Strategic ways to incorporate sustainability as a working culture in tertiary education

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Abstract: The study aims to explore ways to incorporate sustainable culture in the tertiary education industry. This involves investigating the barriers and challenges preventing the widespread implementation of sustainability in the organisation. The exploratory research methodology was adopted to gain insights into the organisation's sustainability status. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information on their current views and challenges regarding sustainability. The results revealed that there was a lack of top management initiatives to encourage sustainability. It was also found that no set targets were communicated in this regard, and with no designated department, it became even more challenging to implement sustainability. A lack of robust, standardised policies determining sustainability led to a culture of complacency. To build a mainstream sustainability strategy, substantial efforts are required to create a committed department for the same and recognise the work of people already making sustainable choices at work and home.

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qualifications from New Zealand. Her research project on sustainability is a key area of interest which she intends pursuing for further studies. With more than 20 years teaching experience in the Tertiary sector, she enjoys exploring new research ideas and wants to work on creating sustainable communities for better living.

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1   Introduction

There has been a complete change in the way the success of organisations is measured these days. Along with the financial performance, stakeholders evaluate the organisational impact on society and the environment (Copeland et al., 2021). Multiple bottom line (MBL) is a relatively new performance standard extending organisational responsibility to ethics, culture, and governance, which has been built on the foundation of the traditional triple bottom line (TBL) covering social, environmental, and financial performance (Rezaee, 2017). MBL stresses the need to create measures for non-financial initiatives and outcomes besides measuring only financial results. The concept has publicised 'corporate citizenship' where success in all three areas of profit, people and planet are required to truly measure a company's achievement. Advocates of MBL strongly assert that companies which consider financial, societal, and environmental outcomes in the same capacity are better corporate citizens and will be more profitable in the long run (Copeland et al., 2021). There is more awareness around the inclusion of 'green practices' like promoting environmental health, reducing waste, and conserving energy and water. Organisations have diverted attention based on three primary rationales of financial benefits, stakeholder relations and consumer demand, which seem to attract customers considerably while evaluating the business (Sun-Hwa et al., 2017).

Sustainability goes beyond simply aiming for profits and instead involves actively managing economic, social, and environmental practices that impact society. Our study focuses on the environmental aspects of sustainability. It involves providing transparent, accurate and reliable information to all stakeholders through sustainability reporting (Salehi and Arianpoor, 2021). This study aims to assess the level of sustainability of tertiary educational institutions and explore potential strategies to enhance their sustainability in the long term. Sustainability has come to attention recently, with firms exerting substantial efforts to include it in daily operations. Although the concept of sustainability gained popularity in the 1980s through the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) report, which primarily focused on ecological sustainability, organisations have faced difficulties in comprehending its full scope. Global warming and climate changes are detrimental to the community and its wellbeing. Considering this need, corporate sustainability encompasses additional social and environmental aspects besides the usual economic one. This provides a holistic overview of balancing company profits alongside corporate social responsibility (Sarvaiya and Wu, 2014). Organisations are expected to utilise earnings to foster social welfare and replenish natural resources.

The study aims to further understand how to incorporate sustainability more strategically into the chosen organisation, making it a routine way of functioning at all levels. A key motivation behind using the tertiary education sector (polytechnics in New Zealand) in this study was our interest in understanding and exploring sustainability issues in the type of organisation we are currently working with. Moreover, due to the recent scenario of merging 16 polytechnics and nine industrial training organisations into one of the largest tertiary institutes in New Zealand (Te Pūkenga), this investigation has become more significant. New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology (Te Pūkenga) works as a solid foundation to educate diverse learners in fields of business, construction, nursing, horticulture, and other areas and prepare learners to work ready. This study can serve as an exemplary role model for practicing sustainability to the learners who will then be able to carry similar values in their respective workplaces.

The key objective of this research is to understand ways of making sustainability an integral part of organisation's culture with complete commitment from staff and stakeholders. It needs to become almost a natural way of doing things for everyone rather than being imposed on by rules and regulations. There needs to be a shift from thinking about 'climate change' at an individual level to its application in all routine tasks undertaken. This can be achieved by aligning profit, people and planet when deciding all company operations (Gimenez and Tachizawa, 2012). Many scholars (e.g., Boulanger and Bréchet, 2005; Polk, 2011; Meyar-Naimi and Vaez-Zadeh, 2012) have presented findings on the choices available to organisations for including sustainability in planning and policies. But the problem area is integrating these policies into daily work where the need to be reminded about sustainability is not required. Though there is evidence of a sustainable strategy being present, there is no visibility of its implementation at lower levels, raising doubts about it being accepted as a 'mainstream strategy', accepted by all (Hengst et al., 2020). This research attempts to understand why sustainability is restricted to meeting rooms and discussions only. The study further delves into the awareness and willingness of staff to implement sustainable measures in their daily working operations.

