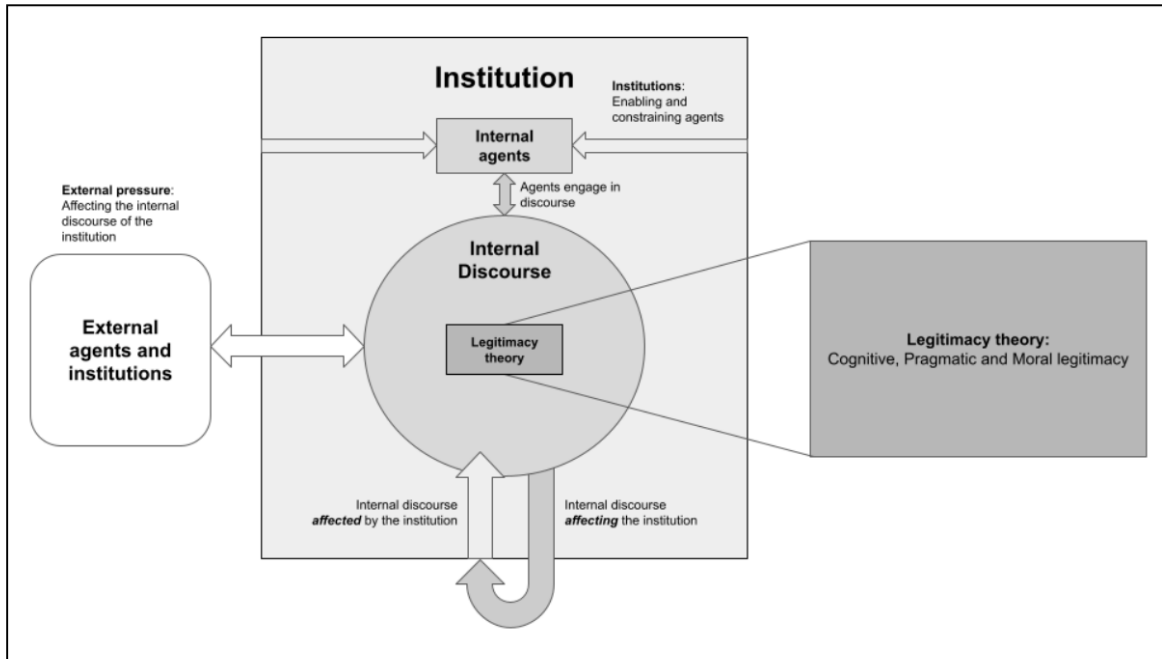
Figure 3: Discursive institutionalism as proposed by Schmidt (2008) combined with legitimacy theory as proposed by Suchman (1995). The theoretical framework for this thesis

Figure 3 summarizes the theoretical framework for this thesis. While discursive institutionalism provides insight into how discourse acts as an internal driver for change, legitimacy theory provides a more fine-grained understanding of the discourse. In this combined theory, legitimacy theory is used as a basis for analyzing and understanding the discourse which in turn, in accordance with discursive institutionalism, affects the institution by driving change. Together, it is hoped that this theoretical foundation will provide valuable insight in answering the research question.

4.4 Criticism and Discussion of Theoretical Framework

While it is believed that the chosen theoretical framework will be useful for answering the research question, some criticism can be addressed. Firstly, criticism against discursive institutionalism's turn to constructivism and subjective ideas as the foundations of institutions have been made. Larsson (2015) criticizes discursive institutionalism as limiting and downplaying the social and intersubjective aspects of ideas. However, as argued by not only Schmidt (2008) but also others such as

Carstensen together with Schmidt (2016), the discourse in itself creates intersubjectivity that guards against relativism. The authors therefore still deem discursive institutionalism as a useful tool for answering the research question partly *because* of the turn to subjective ideas, which are helpful given the subjective nature of the research question; this without sacrificing the intersubjectivity of institutions.

Secondly, legitimacy theory has garnered criticism for not taking into consideration the broader context that agents exist in when applying the idea of legitimacy (Deegan, 2019). By ignoring other actors and agents, such as institutions, when analyzing legitimacy, critics such as Deegan (2019) believe that legitimacy theory is wrongfully applied. However, by combining legitimacy theory with a macro level theory, discursive institutionalism, it is believed that the theoretical framework solves this problem by inherently incorporating the broader, institutional, context.

Finally, criticism may take the form of criticism against the combination of two distinct theoretical frameworks. However, as earlier discussed, it is believed that the combination of theories helps mitigate some of the individual weaknesses of each theory. Additionally, the combination of the two models is believed to help answer the research question. Both institutional theory and legitimacy theory have been utilized in conjunction with business schools in previous studies, as exemplified in the literature review by Snelson-Powell et al. (2016). Snelson-Powell even makes a linkage between legitimacy and neo-institutional theory, albeit not as explicit as in this study. By explicitly coupling the two theoretical frameworks, it is believed that this will help contribute to knowledge in novel ways.

5 Method

5.1 Choice of Method

5.1.1 Ontology - Subjectivism

The choice of subjectivism as the ontological position for this research is grounded in the complex and multifaceted nature of business schools, as alluded to in the introduction. In this study, the objective is to explore the context-dependent realities that individuals, both faculty and students, within the institution experience. Subjectivism acknowledges the multiple and diverse perspectives that exist within the institution (Saunders et al., 2019). Each perspective is influenced by individual experiences, values, and interpretations. Business schools are not unilateral institutions but rather comprise various stakeholders, including faculty, students, and external agents with their own vested interests (Moratis et al., 2023). The subjective view is imperative as each one of these stakeholders brings their unique worldviews and perceptions on the inclusion of sustainability.

5.1.2 Philosophy - Interpretivism

The study also adopts an interpretive epistemological position. Interpretivism is chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the intricate interplay between individuals' perceptions and actions concerning sustainability in education. This position also allows the study to integrate theory in a dynamic way that suits the business school environment, where interpretations, meanings, and discourse shape institutional practices and decisions. By this choice, the study acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and dependent on contextual factors (Saunders et al., 2019). This epistemological position is particularly relevant when investigating the perception of sustainability integration into curricula, as it recognizes that sustainability in education is not a universally defined concept. Rather, it is influenced by diverse perspectives and later interpreted by the individuals involved internally and externally in the educational process (Nordin, Sundberg, 2018).

5.1.3 Study design - Qualitative study

This research is framed within the qualitative research paradigm. This best fits the study due to the compatibility with the research objectives and the exploratory nature

of the questions. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding the depth, richness, and complexity of human experiences and perceptions, making it particularly well-suited for exploring the attitudes and opinions of stakeholders, specifically students and faculty, regarding sustainability within the curricula and coursework at SSE (Saunders et al., 2019).

Concretely, the study will consist of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The semi-structured interview allows for both versatility and provides a platform wherein the subject can express their views openly and candidly (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006). The chosen design has its aims in wanting to capture data more richly, enabling the ability to identify patterns, themes and variations across participants. (Kallio et al., 2016).

