

DOWN THE ROAD OF INNOVATION STRATEGY

A ROUTE TOWARDS EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

by

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Down the road of Innovation Strategy:
A route towards Employee Experience and Sustainability

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| ABSTRACT | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTION | 3 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 6 |
| INNOVATION STRATEGY | 7 |
| EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE | 10 |
| SUSTAINABILITY | 14 |
| THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 18 |
| METHODOLOGY | 21 |
| DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS | 22 |
| ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA | 23 |
| CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS | 26 |
| FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS | 27 |
| INNOVATION STRATEGY IN PLACE | 28 |
| LIMITED INVOLVEMENT OF EMPLOYEES | 29 |
| COLLABORATION IN PLACE | 30 |
| LIMITED ASSOCIATION OF INNOVATION STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY | 32 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 34 |
| LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH | 37 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 39 |
| APPENDIX A - DEEPER EXPLANATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 44 |
| APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW SCRIPT | 47 |

TABLE OF FIGURES AND TABLES

| | |
|---|----|
| FIGURE 1 - MAPPING DIAGRAM OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 19 |
| TABLE 1 - PARTICIPANTS AND EXPERIENCES | 24 |
| TABLE 2 - PROFILES AND EXPERIENCES | 25 |
| TABLE 3 - DEEPER EXPLANATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 46 |

Starting with the research question 'How might Innovation Strategy be a channel to improve Employee Experience and Sustainable Practices in an organization?' this project investigates how an Innovation Strategy process, while preparing an organization for the future, can contribute to employee engagement and environmentally, socially and economically sustainable practices.

There are various reasons stimulating organizations to innovate, yet often the process to conceptualize Innovation Strategies is managed by only a few executives at the top of structural hierarchies (Getha-Taylor, Grayer, Kempf, & O'Leary, 2019). By doing that, organizations may lose the potential of diversified thinking already available from within the employee ranks, besides the rise of challenges during the implementation phase (Car, n.d.), such as employees not being motivated to contribute. Additionally, by restricting the approach to a few, there is the risk of not accounting for adverse consequences, as innovation can result in bad outcomes, even if the term is usually perceived as 'a good solution' (Hartley, 2005).

Inside organizations, for a couple of years, half of employees not being satisfied with their jobs (Weber, 2016). Traditional Human Resource Management approaches have failed to take advantage of employees' knowledge, an important intangible asset and one of the most valuable for a business (Coff, 1997). Organizations are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on employee engagement programs; yet, the results remain poor, which reinforces the need for a holistic approach that also maximizes empowerment, what is known as Employee Experience (Morgan, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017; Hollon, 2012; Weiss & Hughes, 2005).

The organizations' contribution to environmental and social problems has been a concern for several years already, and the concept of sustainability has been growing in visibility lately (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019; Ray & Mondal, 2017). Still, many corporations continue to focus on financial benefits above environmental and social aspects (Ray & Mondal, 2017). This reality not only reinforces the issues mentioned, it risks performance in the long-term and may lead to unsustainable businesses practices. Therefore, organizations need to implement strategies that consider their sustainability aspects to minimize impacts and maximizes benefits to the environmental and social fields as well as to support employee engagement toward the support of such strategies.

By having a collaborative intra-organization approach to Innovation Strategy, organizations can make use of the potential of knowledge already within them (Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010). A lot has been said about the value of involving employees in innovation. However, there is a lack of research on how to realize this potential (Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010). Additionally, by incorporating a sustainability lens to the Innovation Strategy process, the organization can maximize good innovation outcomes and contribute to a successful business while also building employee engagement.

This project starts with a literature review around the topic area with diverse perspectives around academia. From this comprehensive evaluation, this paper summarizes the three themes relationships with a mapping diagram, which is the theoretical framework. Following, a table with a deeper understanding to the theoretical framework presents some crucial points towards the improvement of employee experience and sustainability with the examined approach to innovation strategy.

Afterwards, this document details the methodology of the primary research method executed in the food and beverage sector. Additionally, it presents the rationale behind the organizations and participants selection. Finally, the project talks about the findings and analysis from the primary research, which found deeper understanding to the research question. This report is ends by offering conclusions to the project, as well as, opportunities for future research.

The three key themes presented in the research question were investigated in a multidisciplinary range of literature. This section starts with the description of these topics – Innovation Strategy, Employee Experience and Sustainability. While it brings the interactions of these three themes, this project summarizes this section with an influence map diagram of the potential benefits of the suggested approach towards Innovation Strategy that is discussed along the three sections. Concluding the literature review chapter, a theoretical framework summarizes in a mapping diagram what is being examined. Then, a table provides a deeper understanding of the potential, enablers, and barriers of each particular step that is part of the overall approach.

INNOVATION STRATEGY

For a better understanding of what Innovation Strategy means, the two concepts merged in this term may be evaluated. A strategy is a set of choices; it is the decisions added over time. It starts with a conceptualization phase, which involves the decision to pursue or not something (Nadler, 1994), and it follows with an implementation segment that is going to deliver value to an organization and its stakeholders. Complementing this phrase, an innovation is an intentional and proactive both process and outcome (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Crossan & Apaydin, 2009). It involves the design, adoption and dissemination of new and creative ideas aimed at generating a qualitative change in a particular context (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Therefore, an Innovation Strategy is the organizational choices that aim to generate changes in a preferred future context through the formation and fulfilment of creative ideas.

The current fast and volatile world brings the importance of an Innovation Strategy to organizations. Companies, not simply, have to work to maintain their ongoing operation but evaluate future possibilities that are going to continue delivering value for them and their stakeholders and improve their competitiveness. A culture of innovation is a powerful source of competitive advantage, and a platform for organizations continue to be relevant in the future (Mao & Weathers, 2019). By developing and executing an innovation strategy, organizations can structure the choices that will help them to pursue their future intents.

To conceptualize an innovation strategy, it is beneficial that organizations have future scenarios to set a context. By providing a context, organizations help the focus and alignment of the process. As presented by Van Der Heijden (n.d.), scenarios can be considered as the various future business environments where a strategy is going to perform; a metaphor of a wind tunnel helps this explanation, where scenarios are the test conditions and strategy is the test model. Therefore, scenarios can improve the perception of the organization's members of the future (Van Der Heijden, n.d.). While scenarios

provide contexts, they can maximize focus during ideation and support the entire process of innovation.

To extract the most from scenarios and contribute to context setting, some guidelines shall be considered by an organization. Scenarios' development needs to include insights and knowledge from the organization in order to become useful to the company as a whole (Van Der Heijden, n.d.). Moreover, a range of communication tools, such as kiosks, posters, roleplaying, and improvisation, can maximize the reception of scenarios, impacting the knowledge across the organization, therefore enhancing strategic decisions (Gregory, Harris, & Ogilvy, 1998). The development of scenarios should start by considering information from the organization and further be communicated through tools that enhance response. This action can paint a clear picture of where the organization will play in the future and achieve the benefits from a defined context, as presented in the previous paragraph.

Other than having clear and shared pictures of where organizations want to play in the future, it is essential to acknowledge some concepts around the process of innovating. Innovating is not a one-step activity; it is a social process, specific to the organization and based on codified and tacit knowledge (Van Der Heijden, n.d.; Prange, Eng, & Li, 2015; Blomqvist & Levy, 2006). Also, it is a process embedded with uncertainty, and involve more than one specific world view; thus, it is necessary to articulate, discuss and negotiate an innovation strategy (Van Der Heijden, n.d.). This process should be generative as it captures the learning and strategic insights from both bottom-up and top-down (Naddler, 1994), it emerges from employees, across existing divisions and roles (Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010). While participating in day-to-day tasks, employees often come across critical information or have new insights that can improve current practices or create new opportunities for the organization (Pandher, Mutlu, & Samnani, 2017). By having employees to co-create solutions, organizations put together different perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, it decreases reluctance to change and builds ownership, engagement and commitment, as employees who feel empowered to change are less likely to dismiss their ideas (Plaskoff, 2017). Thus, the process of innovating can be enhanced if it involves the entire organization in continuous interaction, moving beyond the top-level of hierarchies and physical boundaries in order to access employees' knowledge specific to the organization. This approach also influences the innovation as an outcome, while this constant involvement may reduce internal resistance during the implementation of such innovation and improve internal engagement.