Even though there is numerous literatures on the sustainability concept, the gap still exist in applying sustainability from a 'holistic' perspective. Extensive research has been

conducted on sustainable methods, their advantages and overall planning, but not many addresses how to make it a 'natural mindset' of daily working. There is a lack of material covering how sustainable cultures should be the most crucial items on company agendas and what can be done to ensure its smooth flow within the company.

This study explores sustainable measures across chosen polytechnics to have some basic understanding of making the participating organisation more sustainable. A common observation of organisations in the past was the prime focus on profit generation, expanding customer base for future growth, and beating competitors. All available resources were focused on financial success and brand expansion. It was not until now that a more conscious approach to include strategically critical activities started making the firms rethink their existing organisational goals.

2   Literature review

This section presents a critical analysis of the key concept of sustainability and its meaning to corporate organisations. It emphasises the importance of sustainability and the creative approaches that many firms apply to achieve sustainability. The section further emphasises the need for a collaborative approach to manifest any sustainable efforts into reality by incorporating relevant stakeholders in the process.

2.1   The concept

The primary goal of organisations was to achieve higher profits, grow their business and expand their market share. However, there are ideas that call for moving organisation from profit orientation to sustainability. Hung and Chuang (2019) proposed organisational critical activities (OCA) as an essential element to be included for future stability and success. These critical activities receive regular senior management commitment and are resourced significantly to produce the desired impact. Companies worldwide appear to be committed to reducing their carbon footprint and any negative activity impacting the environment (Ojala, 2022). However, showing commitment and working towards the direction are different things. If commitment were turned into practice, there would naturally be fewer environmental problems the world is facing these days. General public support more environmentally conscious companies that have produced evidence supporting social welfare and replenishing natural resources adding to the much-wanted competitive advantage element (Hung and Chuang, 2019). They are more likely to associate themselves and stay loyal to organisations that incorporate sustainability practices into their daily operations.

Babatunde et al. (2020) presented their finding on sustainable development activities that satisfy the fulfilment of current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. This is based on two major concepts: first is needs, where it is essential for sustainability practices to prioritise meeting society's basic needs in terms of socio-economic infrastructure. The second is the state of technology and social organisation, which imposes limitations on the environment's ability to meet future and current needs. Sustainability is not just an objective ensuring an improvement of current living standards but also improving those of future generations through the implementation of valid policies and practices (Babatunde et al., 2020). Kotera et al. (2022) argue that sustainability has become an essential component of tertiary education

today. Alm et al. (2022) support this claim indicating that when sustainable development goals are integrated into teaching through work-integrated learning and real-life experiences, students can develop key competencies for sustainability in their future work life. Close to what we are interested in, Lozano et al. (2022) suggested that the development of sustainable competency in higher education will automatically lead to holistic sustainable development as the higher education institutions are the ones producing decision making in the form of managers and professionals.

2.2   Current progress

New Zealand as a country has a close connection with Māori beliefs, such as preserving 'Tikanga' (Māori concept incorporating culture, values, and ethics in daily life) while generating income from businesses. The belief points to safeguarding the environment, diverse cultures, society and human life before any profit or organisational gain (Foley, 2008). A new term, 'Ecopreneur', has been referred to in Māori tourism to identify environmental innovations and business growth opportunities resulting from it. There was an emphasis on ever-increasing indigenous participation at the small to medium enterprise level within New Zealand relating to Māori cultural values and Tikanga as a whole. Tourism operators, for example, were highlighting 'lifestyle' as an important business pursuit alongside creating an ecologically sustainable firm. The economic values were pushed away, giving way to developing the fourth bottom line, ensuring climate preservation and cultural heritage while balancing the organisation's economic dynamics. Māori entrepreneurs never pursued wealth creation alone; in fact, their true success was determined by incorporating native culture, keeping it alive, without losing it to gain commercial success and profits only (Foley, 2008).