5.2 Data Collection

5.2.1 Interviewed Individuals

Throughout this study, a total of 16 interviews were conducted, see appendix 1 for interviewees, with an equal distribution between student and professors. A deliberate criterion for professor inclusion was their roles as 'course directors', ensuring their authority and responsibility for the curriculum. In contrast, the selection of student participants was based on voluntary participation, albeit with the stipulation that they were at least in their second year or beyond. This criterion was applied to ensure that the interviewed students had encountered a more diverse range of courses during their tenure at the institution (first-year students had only encountered 3 courses at the time of the study, having attended SSE for less than 2 months) and therefore could provide a larger perspective. Thus, the study aimed to have a combination of representation and quality (Cassell et al., 2018).

5.2.2 Process of Interviews

The employed interview process adhered to the previously mentioned "semi-structure" to maintain flexibility while still ensuring that the interviews stayed largely on topic, which would later serve to support theme and pattern recognition across subjects.

To initiate each interview, a set of general questions were asked, this approach allowed for a smooth entry into conversation. The intention was to create a comfortable environment where the interviewees were encouraged to speak freely about "sustainability in relation to SSE". As posed earlier, the interviews needed to garner "rich and in-depth" responses and as such, the interview approach aimed to "invite expansive answers" and "set context information" (Lee, Aslam, 2018). This approach, as advocated in The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods by Lee and Aslam (2018) allowed for a comprehensive exploratory interview wherein the subjects could freely talk about the factors and nuances related to sustainability education within SSE. See Appendix 2 for the interview template.

Each interview was concluded with an opportunity for the participants to provide additional insights or comments they deemed relevant or "missed" (Alvesson and Ashcraf, 2012). This aimed to uncover any unaddressed points or "final reflections".

5.3 Analysis of Interviews

In the analysis of the empirics, the study documented and transcribed the interviews, ensuring compliance with the interviewee's consent, to best facilitate a comprehensive examination of the empirics. This was made easier as all of the interviews were held in english so no translations had to be made. Subsequently, the authors systematically analyzed individual datasets, extracting various themes articulated during the interviews. The collected data and themes were then aggregated through the thematic analysis approach outlined by Saunders et al. (2019). This process was applied independently on the 16 datasets derived from faculty and students.

During the analysis, the authors found themes by coding the transcribed material. The first phase was open coding where the authors went line by line in the raw data and labeled interesting topics with a color. If a similar topic was brought up again, the same color was used. The items labeled were mostly discrete pieces of information, concepts that were adherent to the research questions and attitudes to certain events or topics. See Appendix 3 for an example of how the open coding was done.

In the second part of the analysis, the authors grouped and categorized the raw material. The authors looked for patterns or similarities between the first-order themes and the research question, while the theoretical frame was used as a baseline to create the second-order themes. See Appendix 3 for an example of how this categorization was done. These subsequently formed the constructs used to answer the research question. Figure 4 gives a schematic overview of how the constructs are created from the second-order themes.
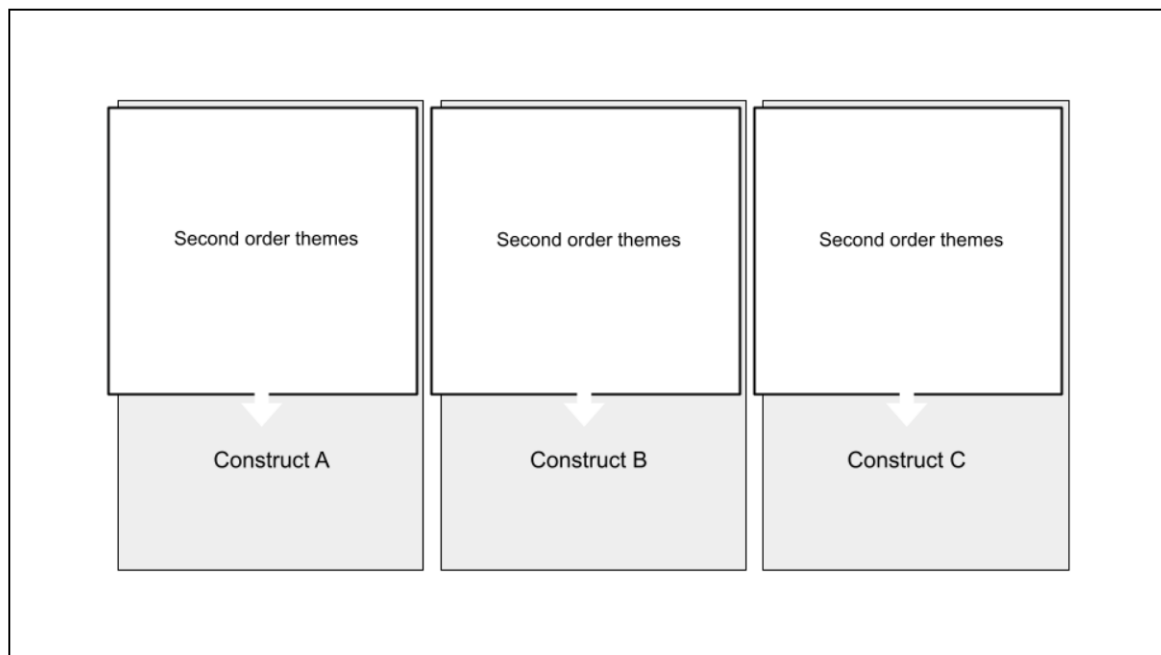
Figure 4: Overview of the thematic analysis methodology.

5.4 Confidentiality

In relation to the interviews and method as a whole, the study decided to adopt a confidential approach to the interviews. This approach aimed at fostering an environment of trust and encouraged candid and honest responses from faculty and students as they were talking about their own institution and employer. With all interviews being recorded, all participants were asked if they consented to this. Any direct quotes used in the discussion and analysis part of the study have been double-checked with the corresponding interviewee. This was only to give the interviewee the possibility to clarify and to ensure that the interviewee was not misinterpreted.

5.5 Method Criticism and Discussion

One of the critical aspects of our chosen methodology lies in the underlying epistemological assumption, our research stance ultimately reflects how we interpret interviews (Denzin, 2001). This distinction is important to acknowledge as it shapes the perceived insight the study arrives at. The chosen epistemological stance is not without its limitations. While the authors can not account for the inherent limitations, an acknowledgment of such shows a certain degree of reflexivity which means there is an understanding and consciousness around the potential biases that the study may encounter. The creation of this awareness ultimately limits the possible effect such biases may have.

The medium through which the interviews were conducted also warrants critical discussion. It is noted that establishing social relationships with interviewees is imperative and that the quality of information shared may differ depending on the chosen medium. As such, interviews conducted without the face-to-face component may lack the social depth which high-quality interviews are often associated with (Harvey, 2011). This could also influence the individual's willingness to share certain types of information, one way the study counteracts this is by providing confidentiality to all participants.