As the accomplishment of scenarios can be enhanced by communication tools, so can strategies. As previously mentioned in the beginning of this section, strategies are the action of choices (Naddler, 1994). To achieve consensus around these choices, communication and knowledge management play an important role (Van Der Heijden, n.d.). Through conversations and intra-collaboration, different departments not only share

their knowledge, but motivate and contribute to a more cohesive strategy and practices in the whole organization.

However, even if the organization implemented what is recommended so far in this section (such as the development and communication of future scenarios, and the involvement of the entire organization in an intra-collaborative strategy practice and communication of it), some challenges will still exist. Strategies can face several risks within three categories: execution, co-innovation, and adoption chain (Adner, 2013). While in his book, Adner talks about the interactions of multiple organizations collaborating towards innovation (open innovation), the three categories of challenges are still relevant to an intra-collaborative approach of innovation strategy. Organizations may face challenges when implementing innovations in the necessary timeframe (execution risk); their success may depend on other innovations being successfully marketed (co-innovation risk); and lately, their accomplishment depend on how much partners need to embrace their innovations before end consumers have the opportunity to evaluate their value propositions (adoption chain risk) (Adner, 2013). While adoption chain risk involves external actors of the organization, co-innovation and execution risks may be mitigated with an intra-collaborative examined by this paper, which may reduce employees' resistance towards a new strategy implementation and clarity of what the organization aims to achieve.

Besides the three categories of risks that innovation strategies may face in their trajectories, another challenge can be named as motivation risk. Even if the word innovation is usually associated with positive results, innovation, and therefore innovation strategy not necessarily will be something good as an outcome (Hartley, 2005). This risk not only can be diminished, but it has the potential of being avoided if the organization involves more people in the process of innovating which can reduce biases; also this risk can be mitigated if it includes aspects giving the same importance as profitability, such as social and environmental through a sustainability lens.

Summarizing, while an organization make the choices around its future intents only involving a limited group of employees and not necessarily considering sustainability aspects (environmental, social, economic), it may end up having innovation strategies with biases, that generate unintended consequences to the environment and society, and that experience internal resistance during their implementation phases. All strategies are open to risks, from the ones involving external actors (adoption chain risk) to the ones that are more internal to the organization (co-innovation, execution, and motivation risks). However, these internal risks can be mitigated if the innovation strategy process has a higher involvement of employees and the inclusion of sustainability aspects in the first place. To do so, an organization should start with the design of future scenarios based on internal knowledge, aiming to set a future context that contributes to the increase of focus during ideation and throughout the process of innovating. Consequently, by clearly communicating these scenarios, employees have a clear picture of where the organization

will play in the future. Also, as presented before, innovation involves continuous interactions, thus it has to move beyond the top-level of hierarchies and physical boundaries to access the internal thinking and not limit the overall innovation level of the company. Concluding, by including more diverse thinking in the room, and aiming to give the same level of attention to social and environmental aspects as it is usually given to profitability, the so-called motivation risks can be diminished, creating a path to good outcomes innovations.

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Another term key to this paper is employee experience, which exists from the reframing of traditional human resources (HR) management approaches to one that better fits the modern workplace while it empowers and engages employees. Its naming comes from a similar approach to user experience but having employees as the centre of the design process instead (Plaskoff, 2017). The approach empowers and engages employees and is motivated by three main themes: low job engagement rates, multiple generations at the workplace, and the complexity of employee treatments.

Understanding and improving the overall experience of employees in an organization is a complex challenge. As the first of the three themes mentioned above, half of the employees in the US are not satisfied with their jobs, a scenario happening for a couple of years already (Weber, 2016), where satisfaction is understood as the basis for employee engagement (Rogel, 2018). Secondly, several generations have been working together, with different needs and wants, increasing the complexity involved in this investigation. Finally, a vast set of elements can affect employees, such as workloads, compensation, feedback activities, among others that are not easily measured (Mao & Weathers, 2019). Therefore, low job satisfaction and engagement rates, multiple generations at the workplace, and the complexity of employee treatments demand an approach that empowers and engages employees.

While most organizations think about employee engagement and innovation, it seems that these two pieces are not being brought together. Management thinking in most organizations tends to focus on three main objectives: employee retention, employee engagement, and promotion of innovation (Caplan, 2014). In an effort to increase employee engagement, many companies have been reformulating their management processes or implementing rewards and recognition systems to motivate desired behaviours and engage employees; still, few are happy with the results (Morgan, 2017; Hollon, 2012; Weiss & Hughes, 2005). These organizations have been struggling to increase employee engagement in the entire workforce by applying old ways of thinking

toward retention and engagement (Caplan, 2014; Plaskoff, 2017). However, the third part, promotion of innovation, continues disconnected from the first two pieces, employee retention and employee engagement; and it looks that organizations are not including many of their employees in the process of innovating.

While these current practices are failing to promote innovation among employees, they are risking the access of codified and tacit knowledge, and the organizational capacity to innovate in the first place. As explained in the section of innovation strategy, some aspects of innovation include to be a continuous activity, social, specific and based on internal knowledge (Van Der Heijden, n.d.). These traditional approaches to increase job satisfaction continually fail to take advantage of employees' knowledge, one of the most valuable assets for an organization (Coff, 1997). Thus, as also presented in the innovation strategy section, by not accessing employees' knowledge, the organization can negatively impact its context setting and the innovation both as a process and an outcome.

Thus, there is a potential that a collaborative intra-organization approach towards innovation strategy generates a forum that is beneficial to the organization and a culture of innovation. When employees know the purpose of the organization, what it is trying to accomplish, and when they are encouraged to propose and try ideas, the foundation for a culture of innovation is created (Caplan, 2013). Therefore, involving them in the loop allows bolder innovations indeed, but also contributes to the holistic approach of employee experience. Consequently, this approach motivates and empowers employees by creating a space and process for them to get involved in the future of their organizations.

As in one way, the above explained involvement of employees can generate staff engagement; on the other hand, how they feel regarding their jobs can further influence organizational success. According to Morgan (2017), those organizations with a smart investment towards employee experience appeared: 11.5 times more often in Glassdoor's Best Places to Work; 4.4 times more often in LinkedIn's list of North America's Most In-Demand Employers; 28 times more often among Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies; 2.1 times more often on the Forbes list of the World's Most Innovative Companies; 2 times more frequently in the American Customer Satisfaction Index. Several studies mention the link between employee satisfaction and profitability (Caplan, 2014), which reinforces the two-way influence of employee engagement and organizational success.

Finally, employee engagement moves beyond the boundaries of the organization and affect customer satisfaction. Employees influence the behaviour and attitudes of customers, and later, customers positively impact the organization's revenue stream (Zurex, 2019). Thus, the connection of good employee engagement and customer satisfaction may contribute that the company appears in some of the rankings presented by Morgan (2014) in the previous paragraph.

To implement the collaborative intra-organization approach that has been discussed, organizations require some capabilities in place, such as how to allow collaboration and how to manage conflicts. Blomqvist and Levy's (2006) defined collaboration capability as the "actor's capability to build and manage network relationships based on mutual trust, communication and commitment" (Blomqvist & Levy, 2006, p. 40). Trust is the heart of collaboration; it can facilitate the process of collaborating to start and continue happening (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006), and it can also enhance organizational performance (Gould-Williams, 2003). Therefore, it is vital to consider mutual trust, communication and commitment to enable collaboration to happen and execute the collaborative intra-organization approach to innovation strategy that has been discussed so far.

Following the required capabilities, conflicts, perceived as something that may generate organizational problems, can be important and beneficial to a culture of innovation. From the discussion and challenge of new ideas, innovations can happen. If not managed well, discord has the potential to block collaboration, impact the flow of knowledge and impact the overall employee experience. Weiss and Hughes (2005) recommend that organizations implement initiatives that effectively manage conflicts, as follows: development and implementation of a companywide method for conflict resolution; criteria to guide employees to assess trade-offs; escalation of conflict as a chance for coaching; requirement of joint escalation; formal policy to managers deal with escalated conflicts with their counterparts; transparency and clear communication of escalated conflicts resolution. By having these initiatives in place, organizations can create a culture where ideas can be challenged, openly discussed, and employees are not afraid to show their points of view.