There are some other research supporting indigenous culture preservation as the natural way to live in terms of ecological sustenance. Such study highlights the impact associated with indigenous and tribal people on ecological balance while serving as a sustainability example to the community (Ødemark, 2019). To maintain natural resources, Māori in New Zealand are foregoing commercialisation willingly to preserve the environment for future generations. Even though it is a mindful cost, the justification is to acknowledge sustainable organisations and their efforts to stay the same while serving as exemplars for struggling firms still grappling with sustainability applications (Ødemark, 2019). Organisations need to learn from each other and share knowledge to ensure sustainable workplaces are created and maintained.

Okoro (2019) supports the above ideas emphasising the urgency to adopt sustainability by industries all over. It cannot be left as an option when corporate activities directly affect people and the planet. Sustainability consciousness and the internal work environment are strongly correlated when deciding a company's future outcome (Okoro, 2019). Organisations can no longer ignore that social, economic, technological, and ecological perspectives are interrelated and need to be addressed with due importance. In corporate circles, sustainability is no longer seen as an ethical and moral issue but as a key element in organisational strategy and competitive advantage (Etse et al., 2022).

2.3   Innovative strategies promoting sustainable options

Hengst et al. (2020) highlights the dynamics of implementing a sustainable strategy alongside a mainstream competitive strategy utilised by firms. Even though it would legitimately exist at the organisational level, employees tend to experience tensions with its implementation at the action level. This is of critical importance to research aim which also points to finding a solution for overall implementation of sustainability throughout the organisation. An interesting term has been introduced, 'decoupling', which simply means "adopting a policy symbolically, without implementing it substantively", leaving it open to misunderstandings (Hengst et al., 2020). Research suggests that though many organisations understand sustainability as their corporate philosophies they seem to struggle with the implementation of sustainability at all levels equally (De Lange et al., 2012). There is a strong need to identify sustainability policy as a 'mainstream' strategy that holds equal importance to all other organisation policies. It cannot be seen as an additional effort to meet the global trend of 'going green', rather it should be the underlying philosophy of day-to-day activities of the organisation.

2.4   A more sustainable supply chain

A common practice in the past was to continue operations, production and selling without thinking about the origin of raw materials and other supplies. However, recent awareness around sustainability has seen multinationals pledge to work only with suppliers with social and environmental standards (Villena and Gioia, 2020). The expectation is not only limited to first-tier suppliers but every possible tier going to the lowest, ensuring a sustainable supply chain is maintained throughout. Even though this is an admirable idea, it is not free of barriers and faces deceptive practices from various parties involved. Despite the awareness of sustainability standards, many multinationals have been scrutinised for sourcing materials from countries requiring employees to work unethically and in hazardous environments (Thorlakson et al., 2018). The problem was deeply rooted in the fact that suppliers in the lower chain levels were not included in the sustainable vision shared by the corporates. There were reports of chronic overtime issues, no health and wellness program, and no knowledge about environmental practices. Surprisingly, the reason behind the above problems went back to the multinationals, who were known to demand higher production without thinking about the consequences on the supply chain (Villena and Gioia, 2020).

Organisations need to evaluate the benefits of sustainable development against the cost involved in incorporating sustainable development. In a book chapter, 'The benefits of sustainability-driven innovation', Kiron et al. (2012) argue that companies that change their business model making sustainability a permanent part of the top management agenda are likely to earn more profit. Ekins and Zenghelis (2021) further argue that although conventional cost-benefit analysis of sustainability might not be possible, organisations need to think seriously about sustainable measures now to avoid future consequences because the cost of 'grow now and clean up later' will be much higher.

2.5   Collaborative approach

Serafeim (2020) strongly points to the lack of attention by investors, in the early 2010s, to environmental, social and governance (ESG) data about a company's carbon footprints

and general governance information. However, now smart, informed investors screen out poor ESG performers and seek to invest only in 'green funds' expecting exemplary ESG behaviours that result in better financial and ethical performance. Dragomir and Foris (2022) support this claim suggesting that major economic, social and environmental issues are common in the contemporary society and all sectors has major roles to play to achieving sustainability. An interesting finding was during the spread of COVID-19, when global financial markets were collapsing, that the companies which the public viewed as behaving more responsibly had less-negative stock returns than their competitors (Serafeim, 2020). The crisis suggests the public is more responsive to companies considering societal needs than short-term profits. Another powerful movement of 'Black Lives Matter' is creating support for fair employment practices and stronger diversity policies. The growing pressure on companies to perform well on ESG dimensions is clear from the above examples, but the challenge for many corporate leaders is the lack of knowledge to achieve the same (Hibaq, 2022). A lack of understanding and communication regarding their ESG efforts is posing to be a great hurdle.