There could also be a threat to the reliability of the answers posed by the different participants. As elicited by Saunders et. al, (2019), observer bias is of particular importance in this study due to the authors being students and therefore emphasizing more with the students interviewed. See section 2 on how this is managed.

6 Empirics

The empiric section will stem from the thematic analysis done on the two separate data sets. From the thematic analysis, the authors found around 35 distinct first-order themes for faculty and around 20 for students. At this stage, the 35 first-order themes created 8 second-order themes, and the 20 from students were condensed to 4.

In the interviews with faculty, the aggregated dimensions are discourse facilitators, legitimacy strategies, and control & impact. In the interviews with students, two themes are found, namely: expected ethos and experiences. Figure 5 below shows an overview of the result of the thematic analysis for the faculty, while Figure 6 shows the same for the students.
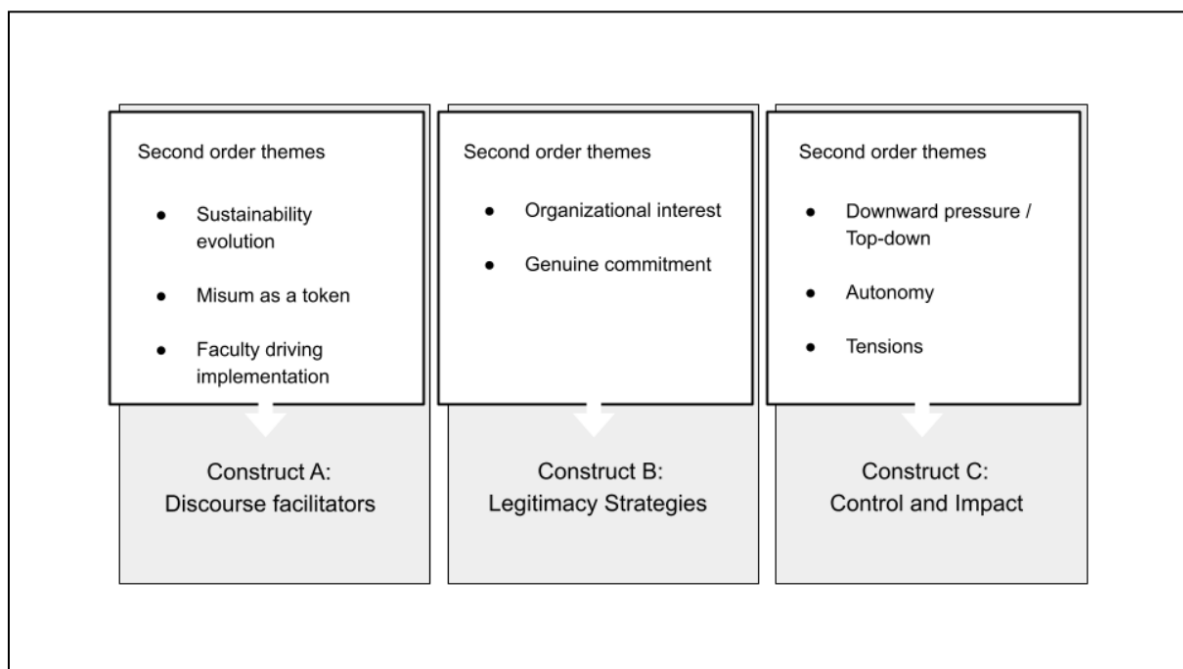
Figure 5: Summary of the thematic analysis done of the data set "faculty".
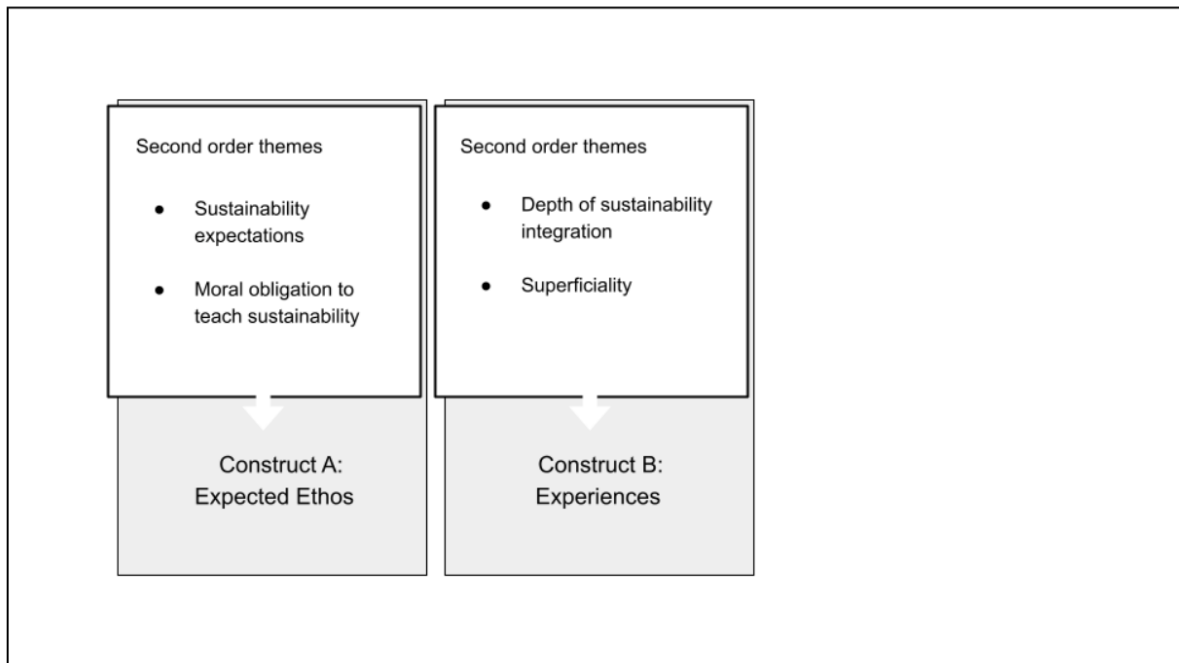
Figure 6: Summary of the thematic analysis done of the data set "students".

6.1 Interviews with Faculty

6.1.1 Discourse Facilitators

Historically, sustainability has not been a topic that courses encompassed nor has it been a focus area at SSE. There is a clear and evident feeling among interviewees that sustainability is something that has become more popular in recent times. During the interviews, it became apparent that certain aspects have facilitated the discourse around sustainability. This section will first show the difference and then note the two main components of how this discourse has changed.