On top of having these capabilities functioning as enablers, the way that organizations choose to deliver their internal programs will influence the overall employee experience. Morgan (2017) identified three environments that matter the most to employees: cultural, technological and physical. He was able to classify that out of 250 organizations, just 6% were investing heavily in all three areas (named as "experiential organizations"), and those companies were the ones delivering excellent results. Therefore, no matter what organizations try to implement to improve employees' engagement and empowerment, it needs to involve the cultural, technological and physical environments. And it is no different from the collaborative innovation strategy approach discussed in this project. Organizations need to think about how the culture is impacting the overall capabilities that influence people to collaborate and be open to new ideas, as different locations or backgrounds among employees may generate challenges towards employee engagement, as collaboration quite changes from one culture to another (Gardner, 2017). Additionally, companies need to plan how initiatives cover digital and physical spaces, for example, technology can allow the capture of ideas and flow of knowledge, but the tangible way an office is organized will also influence how employees engage.

However, some challenges may act against this intention, such as misaligned interests, fear related to conflict, siloed structures, and some misguided assumptions of how to influence collaboration to happen. While these barriers may affect the approach discussed in this paper, on the other hand, the approach also has the potential to influence the mitigation of these challenges in the long term. The following paragraph details these barriers and how the approach proposed by the paper interferes with them.

Firstly, there is a challenge to motivate employees when the interests are misaligned (Mao & Weathers, 2019), which reinforces the need for context and a shared vision of the organization among employees as proposed in the first section explaining innovation strategy and the future scenarios as an enabler towards alignment. Secondly, it is essential to realize that true collaboration may emerge conflict, which should be seen as natural and necessary (Weiss & Hughes, 2005), as previously described, there is a negative idea towards disputes. However, conflicts bring a challenge to the status quo, which is essential to innovation. Therefore, the recommendation of discord resolution initiatives in place can mitigate this second barrier. Thirdly, some organizations may have a siloed culture, which means their departments do not share information between them and their employees. Potentially, this reality creates a sense of competition, with personal or departmental interests over the organization's success. However, both collaboration and innovation cultures can minimize these effects and slowly contribute to the reduction of this silo mentality (Stone, 2004). Finally, some misguided assumptions about collaboration can generate expenses to the organization, which goes against its capital efficiency, while not necessarily improving collaboration capabilities (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). Weiss and Hughes (2005) illustrate these misguided ideas like the ones that teamwork training, effective incentive systems, and structural and procedural solutions can promote collaboration; thus, organizations need to avoid these implementation errors towards collaboration.

Summarizing, by developing the capacity of collaboration (trust, communication, and commitment) and having conflict resolution initiatives in place, organizations have the potential of engaging and empowering employees by involving them in the innovation strategy process. This approach also improves access to internal knowledge, which is essential to a culture of innovation and alignment around the future, further contributing to organizational success. Additionally, as previously discussed, there is a correlation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction, which also adds to the successful future of an enterprise. Concluding, it is suggested that an organization aiming to improve its employees' experience, implement initiatives touching the three environments described by Morgan (cultural, technological and physical). Therefore, the approach of involving employees in the innovation strategy process has the potential to produce bolder innovations and motivates and empowers employees, which further influences the overall employee experience. Equally, knowing the challenges (misaligned interests, conflicts fear, silo culture, misguided collaboration assumptions) exist can allow organizations to

plan better the implementation of the approach discussed by this research, consequently reducing the chance of these risks occurring over time. Also, as mentioned, the collaborative intra-organizational innovation strategy approach brings benefits to both themes of employee experience and innovation strategy, while it also mitigates these four barriers over time.

SUSTAINABILITY

The last of the three themes in this paper is sustainability. Being introduced in the 80s, the concept of sustainability includes three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic (IUCN, 1980). These three dimensions are known as the triple bottom line approach to sustainability. A business is sustainable, according to the definition by Kennedy & Bocken (2019, p. 1), when it “creates, delivers and captures value for its stakeholders in a way that supports a safe and just operating space for humanity and all living entities to flourish”. Therefore, while addressing environmental, social and economic dimensions, the organization aims to meet the needs of our generation and of the ones to come.

As mentioned above, the concept is not new, and a large part of the society, including enterprises, already recognizes the current environmental and social issues happening in the world. Ecological and social challenges, such as biodiversity, climate change and poverty, have been a concern in our society (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019; Ray & Mondal, 2017), and organizations also recognize these emergencies (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019). As the awareness regarding these areas is increasing, is something else influencing organizations to move towards sustainability?

The awareness that other actors have about how organizations act towards sustainability inspires companies to change. Being aware of the environmental and social impacts of business, governments, non-governmental organizations, investors, customers, and employees have been influencing companies to try to do things differently (Geradts & Bocken, 2019; Ray & Mondal, 2017). Sustainability commitments are no longer in question as societal values have changed, and some regulatory improvements are reflecting these changes (Guandalini, Sun, & Zhou, 2019), for example, carbon taxes or legislation prohibiting plastic straws in major cities. From a business perspective, not recognizing or acting towards the impacts and benefits from its activities can pose serious financial risks to the organization, starting by how the different stakeholders mentioned above evaluate the company and will support it.

Despite this reality, humanity is still using nature 1.75 times faster than what Earth’s ecosystems are capable of renewing. The ‘overshoot day’, which is known as the day when

humanity has used nature's resource budget for the entire year, happened on July 29th in the year of 2019, the earliest date ever in the last 20 years. The results are impacted by several countries that people may not know are making the overall effect worse. For example, if all the world's population had lived like Canada, the date would have been even earlier, on March 18th (Global Footprint Network, 2019). Thus, it is essential to investigate how sustainability is interacting with innovation strategies, how companies are considering these three areas of sustainability when making the choices around new ideas and the plans for the organization they are going to run tomorrow.

As already mentioned in this project, despite the positive sentiment usually attributed to the word 'innovation', innovation can produce harmful consequences; on the other hand, by innovating, individuals are changing the status quo towards new possibilities. Innovations, usually perceived as the solution, can generate bad outcomes (Hartley, 2005). However, the process can let the discovery of opportunities towards environmental, social and financial goals (Hart & Milstein, 2003). Thus, sustainability-oriented projects can allow organizations to increase competitiveness yet addressing our planet's needs.

With both the need and the potential of sustainability, more organizations are getting on board, but are they designing their futures considering it? More organizations are developing projects aiming to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Guandalini, Sun, & Zhou, 2019). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), a total of 17, were agreed in 2015 by the member states of the United Nations, along with civil society and business, and are an outline for achieving a better and more sustainable future by 2030. However, while some projects are considering these goals, no evidence was found that when discussing future strategies, organizations are looking at the UN SDGs. It seems enterprises consider what their sustainability reports already state as their future commitments in the sustainability area. This reality might be limiting what organizations can achieve if they included sustainability at the very beginning of an innovation strategy process and not thresholds to their actions.

Not limiting action by thresholds means not considering already a commitment to later think about an initiative to meet the goal, but instead investigating what is required by the context and that could work better. Kennedy & Bocken (2019) suggested some future directions when organizations aim to innovate for sustainability, such as: integrate the business to its context, identifying the needs of socio-ecological systems in which the business operates; promote experimentation to evaluate what works best; investigate new ways of innovating with the change of components of value proposition, creation and capture, while merging social and environmental aspects of sustainability. Therefore, if organizations understand needs from users, society and environment, and practice an iterative approach to improve the designed solutions, they are probably expanding the benefits of their actions, and sustainability commitments could become worst-case scenarios.

As some capabilities are recommended for the improvement of the employee experience, some capabilities allow an organization to become more sustainable. Stubbs & Cocklin (2008) divide these internal attributes into two categories, structural and cultural. The structural group involves processes and practices, while the cultural attributes encompass norms and behaviours. These two groups allow an organization to pursue a sustainable future and should be considered as capabilities to allow the approach of including sustainability in the innovation strategy process.

An organization wanting to pursue a more sustainable path should have under structural capabilities an adequate budget and resources, a positive reinforcement practice, and measures of accountability focusing on social and environmental value creation. Additionally, it should involve the entire organization; the responsibility and act for sustainability should not be centralized in sustainability silos; it has to be shared among all the organization (Geradts & Bocken, 2019). Additionally, the culture in the organization will influence this route, where a clear direction and purpose, and openness to collaboration will contribute to this goal (Geradts & Bocken, 2019). Therefore, the approach to innovation strategy that has been discussed can contribute to sustainability, by providing an opportunity to consider the three dimensions of sustainability in the context setting phase; and by involving employees in a collaborative intra-organization approach, which can involve the entire organization in sustainability and reinforce the purpose of becoming more sustainable.