Many executives rely on the belief that simple actions such as releasing sustainability reports and related events will suffice ESG performance. There is a tendency to embrace a 'box-ticking' culture that encourages the adoption of ESG activities mostly created by consultants based on industry benchmarks and best practices. Though these still earn operational efficiencies in terms of reducing waste and adhering to compliance, but they are not enough to establish a firm sustainable stand. "Companies must move beyond box ticking and window dressing" if they sincerely want to see widespread implementation of sustainability (Serafeim, 2020). There is a need for becoming more conscious of strategically crucial activities to achieve sustainability than just working for monetary gains.

In line with our research objective, Serafeim (2020) research strongly recommends that sustainability become a priority for top executives and central to the firm's culture. It should not just be to pursue ESG ratings instead it needs to use ESG integration to create new ways of competitive advantage. Since it involves fundamental strategic and operational choices, ESG efforts cannot be left entirely to the sustainability department or investor relations team (Bailey et al., 2016). Most companies have been treating it like a cell phone case- added for protection (as in, protection of the firm's reputation), but corporate leaders need to replace this mindset by employing a differentiated ESG strategy to see the financial advantage (Serafeim, 2020).

In the past, companies rarely saw them as agents of social change. The primary focus was on finance and economic growth only. It is only now that the concept of *creating shared value*, achieving financial gains while providing societal benefits, has made corporates rethink their objectives (Kramer and Pfitzer, 2016). It was getting clear if businesses could initiate social progress in the world, pollution, poverty, and disease would be on the decline, and corporate profits could still steadily rise. But this 'shared value approach' faces barriers in the form of government policies, supplier and distributor arrangements, and cultural norms influencing demand. This is because the corporates cannot operate in isolation and are part of the ecosystem comprising of all the above components. To tackle this issue, a movement called *collective impact* has been encouraged which guides company's efforts to bring together governments, companies, and community members in creating multi-sector coalitions (Kramer and Pfitzer, 2016).

The greatest advantage of pursuing 'collective impact' lies in the fact that businesses alone do not shoulder the entire cost of social transformation; the different entities involved share it, too, giving rise to economic opportunities with the additional social progress initiated. The tertiary sector can greatly benefit from this concept while deciding strategies and plans. The research aims to gain significant insight into working options that can be utilised to ensure a culture of sustainability involving key participants and the need to work collectively.

3   Methodology

Using an inductive approach was essential to the research aim as the intention was to understand participants' feelings regarding sustainability at their workplace. Their experiences and coping mechanisms for the same were crucial to this research. The purpose was to understand the nature of issues and inherent opinions about possible causes (Saunders et al., 2020). Therefore, it supports the study of a small sample of the population, ten participants in this research, as the focus is on the context of events taking place.

To gain a rich understanding of the research context and corresponding processes, 'case study' strategy was used. It involved an empirical investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context by utilising multiple sources of evidence. The polytechnics of New Zealand were included in the case study strategy, it incorporated 'multiple cases', to generalise the findings and gather common patterns among each other (Saunders et al., 2020). This was particularly important to the given research aim of establishing an understanding of the sustainability practices of the chosen organisation. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews with ten research participants working in different polytechnics in New Zealand.

Semi structured interviews were used to allow freedom of expression, including responses from both individual experts and groups working in the company. Since a pragmatist approach to research has been established, this style helps deal with a list of predetermined themes in a more flexible and contingent manner based on each participant's response. The exploratory study greatly benefits from using semi-structured interviews to find out what is happening and seek new insights (Saunders et al., 2020). These interviews provide an opportunity to 'probe' answers which was essential in the given research where interviewees were required to explain their responses. Semi-structured interviews provide information that may otherwise be impossible using questionnaires and similar scales (Gupta and Awasthy, 2021). It was particularly important where focus is on understanding the meanings that respondents ascribe to various phenomena.

There were 16 institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs commonly referred to as polytechnics) and nine industry training organisations (ITOs) in New Zealand, which has been merged into one organisation, New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology, called *Te Pūkenga*. At the time of this study, the process of merging of these institutes into one single tertiary institute was in the initial stages and our study was carried out among existing ITPS or polytechnics. A list of polytechnics was created with existing contacts in place to request access for potential research participants who could be present as professional colleagues. Four polytechnics were shortlisted based on response received- these are referred to as Polytechnic AT, Polytechnic BT, Polytechnic CT and

Polytechnic DT in this paper avoiding the use of actual names of the institutions. Contact details were shared with prior permission informing relevant details about this research.