The following quotes explain how sustainability was not always a big part of the education at SSE, but rather a small and almost insignificant facet of the curricula:

"Historically, sustainability is not something that I attributed to the Stockholm School of Economics in any greater degree" - (Hermione)

"We were not really encouraged to think about how to incorporate that [Sustainability]" - (Ginny)

"Sustainability used to be a non-issue" - (*Harry*)

In contemporary times, interviews have revealed an increasing prevalence of sustainability as a subject within academic course syllabi. Noteworthy mentions in these discussions include the term "Misum". The subsequent quotations illustrate the facilitating role that Misum has played in the shaping of the current discourse surrounding sustainability, as well as making it an integral component of education, at SSE:

"Started to change with the founding of Misum [speaks about back office work that needed to be done to receive that amount of money]... I think that was a bit of a wake up call when that first started in 2015, because that was a lot of money, a lot of money received for research purposes. But also with a push for integration into teaching [...]. That's when it started gathering momentum and becoming more important." - (Hermione)

While Misum has played a notable part in formulating and affecting the discourse around sustainability in recent times, another notable observation from the interviews highlights how teachers, as individuals, have contributed to shaping the discourse around sustainability and its subsequent implementation within curricula.

The following quotation shows how the faculty is acting on their own to drive the discourse regarding sustainability, as shown by the fact that they have the individual power to decide how sustainability is to be included:

"By law, we're you know, we are free to research the topics and fields that we're interested in and ask those questions that we want. [...]. So, the extent to which the school can have very strong instructions and requirements on sustainability practices among its personnel is not the same as in a regular organization where 100% of your time is supposed to be managed by your manager, and then determined by the organizational goals, etc, etc. So the discretion that we have means that we were ungovernable to a certain extent." - (Hermione)

6.1.2 Legitimacy Strategies

A recurring theme during the interviews was discourse around different external organizations that hold an interest in the way sustainability is incorporated into the syllabus and curricula at SSE. This shows how certain organizations may influence the way and capacity SSE is working with sustainability in their education. From the interviews, it emerged that aligning with the requirements and demands of these organizations is something that seems to be beneficial to the school. Hence there seems to be a tension between the espoused work and the practical work at the school. In working with sustainability, the faculty described it as two-fold, while they acknowledge the inherent organizational interest that may drive some of their work, they are also adamant that most of the sustainability work comes from a place of genuine commitment.

The following quotations adhere to the organizational interest described during the interviews, which shows how the faculty accepted the inclusion of sustainability because they relate to the interest of the school, for example, research funding:

"How SSE is seen by other actors in society, which could affect our ability to attract students, faculty, and our ability to attract research funding. Or how we're seen in ranking schemes, like Financial Times rankings, etc." - (Hagrid)

"should I be really honest? [about why the SDGs matter so much to SSE] One very big reason is of course accreditation. I mean, you cannot get accreditation if you do not work with sustainability." - (Ginny)

"I think that rankings are super important because students use them to see where they want to go, because you probably… if you're not born and raised in Stockholm, SSE is not necessarily on your radar. And if we want to recruit people from all over the world, we need them at the same time." - (Harry)

Faculty, however, emphasize the depth of their commitment to sustainability integration within education. They emphasize that the incorporation of sustainability

is not superficial. Instead, it reflects a genuine belief held by not just the institution but also the faculty. It signifies a shared vision in the fundamental principle underlining sustainability: that it is important for the students to know.

"I think we're trying and I think we're not trying just to please some kind of external shareholder or to meet some kind of minimum threshold" - (Dolores)

"We have a continued responsibility to teach them those [Sustainability] things as well" - (Hermoine)

6.1.3 Control and Impact

The interviews underscored a discernible level of influence employed by faculty members in shaping the discourse on sustainability. Official school communications prescribe a mandatory alignment of courses with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the faculty's individual autonomy in determining course content became apparent, revealing a reluctance to be subject to such external control.

"all courses have been asked to relate to the SDGs one way or another [...] this is the most operationalized way of signaling that this is important" - (George)

The following quotations shows the degree of freedom faculty members have when formulating the curricula:

"Here's what happens when you develop a curriculum, at least here, right? Somebody says: this is the number of lectures and this is the number of seminars that you have, this is the topic area you're supposed to cover. Solve that problem. Okay. So, I would say, there's a lot of autonomy and a lot of responsibility." - (Hermione)

"I think that is a hallmark of SSE, that we as teachers have a lot of freedom" - (Hagrid)

There seems to be a certain tension between the wish by higher management to incorporate SDGs and the autonomy of faculty to formulate and enact their own course curricula:

"And so if that [Integrating sustainability into curricula] happens, I mean, we'll see, right? Oversight tends to be a challenge in most organizations, you set a policy, you roll it out, and then nobody goes and checks to see whether people are doing this or not [...]" - (Hermione)

"Linking to the SDGs are not unproblematic [...] we are encouraged to, even in a written form, link the content to the goals. And I'm not quite sure that it's always a good idea" - (Ginny)

One interviewee explicitly says that faculty would push back if the control increased:

"We risks creating resentment and pushback from the faculty [...] if there would be the detailed control" - (George)

Another interviewee was adamant that the current way of working with sustainability was not particularly good:

"It is a matter of it having been given the wrong framing at the school" - (Dolores)

"There was this campaign [...] we needed to make sustainability more explicit. That was one of the mottos that they had, and we kind of laughed about it [...] that has become a quote for us almost like an internal joke where we say, have you made sustainability more explicit [...] today?" - (Dolores)

Notably, the interviews uncovered how these tensions then affect sustainability incorporation. In some instances, there was uncertainty among teachers in how they were going to incorporate the material:

"Last year, we got an email from [...] saying that you need to relate your course to this United Nations document … then we did it very quickly, just before the course start last year." - (Cedric)

6.2 Interviews with Students

6.2.1 Expected Ethos

From the student interviews, a consensus emerged aligning with the faculty's perspective that the school professed a large number of sustainability commitments. Students collectively perceive SSE as synonymous with declarations of sustainability. The students implied an inherent expectation for SSE to exhibit a plethora of such commitments.

"Sustainability is in everything, if I go to the portal [SSE-portal], I see something about sustainability, or if I go to a course, I see sustainability, or if I read a brochure, I see something about sustainability." - (Albus)

"For example, every course always mentions how they are connected to SDGs, which is understandable [...]" - (Sirius)

Also important is that many students seem to believe that the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum at SSE stems from a deeper view among faculty and course directors - one that SSE has a moral obligation to teach sustainability:

"I think you know, that many of the professors at SSE really actually care and, you know, think that sustainability is important and something that should be teached to us students, because it is so important for society" - (Luna)

"[...] just look at the school's external communication. There was this article in a newspaper a few months ago about the global challenges course and you really got the feeling when [...] reading it that they [SSE] were doing it because they felt that it was really important to teach these things [...] morally as a business school" - (Albus)

"We sometimes hear how we as students [at SSE] will go on to become future leaders and that this is why sustainability is so important to us. I think they feel obliged to teach sustainability to us so we can make the right decisions [...] after SSE" - (Lupin)

6.2.2 Experiences

Students express a prevailing uncertainty regarding the extent to which SSE authentically fulfills its proclaimed commitments, suggesting a potential inconspicuous divide between espoused curricular intentions and educational practices. Despite numerous interviewees highlighting the school's extensive engagement with sustainability, there remains a shared belief among students that, to some extent, SSE incorporates sustainability in a superficial manner:

Students believe that SSE has seen a large improvement in the sustainability area:

"I think they partly live up to it. If you compare with what I hear from people that went to SSE a few years before, it's definitely better." - (Luna)

"Even if some people feel disingenuous, there are a lot that feel really passionate about sustainability [names teacher and department]. " - (Albus)

Some students did not know about the school's sustainability commitments in practice:

"Perhaps the school works with sustainability in ways unbeknownst to me but I don't think we see much of it. " - (Rowena)

Many highlight the inclusion of SDGs into courses, but emphasize that they almost always see this as something superficial rather than it having actual impact and effect:

"It is almost annoying when they mention how their course aligns with SDG 3 and 4 on the final slide on the intro lecture, but then we never hear about it again. I don't really see the point of it" - (Ronald)

"I mean, the school must gain something from it [including sustainability into curricula], but the problem is that we rarely gain anything, anything to learn from it, it's just there." - (Ronald)

"It seems to be more of a burden [for teachers] than an interesting topic, really." - (Sirius)

7 Analysis

This section aims to analyze the empirics such that it becomes possible to answer the research question. To facilitate a rich and in-depth answer, the analysis is divided into two constituent yet highly integrated parts. Firstly, the authors will highlight the perceptions of the student and faculty by utilizing the framework of discursive neo-institutionalism. In the second part, the study aims to garner an understanding of these perceptions by analyzing the perspectives of both faculty and students through legitimacy theory.

7.1 Student and Faculty Perceptions

In the interviews, the dynamics between student and faculty perceptions regarding sustainability at SSE underscore a great deal of similarities but also significant differences.

It is evident from the empirics that there is a shared conviction regarding the espoused sustainability work of SSE. This is exemplified by teachers acknowledging the increase in volume of sustainability, particularly in research, and the students expecting SSE as an institution to work with the topic. This is adherent to Montenegro de Lima et al. (2020) who showed that sustainability research within higher education has increased dramatically.

Moreover, both students and faculty speak of external influences and interests. Both parts emphasize rankings and other external sources as possible influences to the increased focus on sustainability. This finding highlights the foreground discursive ability of both students and faculty as they can critically engage in discussions around SSE's sustainability commitments (Schmidt, 2010). However, they do so to varying degrees.

For example, both faculty and students experience genuine commitment and interest in sustainability from SSE. Noted by students emphasizing "*there are a lot that feel really passionate about sustainability*" *(Albus)* and faculty continuously mentioning the genuine commitments throughout the interviews. However, faculty rarely

explicitly concretize the work as superficial or lacking while students are somewhat critical of the practical work. Thus, the students and faculty have different perceptions and view the discourse differently. Yet, discursive institutionalism is unable to explain the discourse itself and how the dichotomy between students and faculty have arisen. Section 7.2 will explore this further.

Subconclusion:

The perceptions between students and faculty both align and diverge. This difference is noted in their foreground discursive abilities. Students, in their notable criticism of the practical work, exhibit an ability different from that of their teachers.

7.2 Understanding the perceptions of students and faculty

In the first section of the analysis, the perceptions of students and teachers were shown. The analysis also highlighted how these perceptions can be explained by differences in how they view the discourse and their foreground discursive ability. This section will aim at understanding these perceptions. Firstly through an examination of the impact of Misum, the study analyzes its role in shaping the discourse. Then by applying the lens of legitimacy theory, an meso understanding of both student and faculty perceptions can be gained. In the discussion, the parts are integrated into answering the second part of the research question.

7.2.1 Misum and the emergence of sustainability at SSE

Historically, as many in the faculty witnessed, the incorporation of sustainability in the curriculum has been neglected and has only recently begun to gain prominence. Faculty attributes this to the founding of Misum, which ties research funding to sustainability. While not explicitly stated by the faculty and only indirectly and implicitly evident in the empirics, earlier studies (discussed in the literature review) shows that the coupling of research funding with specific subjects increases discourse and focus towards that subject (Thelwall et al., 2023). This increase in internal discourse surrounding sustainability at SSE as a result of Misum among faculty and top management plays a big role in the increase of sustainability in the curriculum, as exemplified by a statement from Hermoine "*[We didn't have sustainability at SSE before, this] started to change with the founding of Misum…*".

While the introduction of Misum as a research center is trivial, our empirics show that Misum has had an important role beyond research in the form of shaping sustainability education at SSE by acting as a conductor for increased sustainability discourse.

Meanwhile, students seem to have mostly been left out of the sustainability discourse, as exemplified by the student Rowena: *"Perhaps the school works with sustainability in ways unbeknownst to me but I don't think we see much of it"*. While only speculative, the explanation for this may be that students engaged very little with research or Misum and thus failed to become part of the initial internal discourse.

Subconclusion:
Sustainability research and discourse regarding sustainability began to gain prominence at SSE with the founding of Misum. This, in turn, has increased the focus on sustainability education and the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum at SSE. Students have mostly been left out of this initial discourse.

7.2.2 Understanding the faculties' Perspective

From the empirics, it is evident that there exists downward pressure on course directors to increase sustainability in their courses. The reason for this push by top management seems to be twofold. On the one hand, and in agreement with some earlier studies as discussed in the literature review (e.g. Snelson-Powell et al., 2016), many faculty members express beliefs that the increased commitments are to satisfy external pressure such as ranking criteria and external stakeholders, which is extra important for a small business school such as SSE (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016). However, many also seem to view sustainability as an important area of knowledge to impart on students. More often than not, faculty members expressed a belief in a duality of these reasons; the increase in sustainability commitment is both due to organizational interests and a topic that is important to teach students.

The faculty can thus be seen discussing and viewing the school's sustainability commitments in curricula as legitimate in a variety of ways. Firstly, the faculty can be

understood as viewing the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum at SSE as legitimate through consequential and procedural legitimacy, both moral legitimacy. Including sustainability in education is seen as both having good consequences and something that should simply be done at universities.

However, in conjunction with this is the legitimization through pragmatic legitimacy. Many of the interview faculty use reasoning identical to that of legitimization through influence legitimacy. This is evidenced by numerous examples in the empirics, illustrating the significance of sustainability in accreditation, ranking, and ultimately securing funding—all of which hold paramount importance aligned with the faculty's interests, for example research funding. Ginny's quote is extra illustrative of this: *"should I be really honest? [about why the SDGs matter so much to SSE] One very big reason is of course Accreditation. I mean, you cannot get accreditation if you do not work with sustainability".*

This pragmatic legitimization affects the faculty discourse regarding the pressure to increase sustainability from top management. The faculty discourse is strongly colored by ideas that the inclusion of sustainability should largely be pragmatic and that the legitimacy for sustainability inclusion is in part based on how well it fulfills that pragmatic role. For example, one interviewed faculty pushed for the importance of the need for control in how the faculty formulated their courses: *"I think that is a hallmark of SSE, that we as a teachers have a lot of freedom" (Hagrid)* even as another individual underlined the importance of this sustainability education for students: *"We have a continued responsibility to teach them those [Sustainability] things as well"* (Hermoine).