One helpful approach while ideating is to consider the archetypes proposed by Bocken, Short, Rana, and Evans (2014). The eight archetypes of business model can help conduct and implement initiatives for sustainability, include sustainability into current purpose and processes, and drive competitive advantage (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014). These include (Bocken et al., 2014, p. 48): do more with less resource; value the waste; change to renewables and natural processes; service and not ownership; take care of stakeholders; discourage consumption; prioritize social and environmental benefits; deliver solutions at a large scale. These archetypes can be combined and guide a discussion that challenges the status quo and contribute to good innovation outcomes. Therefore, the involvement of employees and these concepts in the innovation strategy process can allow the generation of ideas to deliver a robust innovation strategy with the potential to maximize sustainable practices, improve competitive advantage, and increase social and environmental benefits and/or reduction of social and environmental impacts from the company's activity.

However, similar to the other two themes already presented in this paper, some barriers also exist to an organization aiming to become more sustainable. These barriers range from a market to an organizational level.

Starting within the markets that organizations are part of, the way that organizations compete in their pricing, and how stock analysts evaluate their actions are some of the challenges towards sustainability. Many organizations have profitability as their primary

objective, leading to a highly competitive market (Ray & Mondal, 2017). Thus, the non-sustainable competitive options may be available at lower prices, which might be a critical decision factor for many consumers, and consequently affect the sustainable organizations' results. This scenario leads to a market focused primarily on the financial performance that pays less attention to environmental and social performance. The other example brought at the beginning of this paragraph involves organizations publicly traded; the current weight that stock analysts put on continuous organizational growth poses another challenge to new thinking. An important consideration is how managers can influence the reconsideration of an organization's growth goals (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019); thus, the recommended approach towards innovation strategy has the potential to reduce over time the risks of the market barrier.

On the organizational level, the practices and processes of revising or developing new business models for sustainability continue to be secretive, as are innovation processes in general (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019). Another point is the complexity brought by sustainability. Since it considers three pillars, sustainability brings more sophistication to the innovation process (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013). Other barriers include: not knowing if the changes will actually promote social and environmental improvements after implementation (Kennedy & Bocken, 2019); lack of management tools (Rizos et al., 2016); complexity to verify green promises (Rizos et al., 2016); internal conflicts with current activities (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008); lack of sustainable options of raw-material (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008); and unsupportive regulatory conditions (Linder & Williander, 2017). Thus, a more open approach to innovation strategy and that involves sustainability is therefore needed. The theoretical framework examined by this project, aligned with a table that brings deeper understandings, aim to give the first step in this direction by correlating different elements that can enable the approach and encourage organizations to pursue this path.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, while considering the social, environmental and economic aspects of the business, when an organization makes its decision for a successful future, trade-offs will occur. The systemic and interconnected nature of these areas made it a hard task, but it is crucial not to ignore or isolate these three areas. Campagnolo and Davide's (2019) research evaluated how focusing simply at environmental objectives might make social problems even worse. In their research, they assessed the global impacts of the Paris Agreement on poverty and inequality. The Paris Agreement is an arrangement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The agreement requires all Parties to put forward their efforts through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Despite the good intentions of the initiative towards climate change, Campagnolo and Davide (2019) indicated that the NDCs can actually slow down poverty reduction rates globally and increase 4.2% the number of people living below the poverty

line. Moreover, an attention is brought to the necessity of international collaboration among countries, that can reduce the costs of climate action for the most impacted ones, such as Brazil, Indonesia and some African countries (Campagnolo & Davide, 2019). Thus, it is crucial to pursue diverse sustainability aspects in a project for a conscious decision and effective results.

Summarizing, organizations and other stakeholders already recognize the environmental and social problems generated by the way the current system works. Innovations can allow the discovery of opportunities, increasing organizational competitiveness and addressing Earth and Human's needs. However, the impacts in the environment continue to get worse (e.g. 2019 'overshoot day'), which requires a further understanding of how organizations are considering sustainability when conceptualizing their strategies of the organization they want to run tomorrow. By involving sustainability and innovation strategy, organizations can move beyond the commitments already firmed in sustainability plans; they can investigate what is required by a context, and that could work even better to these thresholds. Organizations shall understand needs from users, society and environment, and practice an iterative approach to improve their strategies and expand the benefits of their actions. In order to pursue a sustainable future, an organization requires some internal capabilities in place (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008; Geradts & Bocken, 2019), from structural capabilities (budget; positive reinforcement; accountability social and environmental; sustainability not centralized in silos) to cultural ones (clear direction and purpose; openness to collaboration). Therefore, by bringing employees to the process of innovating and including the three dimensions of sustainability in the context setting phase, the goal of becoming more sustainable can be pursued. And the eight archetypes by Bocken et al. may be helpful to this process. However, similar to the previous two themes presented, some barriers may influence an organization to become more sustainable, from a market level (pricing; stock analysis and growth) to an organizational level (secretive processes; complexity; unknown result; management tools; follow-up of green promises; internal conflicts; raw materials; unsupportive regulations). Similarly, as before, acknowledging these challenges exist can allow organizations to consider their plans towards sustainability better.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As discussed in the previous three sections (innovation strategy, employee experience, and sustainability), the recommended approach to innovation strategy can be summarized as a collaborative intra-organization approach that includes the sustainability lens. The concept suggests that the approach has the potential of better accessing the diverse knowledge

already in the organization and reducing biases by opening the discussion around innovation. Additionally, it may improve the implementation phase of innovation strategy as it involves employees and reduces internal resistance. Moreover, by including more diversity in the room of the conceptualization of innovation strategy and by incorporating sustainability, it maximizes the chance of innovation as good outcomes, not only for the organization but for the society and environment. The following mapping diagram summarizes the theoretical framework, and what is explained above can be read starting in the second line and followed by the first line from the left-hand to the right-hand side.

Also, the approach promotes benefits to the three themes, as discussed in the previous sections: innovation strategy, employee experience, and sustainability. This is illustrated in the bottom part of the following mapping diagram, starting at the second line, moving to the third one, and then to the fourth one which presents the three themes (innovation strategy, employee experience, and sustainability).

Firstly, on the extreme left-hand side, it allows an opportunity to focus and alignment of a future scenario and the development of a culture of innovation, crucial points for an innovation strategy. Secondly, it contributes to employee empowerment and engagement by involving them in the process of innovating, which can add to the overall employee experience. Lastly, it may bring social and environmental benefits and attention to the triple bottom line approach, which will contribute to a sustainable organization. Thus, the approach can help to the competitive advantage of the organization, how customers perceive it, and further contribute to its success as discussed during the three previous sections (innovation strategy, employee experience, and sustainability).



Figure 1 - Mapping Diagram of the Theoretical Framework

Therefore, this theoretical framework includes four key perspectives around for-profit organizations. Firstly, these organizations may already have innovation strategy process in place. Secondly, the involvement of employees in this process is limited. Thirdly, collaboration is already embedded in their day-to-day operations. And lastly, innovation strategies are not entirely connected with sustainability.

Hence, the proposed approach of a collaborative intra-organization practice that includes the sustainability lens towards innovation strategy can be broken down into four steps: context setting and sharing; innovation strategy process; involvement of employees in the innovation strategy process; and inclusion of sustainability in the innovation strategy process. A table providing a deeper understanding to the theoretical framework, including these four steps can be found in the Appendix A.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This research opted for semi-structured interview as the method to collect primary data. Therefore, this section starts by explaining the theory of this method, and it follows by how the method was carried out and what was made to reduce its limitations.

Semi-structured interviews can be considered an intermediate method of interviews to the focus of structured ethnographic surveys and the flexibility of open-ended interviews (Adams, 2015; McCammon, n.d). Some argue that this flexibility makes this method the most important way of conducting a research interview (Gillham, 2005). According to Adams (2015), there is not a consensus in the name of this methodology. It has already been called as 'elite interviewing', which could accidentally be interpreted as including only high-status participants; and as other terms: 'focused interview', 'ethnographic interview', 'depth interview', and 'qualitative interviewing' (Adams, 2015).