The consented participants were interviewed for duration of 30–45 mins to gain information on current sustainability status. The research aim gained considerable depth with the information collected from participants who were working as managers and tutors. The interviews were conducted via zoom and recorded, seeking prior permission to analyse the responses later to provide a more in-depth analysis. The interviews helped build an open forum for discussion around current challenges and future options for implementing sustainability policy throughout the organisation. It helped us to understand the reasons for not having a sustainable working culture for all levels of the company.

Conducting qualitative research meant data analysis was inclined to be an ongoing process. There was lot of reflection and thinking about emerging themes leading to modifications in the interview process. Therefore 'thematic analysis' was the most appropriate method as the intention was to let themes emerge from the data collected rather than being imposed upon by the researcher (Dawson, 2007). After conducting the first few interviews, it was clear some questions were overlapping and therefore had to be changed to include precise information. In the given research, different patterns were explored relating to sustainability. There was no imposition of a theoretical framework to examine data to base on available theory and practice (Saunders et al., 2020). Since it was not driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the topic, inductive analysis supported the research aim, as an interpretation of the data process was free from researcher's analytic preconceptions and coding frames (Clarke and Braun, 2016).

4 Findings and discussion

The section provides an overview of the findings obtained from thematic analysis using the data collected via semi-structured interviews. A total of ten participants from four polytechnics were interviewed using zoom software, and information was stored as zoom recordings to compile results more systematically. Each interview was for 30–45 minutes leaving scope for further discussion if required. The data was analysed thematically and presented in the following paragraphs using diverse topics and sub-topics using the themes from data analysis. Key points and statements have been italicised and presented separately to emphasise the importance of the content. Each theme leads to answering the main question of how sustainability can be achieved at a core level and working function rather than just as a policy on paper. The results obtained through data analysis are presented using the following topics below.

4.1 Current views on sustainability and meaning to the education sector

There was a wide range of ideas included in this part. For some it was climate change, global warming aligning with school values in terms of *save paper and reduce printing*, work from home options to reduce carbon footprint and overall consciousness of consuming less resources. While for others, sustainability included community development, TBL application and keeping United Nation's sustainable development goals as a benchmark to achieve a high standard of sustainability. This supports Rezaee's

(2017) findings that consider social, environmental, and financial aspects of sustainability with primary focus on environmental aspects of sustainability. One participant pointed to the folk version – "to live gently today, leaving enough so others can live tomorrow" as the basis for achieving social sustainable standards.

Interestingly, for a few participants, the meaning of sustainability revolved around strategic plans for staff, students, and management regarding their future with current courses in New Zealand. For others, it came down to the overall responsibility of the education industry to encourage sustainable living. This highlights the need to extend sustainability to the needs of green practices benefiting organisation stakeholders (Sun-Hwa et al., 2017). The quotes below from the research participants also point to the same direction on their thinking about sustainability.

> "Contribution of businesses to reduce carbon footprint."

> "Sustainability is important to the education sector as it is training students for future workforce."

> "They don't do what you tell them to do, but they do what you do."

Students value being part of sustainable organisations and would like to practice it once they have experienced it. They stressed the need to align courses with future employability and ensure students were work-ready after completing their studies at NZ institutions. This supports Alm et al. (2022) argument about developing learners' competency for the future generation. This suggests that when we can develop environmental sustainability knowledge on our existing learners, they will be able to incorporate sustainable practices in their daily lives.

4.2   Current status of participating organisation

The participating organisations were generally positive about the current scenario surrounding sustainability and expressed honest views on where more work needed to be done. Participants from Polytechnic AT were informed about some positive steps in terms of acquiring a hybrid fleet of vehicles to reduce their carbon footprint. There are well structured programs and policies to support both staff and students. Staff try incorporating sustainability awareness through teaching course content and assignments. However, there seemed to be some discontent regarding the lack of support from senior leadership. This contradicts De Lange et al.'s (2012) findings that organisations understand sustainability as their corporate philosophy but lack initiative for implementation into practice. Our findings suggest that lower-level staff at the implementation level are working towards sustainability while those at the strategic level appear to be not interested in sustainability. As one senior manager commented, "I regret to say sustainability was not on agenda before COVID and that progress has been extremely slow in this area". He also informed about the lowest vaccination rate amongst young Māori, clearly pointing to unsustainable examples. Another manager continued similar lines, "ideas are there but no visible efforts or results in sight".