This conflict between the pragmatic and moral view sometimes results in varying levels of skepticism, as exemplified by jokes about "sustainability becoming more explicit" among faculty (Dolores). All interviewed course directors, however, seemed to share this idea of having control over their courses as fundamental. This has strong implications for the actual implementation of sustainability. The important freedom for course directors to plan their own courses ultimately results in varying levels of implementation of sustainability, which is also evident from the empirics, as

the idea of independence proliferates and is strengthened among the faculty through the discourse, for example in the form of a joke.

Subconclusion:
Faculty view the increase of sustainability in curriculum as legitimate through moral, consequential and procedural legitimacy in addition to influence legitimacy. The pragmatic legitimization, in addition to the moral, by faculty affects the discourse surrounding the inclusion of sustainability, especially by disseminating and strengthening the idea of faculty freedom to formulate their own courses. This affects the implementation of sustainability in the curriculum. The freedom for course directors to plan their own courses ultimately results in varying levels of integration.

7.2.3 Understanding the students' perspective

Meanwhile, students and prospective students receive a constant barrage of communication from the school regarding sustainability. Both during and prior, as exemplified by one of the students mentioning reading an article in a newspaper, their studies at SSE. The empirics suggests that students, through taking part in the communication by the school, such as reading brochures, begin to legitimize the school's sustainability commitments through moral legitimacy. One student (*Albus*) even used the word "morally" in their explanation as to why they believed SSE engaged in sustainability commitments. More specifically, students legitimize the schools sustainability commitments through a mixture of consequential and procedural legitimacy: the interviewed students seemed to believe that SSE had an obligation to both include sustainability due to the good consequences it would have on future leaders (Lupin), as well as the inclusion of sustainability being something that all higher educational institutions should do (Luna).

Subconclusion:
Students view the increase of sustainability in curriculum as legitimate through moral, consequential and procedural legitimacy. This view has largely been shaped by the communication from the school through various channels of communication, both internal (brochures, through faculty) as well as external (outwards communication, newspaper articles).

8 Discussion

8.1 Answering research question

The purpose of this study has been to analyze perceptions regarding the inclusion of sustainability in education within the context of SSE. The authors have dissected and investigated how sustainability is perceived to be incorporated into courses by students and faculty. Combining the frameworks of neo-institutionalism and legitimacy theory, the study is aimed at answering the research question.

8.1.1 Answering the first part of the research question

Through the empirics, it became evident that faculty and student's perception of the school's sustainability work both differed and aligned.

While teachers' perception was two-fold, discussing both external interest and genuine commitment, students' perceptions were more critical. Students noted that it often felt superficial, but that the school also had a lot of commitments towards sustainability and that teachers and faculty often felt genuinely invested towards sustainability. The analysis arrived at understanding the perspectives through the difference in discourse perception and their foreground discursive ability. Critical for the analysis was the implication that this ability is shown by the actor being able to speak and critique the institution as if they were outside it. Thus, the first part of the research question can be answered:

Both students and faculty view the commitments as genuine, but students perceive the practical work and alignment as superficial to a higher degree than faculty.

### 8.1.2 Answering the second part of the research question

Using the subconclusions from the analysis. It is possible to answer the second part of the research question.

Firstly, the discourse regarding the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum has mostly surrounded the faculty, which began during the formation of Misum acting as

an origin for the increased discourse, partly through the coupling of research funding with sustainability topics.

Circling back to the theoretical framework, this discourse has had a strong impact on the actual implementation of sustainability inclusion in the curriculum, which is heavily influenced by the pragmatic legitimization among faculty. The idea of faculty freedom especially affects this, ultimately creating varying levels of sustainability integration in courses.
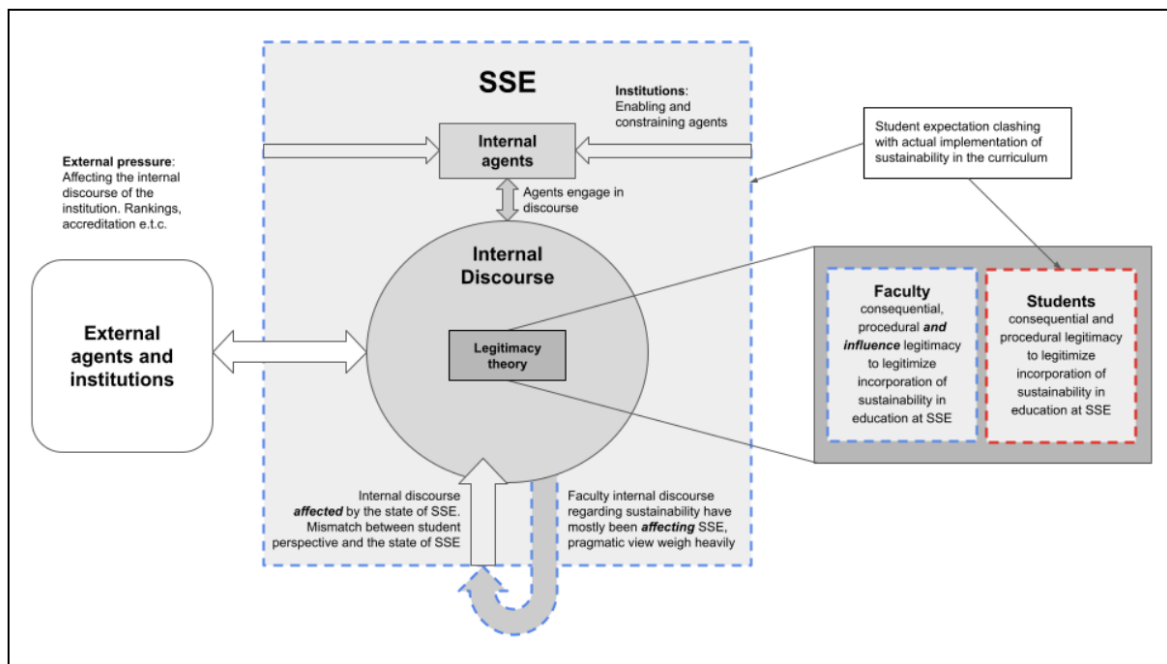
Figure 7: Faculty perspective is what has largely shaped the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum, which due to varying legitimization of sustainability inclusion by faculty and students, creates different perceptions.

This is somewhat contrasted with the legitimization by students. Students, through both internal and external communication by the school, are mostly legitimizing the inclusion of sustainability through moral legitimacy. While this is also true for the faculty, the students' views do not contain the pragmatic nature of the faculty. Therefore, students' expectation of sustainability inclusion in courses is mostly shaped by moral legitimization. When this is sometimes not the case in practice, with the sustainability in curriculum having been colored by faculties' pragmatic views, students experience the inclusion as superficial, resulting in a differing perception of

the inclusion of sustainability at SSE. Figure 7 summarizes this discussion. Thus, the answer to the second research question can be summarized as follows:

Faculty legitimize sustainability education partly through pragmatic legitimacy, which differs from students. Faculty are the ones who have mainly affected the actual implementation of sustainability. When students encounter a pragmatism they do not expect, perception differences in the state of the sustainability implementations occur.