Widely applied in qualitative research, this method involves private conversations, combining closed-ended and open-ended questions, as well as probes such as 'why' and 'how', which allow a more fluid conversation (Adams, 2015; McCammon, n.d.). Different types of probes can be used with different intentions: detail-oriented probes; elaboration probes; clarification probes; silent probe; 'uh-huh' probe; echo probe (McCammon, n.d.). The selection of this method aims to reduce the bias of the researcher, by having a structure of questions designed around the literature review, while still allowing participants to talk about what they consider relevant in their organization or career regarding the themes of this research project. Therefore, the method enables the researcher to pursue a detailed inquiry into existing perspectives (Adams, 2015; McCammon, n.d). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow the standardization of the procedure of executing and collecting qualitative textual data from the interviews (McCammon, n.d). Having a structure that helps not only the conduction of the interview but also the data that is going to be analyzed afterwards, since qualitative data sets are more complicated (Gillham, 2005; LeCompte, 2000).

Unfortunately, the chosen method also has its limitations. With a short period of time available to execute this project, plus the requirement of approving the primary research in advance with the Research Ethics Board of this university, semi-structured interviews could bring some challenges since they contain time-consuming and labor-intensive activities. Interviews involve the generation of huge amounts of notes which further require designated time for analysis. In this research, the decision was made to record the audio if the participant allowed to do so, thus the researcher would not lose any idea spoken during the interview. However, the action of transcribe an audio is an arduous one. To minimize these limitations, this project made use of an automatic speech recognition service that generates a speech-to-text transcription based on an audio provided by

Amazon Web Service (AWS), the Amazon Transcribe. This service allowed the researcher to reduce the time required to generate transcripts and focus on the analysis of the interviews' data as described in the previous paragraph.

Three distinct means were adopted to find potential participants: an open call by email to the SFI community, LinkedIn invitations, and individual referrals. From these channels, this research was able to access a total of six participants that talked about seven different experiences. The dialogue with each participant was made around the topics of this project (Appendix B – Interview Script), according to the interviewee's experience and the course of the interview probes were used aiming at an equivalent coverage among participants (Adams, 2015; Gillham, 2005). This research method aimed to access the interviewees' perspectives on the investigated areas, including their opinions about the past, present and future. The interviews were conducted through phone, and all participants consented to be audio recorded, which allowed the researcher to later generate transcripts that were used during the data analysis along with the researcher's notes written during the conversations. This gathered data was analyzed applying a systematic approach that looked for: frequency – how numerous the items or units of analysis appear; omission – items that never appear during the interviews, but were expected from literature review; and declaration – when participants mention something that was not expected by the researcher (LeCompte, 2000). Later, it was synthesized, evaluating the theoretical framework developed in the Literature Review chapter.

ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA

For confidentiality purposes, this research is not disclosing the name of the organizations in this report. This decision was made to avoid the exposure of the participants' names if someone tries to link the organization names with their roles. However, this section explains the selection criteria applied to this project. This research project focused on participants with working experience at a for-profit organization in the food and beverage sector.

Starting with the 'for-profit' criteria, the research wanted to access people that work in this type of organization because it aimed to investigate how an organization that intends to generate profit considers the other aspects of sustainability (social and environmental). If the research had included non-for-profits experiences, it could have not necessarily addressed what was being explored.

Secondly, the rationale behind the selection of a specific industry was based on the size of the industry and its impact to sustainability. For instance, the food and beverage manufacturing industry, which is included in the food and beverage sector, is the second biggest contributor to the GDP of Toronto. In 2017, food products accounted for almost 40 billion dollars, the second primary industry of all manufacturing output in Ontario. Additionally, a research study that decomposes environmental impacts by sector in the US states that food and beverage productions are usually among the top industry to greenhouse gas emissions, water use, water and land pollution, and air pollution (Botto, 2019). As the research limited the eligibility to one sector, it was decided that it would not restrict the fitness of participants based on the location of the organization. Because doing so could pose challenges to the recruitment of participants giving the timeframe of the project. Additionally, different areas could bring different insights and cultures that could be lost if the recruitment was restricted to a city, for example.

Finally, as presented in the sustainability section, one of the barriers for sustainability is the system in which the organization is embedded. By restricting the eligibility to one sector, the participants' experiences could be more comparable during the analysis phase.

The actual recruitment result of each one of the three distinct means presented in the 'Data Collection and Analysis' section was as follows: the 50 LinkedIn invitations generated one participant with two experiences; the open call by email to the SFI community generated two participants with two experiences; and individual referrals generated two participants with two experiences. Except for one participant (identified as A) who talked about two different experiences in two distinct companies, each one of all the other six participants spoke about one experience in one organization. Therefore, the following analysis in this paper may use the terms participant or experience, depending on how the data is being evaluated.

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Participant | A | A | B | C | D | E | F |
| Experience | #1 | #2 | #3 | #4 | #5 | #6 | #7 |

Table 1 - Participants and experiences

The seven experiences, that the participants talked about involved six distinct companies in the food and beverage sector. Five of these six organizations, from where six experiences happened, are global enterprises with at least fourteen thousand employees each. These organizations include one of the largest processing food companies in the US, three of the largest food and beverage conglomerates in the world, and one of the largest chocolate manufactures in the world. In majority, they are among the S&P 500 index or equivalent index, and two of them are listed in the S&P 100 index. However, from these six experiences two were distinguished because they happened in the headquarters, while the other four involved working outside the headquarter and country of the organization's origin.

The last experience of the seven experiences (experience #5) comes from the smaller organization in number of employees among the study. This company is an innovation branch of a global group of foodservice and employees and has 100+ employees. This experience is going to be analyzed separately from the other three experience since it brings a different context from the other six experiences, not only because it is a separate entity that had the mandate to innovate but also because the interviewee role in research department generated some unique observations compared with the others.

The decision to segment the seven experiences into three different groups was made after a couple of rounds of analysis executed and patterns found. Therefore, this research ended having the three profiles as follows that were used specifically to the explanation of facts not expected before the interviews:

| Profile | Experiences |
|---|-------------------|
| Position type: Senior leadership in Innovation Organization Type: global Location: headquarter Employees: 14,000+ | #1 and #2 |
| Position type: Marketing/sales Organization Type: global Location: international operation Employees: 14,000+ | #3, #4, #6 and #7 |
| Position type: Research lead Organization Type: innovation branch of global Location: main office in the country Employees: 100+ | #5 |

Table 2 - Profiles and experiences

As the criteria for participants involved current or past experiences, the majority of them come from past experiences, and only experiences #5 and #7 are from current roles.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The information provided by interviewees is kept confidential in this research. Any quotation and/or statements may only be attributed to an interviewee in this final report if he/she has allowed this option in the interview consent form (two participants out of the six opted-in to be attributed for their contribution). Data collected during this study are stored in a password protected computer belonging to the researcher, with access restricted to the principal investigator (Dr. Alia Weston) and the researcher (Igor Bueno Antunes). Audio recordings were deleted after transcripts generation, and all other primary data will be deleted by March 2020. Participants were informed that they could withdraw or request the withdrawal of their data prior to data analysis. Furthermore, they were informed that this study is exclusively concerned with non-proprietary information around processes, which means this research is not aiming to have access to information considered confidential by their current or former employer, nor its strategy content.

This research project has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, file number 101626, and approval number 2019-67.

The data generated from the interviews were analyzed aiming to respond to the research question of 'How might Innovation Strategy be a channel to improve Employee Experience and Sustainable Practices in an organization?'. The theoretical framework highlighted four sub-questions, which were further used as key analytical themes in the research:

1. Do for-profit organizations already have innovation strategy processes in place?
2. How is employees' involvement in the innovation strategy process?
3. Do organizations already involve collaboration among their employees?
4. Are innovation strategies including sustainability aspects?

The following four sections in this chapter present the findings and analysis by each one of these four themes.