Tutors were unhappy with the lack of knowledge around the current merger (Te Pūkenga), with the background knowledge not been established. As some participants lamented,

> "There is no support from senior leadership in driving sustainability."

> "There are no plans, no ideas, and no feedback. A lot of information is passed through emails, but no discussions take place; sustainability is more on paper, at the moment than in practice."

Participants from Polytechnic DT had a lot of positive examples to share, sighting the reduction of printing costs and work from home options to support staff and students. "Initiatives like recycling bins, LED bulbs and use of Blackboard instead of handwritten notes", were the examples provided. Another tutor commented on the 'holistic' approach being encouraged to achieve sustainable options through departments and general business. One participant from Polytechnic CT informed about the deep-rooted sustainability component in strategy, policy, teaching, and delivery. He said, "lectures on triple bottom line were quite common, and assignments were based on ensuring a wide awareness of sustainability".

However, the most promising information was gathered from Polytechnic BT's construction tutor, who proudly mentioned having a wellness and sustainability manager for almost 11 years now. He spoke about the departments taking care of sustainability at all levels with a *proactive rather than reactive approach in mind*. These efforts point towards the sustainability agenda and support Okoro's (2019) findings that suggest organisations now recognise the urgency to adopt sustainability. This is also aligned with Babatunde et al.'s (2020) research findings about organisations now working towards developing policies and practices that are more concerned with protecting the future generation.

4.3 Measures to track progress

Most respondents confessed to a lack of awareness of any measures to track sustainability progress. Even if they were present, the knowledge about these measures was not known to them. A senior manager pointed towards the role of government to set out rules against which organisations could track their progress. Some tutors suggested practical measures that could be introduced in their respective organisations to do the needful-amount of paper being used, electricity usage, waste management and carbon footprint awareness, enrolment data to see passing rates and employability status. Some pointed out,

> "There was no such communication to staff regarding any measures in place."

> "Electricity usage, waste management and carbon footprint accounts needed to be tracked."

> "Amount of printer ink used could be a basic measure looked into to track progress."

> "Student enrollment data and employment status match would reveal sustainability in clear terms."

The participant wanted to see a clear interpretation of results around students enrolled in each course with the employment achieved for that cohort. Not only should this data be analysed, but its communication to all staff was equally crucial to understand missing gaps in course delivery. This finding is similar to Dragomir and Foris's (2022) claim suggesting that major economic, social, and environmental issues are common in contemporary society and all sectors have major roles to play in achieving sustainability.

4.4   Challenges faced by the organisation

Different challenges were identified during the research; Polytechnic AT was mainly affected by a lack of communication and insufficient support from senior leaders. The participants had a common ground pointing towards the recent restructuring with Te Pūkenga and the uncertainty it carried affecting their own individual future within the organisation. As one part-time tutor lamented, "there seems to be no transparency of information shared". Another tutor commented on the challenge to create current and new courses and address the needs of employment, she also pointed to the lack of resources supporting in this regard. A senior leader was saddened with the lack of involvement with Māori values 'kaitiakitanga' (sustainable guardianship and protection) and the lack of support extended to Māori in rural areas. He further informed about a "Bogan" attitude (colloquial for someone whose speech, clothing and behaviour are considered unsophisticated) as opposed to more accommodating and kind people accepting sustainable measures for a better life. This contradicts De Lange et al.'s (2012) findings that organisation understands sustainability as their corporate philosophy but lacks initiative for implementation into practice. This is due to a lack of transparency in the amalgamation of different polytechnics into one organisation and future uncertainty surrounding this.

Participants from Polytechnic DT found lack of financial resources a major area of concern. As one participant highlighted,

> "Lack of funding for simple things like router to provide internet connection to rural farmers."

> "Types of learners are different from Invercargill to Auckland."

Polytechnic BT's biggest challenge was lack of business model to guide future survival. Financial concerns regarding the implementation were another one reported. While Polytechnic CT suffered from lack of specific goals and milestones to achieve sustainability. The quote below from one of the participants from the Polytechnic CT suggests this.

> "Even more rigorous department could be developed and focus more strategically on sustainable options."

This is similar to the findings from Sarasvathy and Ramesh (2019), who argue that limited resources, including financial, uncertain future direction from top management and similar issues, are obstacles to implementing sustainability in the chosen organisation.