8.2 Practical implications

The study offers valuable practical insights to everyone at a business school, it sheds light on the views of both students and faculty - the two most influential parts when it comes to sustainability education. Firstly, the study showed a discrepancy between student and faculty perceptions. Revealing a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions shows the need for increased communication and additional alignment strategies between the two parts, but it may also shed light on a misalignment on a larger scale - showing analogous problems in other areas.

Secondly, the study shows that teachers shape the discourse around sustainability education and that their autonomy is imperative, this represents a transformative era within the evolution of education. Top management could have to adapt their sustainability integration work with faculty members, presenting potential conflicts if they want to implement certain decisions. The implication is that SSE has to balance its creative innovation of sustainability incorporation (and hence its societal responsibility) with academic freedom and teacher interests, which have societal ramifications given the importance of SSE in educating business leaders.

8.3 Theoretical implications

As one of the principal studies undertaken at SSE within this academic domain, the results significantly reduce the ambiguity inherent in the discourse surrounding sustainable education. It provides the field with an in-depth example wherein localized contextualization enriches the theoretical landscape by highlighting perceptions and their theoretical significance.

The findings align with Lozano's (2013) identification of external and internal drivers for sustainability in organizations. The acknowledgment of external pressures such as rankings and reputation as highlighted in the study resonates with Lozano's explanation of different influences on organizational influences.

The thesis further resonates with the findings of Montenegro de Lima et al. (2020) and Thelwall et al. (2023) concerning the influence of funding on sustainability discourse and research activity. Just as Montenegro de Lima et al. (2020) highlighted the dramatic increase in sustainability research due to funding in higher education, this thesis illuminates the impact of funding initiatives like Misum in initiating discourse around sustainability at SSE and the effect this eventually has on the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum.

The study introduces a novel dimension by investigating perceptions of divergences between students and faculty regarding a business school's sustainability commitments. The analysis showed that both faculty and students approach sustainability through a moral legitimacy lens but that faculty was also largely shaped by pragmatic legitimacy in their assessment. In addition to this, the student's perspective was notably influenced by communication channels and discourse facilitated by the institution. Ultimately, this revelation sheds light on a nuanced discrepancy in how students and faculty within the academic setting interpret and evaluate the institution's commitments to sustainability and contributes to further knowledge by providing a theoretical backbone for the understanding of the discrepancies, in addition to providing a backdrop for further studies.

Moreover, the research illuminates how the initial sustainability discourse primarily involved faculty with students being relatively excluded, which has impacted their perception of SSE's sustainability commitments. This perspective has not been explored in prior studies - thus contributing to the understanding from a student's perspective in general, offering a new dimension in contemporary institutional frameworks.

8.4 Limitations

There are limitations inherent in this study. Given its interpretive approach, the portrayal of empirical data is subject to the authors' interpretation, introducing a potential bias in the presentation.

In terms of the interviews, the selection process is a limitation. Firstly, deciding to only interview "course directors" and students illuminates an important perspective, but the omission of the marketing department and those in charge of sustainability commitments at SSE could be criticized as it could provide explanations and insights into the inclusion of sustainability in education at SSE. This study chose to pick students at random to participate, without offering external rewards. This could have drawn students who are interested in the research area and thus provided a dataset wherein all participants had some sort of pre-conviction.

8.5 Future Research

Firstly, an interesting avenue to explore could be to conduct a longitudinal study to track the evolution of perceptions regarding sustainability commitments at SSE. Explore how the perception has changed over time considering variables such as shifts in leadership, external influences, and contemporary discourse around sustainability. This type of study could serve to unearth potential underlying factors or trends regarding perceptions.

Extrapolating the results onto business leaders could serve to further the research done in this study. Seeing as the study found one of its purposes in the societal importance of business schools, it would be interesting to see what perceptions alumni from business schools have regarding sustainability and where these perceptions and subsequent knowledge stem from. Such a study could further illuminate the societal ramification of business schools.

9 Conclusions

As sustainability continues to gain prominence, so too does the scrutiny on how well business schools educate future leaders in sustainable leadership. This study, by conducting a number of semi-structured interviews and coupling different theoretical models within the field, has highlighted similarities as well as differences in how students and faculty perceive the inclusion of sustainability in education at SSE. Moreover, this study has contributed to explaining and understanding the above mentioned findings. The findings and methodology in this study has theoretical and practical implications on a broader scale beyond SSE. Many of the results are applicable to a broader context and the study of perception itself provides a new basis for further studies. With this in mind, it is hoped by the authors that this thesis will bring interest and provide a foundation for further research in the important area of sustainability within business schools.

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Appendix 1 - Interviewees

Interview via	Role & Codename	Date
Teams	Student - Albus	October 10th
Teams	Student - Seamus	October 11th
Teams	Faculty - Hermione	October 12th
In-person	Faculty - Hagrid	October 12th
Teams	Faculty - Cedric	October 13th
Teams	Student - Lupin	October 16th
Teams	Faculty - George	October 19th
Teams	Faculty - Ginny	October 19th
Teams	Faculty - Dolores	October 19th
Teams	Faculty - Fred	October 23rd
Teams	Faculty - Harry	October 24th
Teams	Student - Rowena	October 26th
Teams	Student - Ronald	October 26th
Teams	Student - Sirius	October 26th
Teams	Student - Luna	November 1st
Teams	Student - Draco	November 3rd

Appendix 2 - Templates

INTERVIEW WITH STUDENTS - TEMPLATE

General pleasantries. Set the tone for the interview to be open and informal. Give information about confidentiality, logistics and other important details.

Börja med allmänna frågor och låt intervjupersonen tala relativt fritt för att först få fram intervjupersonens tankar och idéer ofiltrerat och påverkat av intervjuprocessen. Öppna med hållbarhet generellt för att därefter rikta in sig mer på HHS för att komma ifrån att deltagaren låser sig fast i organiserat hyckleri för tidigt.

What are your thoughts on sustainability?

How do you encounter sustainability in your daily life? / How do you sustainability in your day-to-day life?

What are your (general) thoughts on sustainability in SSE?

Rikta in sig på mer specifika områden. (Anpassa till vad den intervjuade säger?)
Do you feel that sustainability is an important part of your education?
-> Why is that?

Do you believe that the school is working enough with sustainability?
-> Can you give examples of the school working with sustainability that you have experienced or heard about?
-> What should the school do more with regards to sustainability?

Do you know about the school's commitment to sustainability? / Do you know to what extent the school has committed to work on sustainability?
-> Can you mention anything specific about the school's commitment to sustainability?

Have you, on websites, brochures or by other official communication, from the school received information about the schools commitment to sustainability?
-> If so, how and in which medium?
        -> How much?