INNOVATION STRATEGY IN PLACE

Regarding this first theme, out of the seven experiences, all of them provided a further understanding that their for-profit organizations already have innovation strategy processes in place. However, not many of the participants were involved in the conceptualization phase of innovations strategy, only the experiences #1, #2 and #5 mentioned they were part of this stage. Despite the involvement, all participants talked about what they knew of the process in their organizations, and most of them mentioned the importance of having a very clear direction in order to allow this process to happen, with a greater understanding that having a vision helped the teams to come to an agreement during this stage. This provides an explanation to the requirement of the focus and alignment, and how the innovation strategy is a social process which involves discussions.

Still, regarding the innovation strategy, some participants mentioned that the process is very focused on numbers, which can leave out more disruptive or long-term opportunities. With the business having a louder voice, organizations may leave some promising opportunities untouched, and end up focusing on incremental innovations more than disruptive ones. This scenario not only goes against one of the enablers to a culture of innovation of being comfortable with uncertainty, but it increases the adoption risk by not necessarily considering the user's needs.

A participant, Deborah, mentioned that, in one of her experiences, the organization experimented with some organizational structures to allow teams to work outside the core innovation strategy on things considered more unusual or disruptive. However, this came

with the challenge around businesses' expectations on the return over these investments. Deborah explained that:

"(...) most of for-profit companies, especially when they are publicly traded, they don't want a lot of resources devoted to things that don't have unidentified payoff, at least in some reasonable time for it" – Deborah

One of the profiles presented before, the third one – a research lead who works at the main office of an innovation branch of a global organization in his country – brought the perception around the necessity of understanding the user's needs. Only a few participants gave attention to this point, and while this profile was not the only one to talk about this importance, he brought a unique concern that sometimes his organization pushes for faster researches, which may end up affecting the quality of research and insights found. Experiences #1 and #2, from the first profile, also mentioned the involvement of the consumer insights team early in the process, which would execute something similar to what this third profile does. However, this constraint of the agility required by the business to have insights was not mentioned in these experiences.

LIMITED INVOLVEMENT OF EMPLOYEES

Moving to this second theme, it was possible to find a deeper understanding of the extent to which employees are included in the innovation strategy process. All experiences had a limited involvement of employees in the conceptualization of innovation strategy.

All the participants touched the point that usually, this conceptualization phase has a limited involvement of employees, which goes against one of the four steps of the approach that is proposed in this paper: involvement of employees in the innovation process. As mentioned before, the conceptualization remains with the top level, and some input may come from individuals in lower levels according to their roles and the project being discussed. It was possible to find that for those not included in the conceptualization, they valued the involvement when they or their peers were required to help with an information, or when the other part was interested to hear their opinions. This gives a more in-depth explanation that employees would value a higher involvement of themselves in the process, as being examined by this paper. For example, Isabella explained:

"(...) if I had some feedbacks, they would listen to me and make some changes (...) I had an opportunity to give an input (...) even though I was not part of the conversations, only directors were (...)" – Isabella

Additionally, two of the profiles presented in the methodology chapter brought something not expected before the analysis phase. While both profiles involve the same size and type of organizations (global ones with more than fourteen thousand employees), the first profile is about a senior leadership position in an innovation function working at the headquarter, while the second profile includes experiences in marketing and sales but in international operations (outside their organizations' headquarters). The perceptions from who works at the headquarter of an organization and someone who works at an international office varies. From the data, it was possible to find that participants at the non-headquarter location were concerned that the strategies should consider more the local environment and consumers. These participants mentioned that sometimes there were some disconnections, as the innovation strategy was being conceptualized abroad by the headquarter, something that was not expected before the interviews and did not appear in any of the other profiles. However, since all the participants in this second profile were not necessarily included in the conceptualization phase, it is hard to explain the degree of involvement of the senior leadership of the international operation into the innovation strategy process.

This last point also relates to what was presented in the previous section of this chapter (Innovation Strategy in Place) around the necessity of understanding the user's needs. However, the concern brought by the participants from international operations of considering local environments and consumers may be a level of focus and specifics that not necessarily is being aimed by headquarter activities and, as a result, may affect the overall strategy. For example, a participant said:

"(...) the strategy was like training this customer to use the product when they [the headquarter] didn't really realize that [it] was probably not going to be [operated] by the customer, but by the people that work in their houses" – Participant

As talked in this quote, the differences in the customers' characteristics between the two countries could maximize some adoption risks to that specific innovation, since these characteristics were not considered in the early stages of the project.

COLLABORATION IN PLACE

Continuing the findings and analysis chapter regarding this third theme, all organizations already involve collaboration among their employees in their day-to-day activities and projects. When the topic of collaboration was discussed regarding the general day to day activity of their organizations, participants mentioned collaboration is something they see in their experiences, and it is cross-departmental. If we look at the main functions of food

and beverage companies: sales, marketing, supply chain, finance and manufacturing, a good amount of their work is highly cross-functional. Only one participant (experience #3), while said that the organization involved collaboration, mentioned it was only a little bit concerning her role as category advisor, and it was limited to some departments.

When discussed, what would be the essential factors, according to the participant perspective, that allowed collaboration to happen in their organizations, their views varied but touched profoundly at the aspects presented in the framework. As talked by most of the participants, having shared goals can contribute to that collaboration happen. This idea goes as mitigation towards the barrier of misaligned interests and reinforces the need for a context and shared vision of the organization among employees, which can help the achievement of alignment. Additionally, as presented by Weiss and Hughes (2005), the idea that effective incentive systems can promote collaboration can end up not necessarily improving cooperation. Thus, this can be helpful towards mutual trust and commitment, which will end up influencing collaboration.

All the three collaboration capabilities (mutual trust, communication, and commitment) in the definition of Blomqvist and Levy's research (2006) were mentioned in the interviews, but not all the three aspects by the same participant. It was suggested that collaboration is needed to touch the different skills of the team, and trusting people is the foundation of it. Additionally, one participant mentioned the idea of safety, based on her experience where employees felt safe to share ideas and collaborate. Secondly, as talked before that having shared goals can contribute to alignment, the communication piece was mentioned by one participant, who reinforced that you need to have excellent communication in place to make sure everyone is on the same page. Finally, the commitment aspect appeared in half of the experiences; by the comments that what works well is having people who are open to collaborate, who have a collaborative mindset, collaboration can flourish.

Interestingly, one of the three misguided assumptions that not necessarily improve collaboration, as presented by Weiss and Hughes (2005), appeared among the participants' perspectives. Two participants believed that collaboration tends to happen in their organization because the working process involves different departments, and it is how the structure works. Additionally, another participant mentioned that in her experience, the physical structure influenced how people interacted, through informal gatherings where they were able to promote great work. Therefore, the misguided collaboration assumptions framed as barriers in the framework have to be clarified. The idea presented in the framework aims to inform organizations that those three ideas are not exclusively responsible for generating collaboration, and they involve high costs to the organization. However, it is important to acknowledge the participants' perspectives regarding the value of these two areas (processes and physical structure).

The participants mentioned some points that were not working well regarding collaboration. The main one was the time that collaboration requires and sometimes

organizations may not have the resources needed, which can be either budget or number of employees. Furthermore, as communication is demanded, organizations need to evaluate how to improve their practices by considering the delivering environments, as presented by Morgan (2017), cultural, technological and physical. For instance, one participant mentioned that the collaboration was restricted to the physical location, and it could have involved different offices from other cities or countries to benefit the strategies.

Finally, when inquired if their organizations had in place conflict resolution initiatives, only a few participants were aware that they existed. One participant, who has seen some different conflict processes put in place, mentioned that employees knew that the organization culture was outstanding, and people were respectful in their discussions but also not afraid of disagreeing. The participant indicated that they knew that they should bring to debates, facts and data, not just opinions, and acknowledge the other person's point of view. This perspective gives further explanation around what is examined in the theoretical framework, that discord resolution initiatives have the potential to contribute to a culture where employees are not afraid to debate, and consequently, the organization end up gaining from this challenge of ideas.

LIMITED ASSOCIATION OF INNOVATION STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Finally, in this last of the four themes, most of the experiences informed that innovation strategies are mostly not connected with sustainability. Very few of them stated that the innovation strategy considered sustainability (experiences #6 and #7).