4.5   Staff awareness of sustainability

Participants from Polytechnic AT mostly agreed staff were aware of sustainable measures like waste management, recycling and reusing. They were, however, saddened to report that there seemed a lack of focus and interest, to practice sustainability as it was not being encouraged by senior leadership. As one senior manager reported, "staff are not well travelled and consequently not having enough ideas" to create innovative sustainable practices within the organisation.

Participants from Polytechnic DT acknowledged a lack of awareness and hesitation to implement sustainability in daily operations. Polytechnic CT participants did not

comment due to a lack of information regarding staff involvement and awareness on sustainability. However, Polytechnic BT tutor informed, "to have knowledgeable, learned staff who have displayed this awareness in their behaviour and courses taught on campus". In fact, to support his statement more this participant justifies his argument on the basis of information around a paper called 'environmental impact' introduction, which specifically targeted sustainability being taught on campus. This is aligned with the argument put forward by Alm et al. (2022) about incorporating sustainability in teaching and learning to improve learners' awareness via experiential and work-integrated learning.

4.6   Options to build awareness among staff

'Lead by example' and 'walk the talk' was the common tone throughout this question. Participants from Polytechnic AT and Polytechnic CT unanimously pointed to more involvement of top management in creating staff awareness around sustainability. They also highlighted the role of government and council in preparing sustainable development goals (SDGs) as benchmarks to be achieved by organisations at all levels. One senior manager pointed out that they can change things. Tutors wanted to see regular meetings around sustainability and feedback taken on board from all employees, more professional development (PD) initiatives on similar lines and ensuring everyone understands the importance of being sustainable. This is also about sustainability becoming a priority for top executives and central to the firm's culture (Serafeim, 2020).

Polytechnic DT tutors emphasised the use of training in small sessions to highlight the importance of sustainability. They also emphasise the use of videos and other mediums to encourage a sustainable lifestyle. As one senior manager narrated, "I started rethinking buying a pair of jeans when came to know the number of resources used in manufacturing was similar to a person drinking water for two years". The spread of such information via interesting anecdotes could set sustainability awareness in the minds of everyone.

Tutor from Polytechnic BT suggested the use of newsletters and well-being clinics to build this awareness with the quote below.

> "A system of 'Uniwaka'-carpooling app was in beta testing stage, allowing students and staff to share rides leading to lesser cars on road."

This innovative initiative targeted at meeting a very basic need, travelling to college, in the most effective way. By downloading the app and using it to reduce one's own carbon footprint was an important step in building sustainability awareness.

4.7   Potential apprehensions

Potential apprehensions were one of the themes that came up from the data analysis. For example, a senior manager from Polytechnic AT pointed to having strong conservation groups but not sustainable groups and to thinking that "climate change was on holiday due to crisis created by COVID-19". It was clear that the participants were interested to talk about preserving the resources, but no one focused on the holistic inclusion of sustainable thinking at work. To make matters worse, with onset of coronavirus pandemic, all efforts were directed at it, leaving sustainability entirely out of sight. However, this contradicts Serafeim's (2020) arguments that during the spread of

COVID-19, when global financial markets were collapsing, the companies which the public viewed as behaving more responsibly had less-negative stock returns than their competitors. If this is the scenario, sustainability should have been a core focus of most organisations even during the COVID pandemic.

Tutors felt restructuring with Te Pukenga, senior leadership attitude to a 'tick-box culture' and not being technologically advanced as potential apprehensions. One of the horticulture tutors from Polytechnic AT informed us about inherent motivation being missing, and that lack of no one specific person responsible for overlooking sustainability as key apprehension.

Polytechnic DT and Polytechnic CT participants saw finance as a significant obstacle and thought lack of budget was a key measure in the organisation. Whereas a construction tutor from Polytechnic BT saw 'cost of energy' as a major area of concern. The high price of acquiring hybrid electric vehicles was not an affordable option. He commented on the unaffordability of sustainable options leaving people in a predicament to, "put food on table or spend on eco-friendly commodities".

4.8   Stakeholder participation

Polytechnic AT participants informed about more work to be done involving students in terms of getting *free transportation to college and teaching sustainability components through all courses*. Industry partners need to be approached and asked directly regarding their expectations from the organisation. Transparent communication with relevant parties was crucial, and somebody needed to be responsible for overlooking sustainable stakeholders' relationship.