Do you believe that the school lives up to its commitment to sustainability?
-> Can you give examples of why you think this way?

Have you experienced sustainability differences between different institutions or courses?
-> How and in what way?

Outside of lectures and courses, have you noticed the school's commitment to sustainability?
-> If so, how?

Did sustainability play any role in your decision to enroll into SSE?

INTERVIEW WITH FACULTY - TEMPLATE

Inled med några lätta frågor för att skapa förtroende och för att sätta tonen för intervjun som öppen och informell.
General pleasantries. Set the tone for the interview to be open and informal. Give information about confidentiality, logistics and other important details.

Börja med allmänna frågor och låt intervjupersonen tala relativt fritt för att först få fram intervjupersonens tankar och idéer ofiltrerat och påverkat av intervjuprocessen. Öppna med hållbarhet generellt för att därefter rikta in sig mer på HHS för att komma ifrån att deltagaren låser sig fast i organiserat hyckleri för tidigt.

What are your thoughts on sustainability?

How do you encounter sustainability in your daily life? / How do you sustainability in your day-to-day life?

What are your (general) thoughts on sustainability in SSE?

Rikta in sig på mer specifika områden. (Anpassa till vad den intervjuade säger?)
Do you believe that the school is working enough with sustainability?
-> Can you give examples of the school working with sustainability that you have experienced or heard about?
-> What should the school do more with regards to sustainability?
-> Has the work with sustainability increased during your years as a teacher?

Have you, on websites, brochures or by other official communication, from the school received information about the school's commitment to sustainability?
-> If so, how and in which medium?
        -> How much?

Have you experienced sustainability differences between different institutions or courses?
-> How and in what way?

Do you feel that sustainability is an important part lesson and course structure?
-> How do you work to incorporate sustainability in the courses you teach?
        -> Can you give examples of (creative ways) you have incorporated sustainability in your courses?

Do you know about the school's commitment to sustainability? / Do you know to what extent the school has committed to work on sustainability?

-> Can you mention anything specific about the school's commitment to sustainability?

Do you believe that the school (your course) lives up to this commitment to sustainability?
-> Can you give examples of why you think this way?

In your opinion, what effect does sustainability commitment have on your work?
→ Do you have to alter syllabus, remove material, are you confident and comfortable lecturing around the topic of sustainability
->Does the school's sustainability commitment affect the way you structure (for example affect your teaching material by including slides on sustainability) or teach in your courses?
      -> If so, how?

Do you feel like sustainability takes a backseat against the "core" topic of your course?
-> Have you ever felt that sustainability is put aside in order to have enough "teaching hours" for the "core topics" of the course?
      -> What do you think about this?
-> Have you ever felt that sustainability is brought up to the detriment of "core topics"
-> Have you ever felt that "core topics" are needed to make way for sustainability?
      -> What do you think about this?

Do you feel comfortable in your knowledge regarding sustainability to effectively incorporate it into a syllabus?
-> What does the school do to help with this?
-> Do you feel like the school support you enough in this regard?

Email to faculty - Template

Ämne: Invitation to Participate in Thesis Research on Sustainability in Business School Curricula

Dear (Namn),

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Rasmus Sjögren, and me and my thesis partner Zen Fung Pang and I are currently working on our thesis which aims to try to understand sustainability in business schools and how sustainability is incorporated in business schools. As such, SSE becomes an interesting object of study as one of Swedens leading bussiness school institutions.

Why Your Participation Is Crucial

Your insights as educators are invaluable to understanding how sustainability is incorporated into course materials, teaching methodologies, and institutional support. This research aims to address questions like:

- How do you perceive the school's commitment to sustainability?

- What challenges do you face in incorporating sustainability topics into your curriculum?

Your Contribution

If you agree to participate, you will be part of a **confidential**, in-depth interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. Your feedback will significantly contribute to identifying gaps, if any, between our school's stated objectives and the realities of classroom instruction.

To participate, please reply to this email to schedule an interview time that works for you.

Your involvement would greatly enrich the quality and depth of this important research. Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to your positive response.

Best regards,

Rasmus and Fung

Email to students - Template

Ämne: Seeking Student Participants for Research on Sustainability in Business School
Education

Dear (Student),

I hope all is well. My name is Rasmus Sjögren, and me and my thesis partner Zen Fung Pang are currently conducting research for our thesis, which aims to try to understand sustainability in business schools and how sustainability is incorporated in business schools. As such, SSE becomes an interesting object of study as one of Swedens leading business school institutions.

Why Your Voice Matters

Your perspective as students is crucial in understanding whether the school's sustainability initiatives are making a meaningful impact on your educational experience. This study will address questions such as:

- Are you aware of the school's commitments to sustainability?

- Do you find these initiatives effective in your courses?

How You Can Contribute

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to a **confidential** interview that will last about 30-45 minutes. Your insights will provide a nuanced understanding of how sustainability concepts are being delivered and received at the student level.

If you're interested, please reply to this email to schedule an interview at a convenient time for you.

Your participation could be a pivotal component in improving the educational practices of our business school. Thank you for considering this opportunity, and we look forward to your response.

Warm regards,

Rasmus and Fung

Appendix 3 - Color coding example

Extract from interview with "Ginny"

Okay, good. And you said that the work has changed over the years. Could you give example how how it has changed in recent times?

Well, to start with. I think that to start with, if I look back, like 1015 years, for sure, right. So there was not so much talk about sustainability. There were of course, no courses on that or like parallel tracks. And we were not really encouraged to think about how to incorporate that. So if there was something on sustainability that it was because there was some more passionate about that. So that was that. [talking about own experience that may reveal identity]. So that wasn't a discussion. Because I think that's also there's a big difference. When a manager tells you, you have to do that, because it's a sort of hygiene factor and it must be done otherwise you will be the bad guy, or whether you see that the management really cares. Right. So that's the difference. And there I think there was a change that now the feeling is that people really care about this. So that's one thing.

Then to be honest, I also have to say when we started with incorporating more sustainability into the courses there was a kind of also not that positive approach from all students. They also taught many students that, you know, I came here to earn money that's kind of later on. And this has also changed, I would say, I can see really like, and it's a relatively quick change. I think it's about three, four years, not more than that, then I see that the biggest difference, right, so that's nobody's really questioning why did you do that? And people are interested, right. So yeah. But I think that it has to do with that they see already when they entered the school, that there is a focus of sustainability before when there was not focus, it was just an add on. And they did not really feel that this is meant to rate us there. Right. So so that's why I talked about that, you really have to show that you're mean it and not just do it because it looks good.

Explanations for found first-order themes

-   Sustainability Before
-   Contemporary Sustainability
-   Adaptation
-   Attitudes to sustainability
-   Talk from top
-   Moral commitment

From the example above, "Sustainability before", "Contemporary sustainability" and "Adaptation" were condensed into the second-order theme of "Sustainability evolution". (These first-order themes were also found in other interviews, not just this example.)