Most of the participants mentioned their organizations had sustainability plans and initiatives in place. However, sustainability aspects were not necessarily included in the innovation strategy conceptualization. In the majority, the processes are different, and even a diverse group of people may be involved between the two. Deborah explained that:

“Both companies had a very rich sustainability plan (...) That was a completely separate team of people (...) that was a completely separate process and plan from what we are going to launch to grow the business” – Deborah

This reality emphasizes some of the barriers presented in the framework and connects with what was discussed in the sustainability literature review section that organizations might be limiting what they can achieve environmentally and socially wise. For example, if an organization has a sustainability plan to reduce a certain percentage of plastic in

its product's package, when it is pursuing the innovation strategy conceptualization, the enterprise may be limiting its actions to sustainability to that specific metric, instead of thinking about different concepts or even, in this example, if plastic is required at all. Isabella emphasized this point when she explained:

"(...) sustainability strategy (...) I'm sure they put a lot of thought into it, but I don't see this happening right now" – Isabella

Still, regarding this theme, some participants mentioned one of the points already presented in this project regarding the intersection of sustainability and customer preferences. The interviewees talked that when a product was targeted at the type of consumer for whom sustainability was so important that it was going to drive purchase behaviour, then some considerations were made in the product's strategy. These opinions reinforce the importance of consumer behaviour to influence companies' decisions and how the market level barriers (pricing, stock analysis and growth) may be influencing the evolution towards sustainable practice. Additionally, it brings the questioning of whether or not organizations are willing to be sustainably responsible because they want to do so. One participant's view was that it all depended on the organization's intention. For example, he stated that in his organization:

"I think it's mainly because of consumers a looking for that" – Participant

One of the outliers was the experience one participant had when a beverage brand was being launched in a new country. The experience happened ten years ago, and still, a lot of sustainability was considered and built in the brand strategy and its business model. Because the participant was not included in the conceptualization, it is not possible to understand the facts that the organization followed in its innovation strategy when conceptualizing that new business line. However, the participant reinforced that the precise direction and purpose regarding sustainability was very impressive for that time and country reality.

This research started by investigating the topics of innovation strategy, employee experience and sustainability, and selected the sector of food and beverage due to its size and impact at both social and environmental aspects of sustainability. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants who talked about seven distinct experiences in some of the most prominent for-profit global organizations in this industry. Their experiences provided deeper understandings towards the four sub-questions of this research: how innovation strategies are being pursued by organizations; how much employees are involved in these processes; how collaboration is already applied in their activities; how the process of innovating is not necessarily linked with sustainability efforts.

Firstly, all organizations involved in the interviews have innovation strategies, and for most of the interviewees it is essential to have a clear direction to allow this process to happen, since this allows the teams to come to a common understanding. This understanding provides a further explanation of the requirement of the focus and alignment, the first of the four approach steps presented in the theoretical framework section.

Yet, regarding innovation strategy, participants are concerned of how the focus on numbers, or how the business side speaking louder may affect the overall innovation. As presented in the Literature Review chapter, innovation is an intentional and proactive both process and outcome (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Crossan & Apaydin, 2009), and these practices that participants are concerned about can affect both portions of innovation. First, these practices may affect innovation as a process by influencing how employees are comfortable with uncertainty, which is one of the enablers of the second approach step (innovation strategy process). Secondly, the business side having a louder voice or requiring fast answers may leave some promising opportunities untouched, which can contribute to adoption risks by not necessarily considering the user's needs, and therefore affecting the same approach step (innovation strategy process).

Secondly, regarding the second sub-question, all participants mentioned that the involvement of employees in the conceptualization of innovation strategy is limited. Therefore, there is the need of the third approach step, which talks about the involvement of employees in the innovation process, as detailed in the Appendix A. As this conceptualization phase remains in the top-level, organizations may lose the potential of diversified knowledge from employees, besides the rise of challenges during the implementation phase of such strategy (Car, n.d.). Notably, the participants not included in this stage valued the involvement when they or their peers were required to help with something, or someone involved asked for their opinions. Thus, this third step of the overall approach touches the employee experience by contributing to employees' engagement and empowerment.

However, still about this second sub-question, non-headquarter employees are concerned that sometimes the conceptualization of strategy is even happening in a different country. This reality to global organizations imposes challenges to understanding local specificities,

and it could be understood as a higher level of silo culture that may still happen, beyond geographic borders. Therefore, this experience may disturb both the quality of the innovation as an outcome and employee engagement and empowerment.

Thirdly, the sub-question that this research examined was how the collaboration is currently happening in these organizations, and all participants agreed that their organizations already involve collaboration in their day-to-day activities and projects. In their perspectives, several factors contribute to it, such as: having shared goals, mutual trust, communication, and commitment., which goes towards the collaboration capabilities (Blomqvist and Levy, 2006) presented as enablers towards the third approach step ('involvement of employees in the innovation strategy process'). Despite being considered by Weiss and Hughes (2005) as misguided assumptions to collaboration, some participants believe how the processes are structured and how the physical spaces are designed to help their organizations to promote more cooperation. Finally, asked about how collaboration could be improved, participants mentioned the importance of having resources in place, either budget or number of employees, and implementing effective communication. This last point gives further understanding to what Morgan (2017) mentions as organizations having to evaluate how to improve their practices by considering the delivering environments: cultural, technological and physical; something that sound truly important to global organizations and that could mitigate some of the challenges discussed before of the headquarter strategies versus non-headquarter activities.

Yet regarding collaboration, participants were asked if they were aware if conflict resolution initiatives were in place in their organization. While most of the participants were not aware of such efforts, one interviewee who identified something in her organization believes that employees knew that they should bring facts, data, and acknowledge the other person's point of view when debating ideas. These initiatives, as presented in the theoretical framework, act as enablers towards the third approach step ('involvement of employees in the innovation strategy process'), by contributing to a culture where employees are not afraid to debate. Consequently, the innovation process can benefit from it.

Finally, the fourth sub-question examined how limited the connection between innovation strategy and sustainability is, and very few of the participants stated that the innovation strategy considered sustainability aspects. While all organizations included in the research had sustainability plans and initiatives in place, sustainability aspects were not necessarily included in the innovation strategy conceptualization, and sometimes involving even a different team. This reality might be limiting what organizations can achieve environmentally and socially wise, and this is the change examined by the theoretical framework and greater analyzed as the fourth approach step ('inclusion of sustainability in the innovation strategy process').

Also, regarding this last theme, some participants believe what makes the organizations

move towards sustainability is when consumers value these aspects. These views provide a further explanation of the importance that consumers' behaviours have over companies' decisions. Finally, for anyone aiming towards sustainable practices, it is vital to consider the barriers presented by Table 3 (Appendix A).

Therefore, while all organizations in this research have an innovation strategy process and already benefit from collaboration in their day-to-day activities, they are not benefiting from the inclusion of employees and sustainability in this process. The conceptualization process remains with the top-level hierarchy, and what is developed is pushed the structure downwards. This reality brings some challenges for the strategy itself, as well as for the future organization's success and employee experience.

Thus, these findings gave further explanation to this project around these four themes examined (innovation strategy in place; limited involvement of employees; collaboration in place; and limited association of innovation strategy and sustainability). With this in mind, the designed theoretical framework can help, simply and intuitively, present the related concepts and how they are connected. It aims to inform someone about the potential benefits, enablers and barriers if his/her organization wants to improve its innovation strategy process by including intra-organization collaboration and sustainability aspects. However, the framework does not intend to prescribe a procedure towards innovation strategy; it aims to bring the different elements involved in it and concepts that might be helpful for this particular approach to innovation strategy. This is important because of the reasoning that this approach can bring access to employees' knowledge, reduce biases during the innovation strategy conceptualization, decrease internal risks during its implementation, and maximize good outcomes for the organization, environment and society. As discussed in this project, there is a lack of projects explaining how organizations can get there. Therefore, this research aimed to make a step in this direction by presenting and examining some interesting points towards these benefits.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Since it was possible to have only six participants who talked about seven distinct experiences, the findings from this primary research may not represent the food and beverage sector's reality entirely. However, this research did not aim to study a statistically representative sample but a deeper insight about how employees feel and see the practices of their organizations involving innovation, strategy, collaboration and sustainability. Further research can explore how employees want to get involved in a particular innovation strategy in their particular organization? Yet, there is a potential to evaluate in a particular scenario how employees would react to what has been discussed in the paper.