Polytechnic DT respondents also emphasised the critical role of communication in identifying sustainable working relations with all stakeholders. As one senior manager pointed out, "suppliers need to know about organisations sustainable efforts", and learners could be aware of sustainability through various course papers.

Similar arguments were put forward by participants from other polytechnics. For example, one of the tutors from Polytechnic BT informed about construction courses and the collaboration with builders and architects to encourage the use of sustainable materials while tutor from Polytechnic CT thought that the government had a major role to play to ensure the organisation's overall structure was sustainable. This is about the institution's/organisation's efforts to bring together governments, other organisations, and community members in creating multi-sector coalitions for achieving sustainability (Kramer and Pfitzer, 2016).

4.9   Methods to ensure sustainability becomes a working function

Mostly participants from Polytechnic AT pointed out about having a specific position designated to oversee sustainable working. They suggested that processes needed to be structured, and staff involved should be encouraged. There needed to be a "commitment to work with proper standards", as one tutor pointed out, which then should be checked against set parameters.

Polytechnic DT tutor resonated with the need for communication and adequate funding to ensure sustainability was practiced. There needed to be more awareness and training regarding this, resulting in a culture of mindful sustainability. Aligning closely to this above idea, tutor from Polytechnic BT strongly emphasised the need for rewards to

recognise sustainable efforts. On the line of recognising employee of the month, there could be *environmentalist of the month* to highlight the contribution of passionate staff. He also pointed to giving more emphasis to teaching people to think about sustainability. These ideas closely align with Kotera et al.'s (2022) recommendation about making sustainability an essential part of tertiary education.

Similarly, Polytechnic CT participant wanted to see 'robust but consistent reporting and disclosure of sustainable practices' which should be measured against international standards. A stronger leadership focus to appropriate policy, guidelines and vision was required to ensure overall flow of sustainable options throughout the organisation. This was the highlight of the conversation with the participants from the Polytechnic CT.

4.10 Potential benefits of sustainability

The far-reaching benefits of sustainability were unanimously supported by all participants. Everyone agreed a sustainable environment would reduce cost, time involved in completing activities and the overall health of communities. It could lead to decreasing inequalities in terms of salary parity and support various regions to survive for a long time. A key benefit was pointed towards building:

> "Brand and market reputation while sustaining an environment for future generations."

> "Better utilisation of energy and resources would mean higher productivity and return on investment for the organisation."

> "More community benefit out of sustainable business practices."

> "Creating a better place to live."

> "Longevity of future for both staff and students."

The greatest benefit of a sustainable mindset is creating mutual advantages for individuals and society. If everyone takes care of their choices, a favourable change will be seen in environmental health at all levels. This is related to avoiding the future consequence of the 'grow now and clean up later' approach suggested by Ekins and Zenghelis (2021) and reaping the benefit of sustainable development at the present.

5   Conclusions

This study found that organisation has some work to do before it can be considered sustainable. The research aim was to strategise sustainability as a mainstream policy incorporated into daily operations and the mindset of all involved. It should become a lifestyle choice for everyone and not just be restricted to discussions in meeting rooms. The use of semi-structured interviews greatly helped collect data from participants who felt comfortable sharing their opinions about various sustainability issues within their respective organisations.

The findings clearly point to areas where efforts must be put to create a sustainable working culture. Top management initiatives, standardised policies, designated departments, and rewards to recognise sustainable achievements were the key points that came out of this study. The study pointed towards the necessity of appointing personnel who needed to focus all their energy and expertise to ensure sustainability measures are

practised uniformly within all organisation departments. Benchmarking against other educational institutions that have successfully implemented sustainability practices and identifying various strategies, policies, and practices that can be implemented in the organisation would help to successfully reach the sustainability goal. Encouraging open communication, creative dialogue, and sharing sustainability best practices within the organisation among various employees and between organisations to work collaboratively in tackling issues related to implementing sustainability measures could also help achieve the goal. Similarly, it is equally important to raise awareness about sustainability by various means like workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns, to students, staff, and other stakeholders for educating them on how to be sustainable and implement sustainability in daily life.

It is important to understand that even though senior leadership's initiative and policy making is required, sustainability should not be forced upon staff and stakeholders. There needs to be a culture created by the firm to encourage sustainable work choices for which actual examples and actions need to be displayed. In today's time, everyone is knowledgeable about recycling, reusing, reducing waste, and leading a 'green lifestyle' in general. Sustainability can be achieved holistically by including the recommendations from the research, which will result in a more productive workplaces and happier communities.

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