The understanding of how the innovation strategy process happens by participants may be limited since most of them are not involved in the conceptualization of it. However, this was something that the researcher had in mind that could happen even before conducting the interviews because he wanted to hear from different level roles. Even if a participant's involvement in the conceptualization of innovation strategy was null, it could bring insights and also answers the perspective of the low participation by employees in the process as was being investigated by the research. Further research could explore specific areas that participants are involved in. One such area that would be valuable is explore participants' understanding of barriers and how they would mitigate these.

Finally, as this research examined a collaborative approach towards innovation strategy with an increased involvement of employees, the task to listen to employees may continue to be a challenge to a particular organization. Also, as explained by some participants, sometimes more attention is given to the business side in detriment to user needs or disruptive ideas. Further research can explore how design thinking can inform organizations to better spend time with their employees and empathize with their experiences. Additionally, it can investigate how a balance towards desirability, feasibility, and viability can be reached; aiming to the intersection of what users need, what is technically and organizationally feasible, and what is financially viable.

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As presented in the theoretical framework, this research proposes an approach to innovation strategy that is summarized as a collaborative intra-organization practice that includes the sustainability lens. This approach can be broken down into four steps: context setting and sharing; innovation strategy process; involvement of employees in the innovation strategy process; and inclusion of sustainability in the innovation strategy process.

The following table provided a more in-depth understanding of the theoretical framework by including these four approach steps mentioned above. By reading the table from the left-hand side column to the right-hand side column, the reader can navigate from each theme to the approach step related to the theme, to the potential of such step, what can enable it to happen and some barriers that may influence the implementation of the step. In the final column, the table brings how these barriers may be mitigated or not by the overall approach.

For example, the area of Innovation Strategy has two steps that are going to help an organization to achieve the overall approach discussed in this project. The 'context setting and sharing' action has the potential of a focus and alignment of the future of the organization. To enable this step, the organization needs to develop future scenarios that include insights and knowledge from the organization and use a diverse set of communication tools that increase the understanding of these scenarios. This first step does not have barriers associated with it. However, the second step of the same theme (Innovation Strategy) presents four barriers (execution risk, co-innovation risk, adoption risk, motivation risk), and the overall approach discussed in this project can mitigate three of these barriers (execution risk, co-innovation risk, motivation risk).

How to interpret icons at the column Barrier Mitigation:

+++ the overall approach can mitigate the barrier on the left-hand side column where the icon (+++) appears

++ the overall approach can partially mitigate the barrier on the left-hand side column where the icon (++) appears

+ the overall approach has the potential to reduce over time the risk of the barrier on the left-hand side column where the icon (+) appears

Reference list from Table 3:

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Van Der Heijden, n.d. | 6 Morgan, 2017 | 11 Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013 |
| 2 Prange, Eng, & Li, 2015 | 7 Mao & Weathers, 2019 | 12 Rizos et al., 2016 |
| 3 Adner, 2013 | 8 Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008 | 13 Linder & Williander, 2017 |
| 4 Blomqvist & Levy, 2006 | 9 Geradts & Bocken, 2019 | |
| 5 Weiss & Hughes, 2005 | 10 Kennedy & Bocken, 2019 | |

| Area | Approach Steps | Potentials | Enablers | Barriers | Barriers mitigation |
|---------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| Innovation Strategy | Context setting and sharing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus and alignment of the future | <u>Scenarios characteristics:</u> ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenarios that include insights and knowledge from the organization; • Communication tools that contribute to reception; | | |
| | Innovation strategy process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of innovation • Competitiveness | <u>Innovation characteristics:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a one step process;¹ • Social process; ^{1, 2 & 4} • Specific to the organization;¹ • Based on codified and tacit knowledge;^{1, 2 & 4} • Involves discussion;^{1, 2 & 4} • Be comfortable with uncertainty.¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execution risk;³ • Co-innovation risk;³ • Adoption risk;³ • Motivation risk.³ | <p>+++</p> <p>+++</p> <p>+++</p> |
| Employee Experience | Involvement of employees in the innovation strategy process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement and Empowerment • Knowledge access • Organizational success • Customer satisfaction | <u>Collaboration capabilities:</u> ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual trust; • Communication; • Commitment. <u>Conflict resolution initiatives:</u> ⁵ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companywide method for conflict resolution; • Criteria to trade-offs; • Escalation as coaching; • Requirement of joint escalation; • Policy to deal with escalated conflicts with their counterparts; • Transparency of escalated conflicts resolution. <u>Delivering environments:</u> ⁶ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural; • Technological; • Physical. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misaligned interests;⁷ • Conflicts fear;⁵ • Silo culture; • Misguided collaboration assumptions.⁵ | <p>+++</p> <p>+++</p> <p>+++</p> <p>+++</p> |
| Sustainability | Inclusion of sustainability in the innovation strategy process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable practices • Competitive advantage • Increase of social and environmental benefits and/or reduction of social and environmental impacts | <u>Structural capabilities:</u> ⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget • Positive reinforcement; • Accountability social and environmental; • Sustainability not centralized in silos.⁹ <u>Cultural capabilities:</u> ⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear direction and purpose;⁹ • Openness to collaboration.⁹ | <u>Market level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pricing; • stock analysis and growth. <u>Organizational level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretive processes;¹⁰ • Complexity;¹¹ • Unknown result;¹⁰ • Management tools;¹² • Follow-up of green promises;¹² • Internal conflicts;⁸ • Raw materials;⁸ • Unsupportive regulations.¹³ | <p>+</p> <p>++</p> <p>++</p> <p>+</p> <p>+</p> <p>+</p> |

Table 3 - Deeper Explanation of the Theoretical Framework

To start, I would like to thank you for your interest and availability to participate in this interview. As in the Consent Form, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, and even after the interview, you may request withdrawal of your data before data analysis. Additionally, I am available if you want to ask questions in the future.

This study is exclusively concerned with non-proprietary information around processes, which means this research is not aiming to have access to information considered confidential by your current or former employer, nor its strategy content. You may decline to answer any question if you wish to or if it involves proprietary information for your employer.

[In case participant agrees to be audio recorded for transcription purposes in the Consent Form] As your agreement to be audio recorded in the Consent Form, I will start recording now and would like to say this recording will be stored in my password-protected computer and destroyed once the transcription is completed. Additionally, all the information you provide will be kept confidential. i.e. information that personally identifies you will not be circulated without your permission.

1. Are you currently employed? [The questions that follow will be regarding a previous position if the participant is not currently employed]
2. Can you tell me your position title?
3. How long are you in this position? [Also ask when the participant finish this position if it is a past experience]
4. What is the approximate number of employees in your organization?

Innovation strategy is defined in this project as the choices/plans of new and creative ideas that aim to generate changes in a preferred future context. While the corporate strategy looks at the business we run today; the innovation strategy looks at the business we are in tomorrow.

5. Does your organization have an innovation strategy?
[if yes, move to question 6]
 - a. If no, how does your organization articulate its strategy in general?
 - b. If no, how is innovation involved in this strategy?
6. Are you part of the conceptualization of your organization's [innovation] strategy?
7. Could you explain what you know about this process?
 - a. What do you think works well?
 - b. What do you think does not work well?

c. What do you think could be enhanced?

8. How often is this [innovation] strategy process reviewed each year?

9. Does this process involve all employees or a particular group of employees?

a. Could you explain who generally is involved?

b. Could you explain how this involvement is?

10. Are those who participated in the conceptualization involved in its implementation?

Sustainability is defined in this project as meeting the needs of our generation and of the ones to come by considering its three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic.

11. Does this process take into consideration sustainability?

a. If yes, could you explain how?

b. If no, do you think this could bring benefits to the organization? And why?

12. How is sustainability incorporated in your organization?

a. Is it centralized with roles related to sustainability or innovation? Or does it involve the entire organization?

13. Does your organization consider the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals?

a. If yes, could you explain how?

To conclude, I would like to ask some questions related to intra-collaboration:

14. Does the work in your organization involve intra-collaboration?

a. If yes, how much cross-departmental is it?

b. If yes, how do these engagements happen?

c. If no, why?

15. What do you consider essential factors that allow collaboration to occur in your organization? [or, in case of no in question 14: What do you consider essential factors that would enable collaboration to happen?]

a. What do you think could be enhanced? [not applicable in the case of asking the second option in question 14]

16. Are you aware for processes for resolving conflicts in your workplace should they arise?

Thank you for your participation. Is there anything else you would like to add?