






# THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION AND CREATIVITY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS

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**Abstract.** Sustainable development becomes a strategic goal of modern business organizations and an aspiration to ensure long-term economic growth through the creation of innovative products and services, saving resources and their sustainable use, nurturing the environment, and contributing to the creation of public welfare. It should be noted that communication and creativity constitutes a significant part of the innovation generation and implementation process. Promotion of idea generation, the interpretation of the need for innovation, the provision of opportunities for expressing new ideas, the development of relationships both within the team itself and with stakeholders are important in each phase of communication. The article presents the research, the purpose of which is to determine how creative communication solutions condition the involvement of the organization's stakeholders, developing sustainability and creating sustainable innovations in Lithuanian business organizations. The applied research method is qualitative content analysis of the web pages of the largest Lithuanian business organizations, seeking to collect data on the essential organization of sustainable innovation development activities, challenges and features of stakeholder involvement. The data required for the research was collected by reviewing the publicly available information of 100 websites of Lithuanian business organizations in order to determine the essential communicated sustainability topics. Documents related to sustainable activities of organizations were also investigated (sustainability performance reports, corporate social responsibility reports, etc.). The results of the study show that Lithuanian business organizations consider the development of a sustainable activity strategy an important priority in the near term. However, although they understand the need for sustainable activities, developing sustainable innovations by involving stakeholders in these activities is difficult due to the lack of such practices and various organizational factors.

**Keywords:** business, communication, creativity and innovation, stakeholder involvement, sustainability, sustainable innovation.

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## 1. Introduction

Sustainable development is becoming a strategic goal and aspiration of modern business organizations (Eisenreich et al., 2021; Liotta et al., 2020; Badurdeen & Jawahir, 2017), etc. In modern organizations, which have become extremely competitive due to globalization, creativity becomes more and more important for achieving organizational efficiency, as well as innovation (Inegbedion et al., 2021). Yagnik (2020) notes that creativity is a powerful force with a huge potential to increase the effectiveness of development and social change.

Research on the issues of sustainability of business organizations have paid considerable attention to stakeholders' activism and their pressure in the development of organizational sustainability. Wolf (2014) notes that it is namely the stakeholder pressure that forces large corporations to review their entire supply chain and avoid any reputational risk. Meixell and Luoma (2015) state that interested parties put pressure on business not only to provide economic benefit but also to solve environmental and social problems. It is noted that the currently established economic system is based on a linear model "take-make-dispose", which creates a high demand for resources and an increasing amount of waste, and if it is not transformed into a more sustainable one, various problems can be intensified (Eisenreich et al., 2021).

George and Schillebeeckx (2022) state that the changing expectations of customers and investors expand organizations' understanding of value creation and influence business models. Therefore, in the modern world, the emphasis is placed on the necessity of developing sustainable business (Nosratabadi et al., 2019), while creation and dissemination of sustainable innovations is an important prerequisite for sustainable development and a source of growth (Evans et al., 2017). Sustainability innovations are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of environmental, social and economic solutions (Liotta et al., 2020; Juntunen et al., 2019). Innovative activity is a complex process taking place in certain stages, which is influenced by both the internal and external environment of the organization, involves many actors, and makes use of external and internal resources, while a smooth transition from one stage to another requires respective knowledge, technologies, and effective solutions (Atkočiūnienė & Siudikienė, 2021). It is emphasized that the innovativeness of organizations is greatly influenced by the readiness of organizations to promote the processes of collective cooperation, knowledge sharing, and creative expression (Fan & Luo, 2020; Kim & Choi, 2019). Value creation has always been essential for any on the basis of the organization's activities, but in the innovative activities and value creation processes of modern organizations, the need to promote creative cooperation of various stakeholders, the generation of new ideas, the sharing of knowledge and experience is gaining more and more importance, so communication management solutions must be strategized accordingly (Mathrani & Edwards, 2020; Boyd & Koles, 2019).

The research problem presented in this article is complex, encompassing an important participation and involvement of stakeholders, their role, and organizational initiatives, which promote creative collaboration between organizations and their stakeholders in developing sustainability activities and in the creation of sustainable innovations. Many researchers note that stakeholders' participation in sustainable development processes of organizations is particularly significant in seeking to develop sustainability (de Luca et al., 2022; Eisenreich et al., 2021). Successful communication of innovations in creating value in business builds a culture of continuous change and renewal as well as new business models (Ye et al., 2015). However, it is stated that organizations need to look for ways and opportunities for increasing stakeholder involvement in these processes (de Luca et al., 2022). This article analyses the dimension of sustainability at the organizational level, revealing the role of creativity and communication for the implementation of sustainable innovation development.

The research object is the role of communication and creativity in developing sustainability and sustainable innovations. The purpose of the research is to determine how communication and creativity decisions lead to the involvement of the organization's interested groups

in developing sustainability and creating sustainable innovations in Lithuanian business organizations. Research tasks: to analyze the theoretical aspects of sustainability and sustainable innovation; reveal the role of communication and creativity in developing sustainable innovations in business organizations; to investigate the approach of Lithuanian business organizations to the development of sustainability and sustainable innovations; to identify the forms of promotion of stakeholder engagement applied by organizations and their implementation in sustainability communication. Methods applied when writing the article: the analysis of scientific literature, synthesis, secondary data analysis, qualitative content analysis.

## 2. Theoretical foundations

Taking into account the growing economic, social and environmental challenges, and seeking to emphasize the need and importance of continuous qualitative changes, today's modern economics uses a multifaceted term of sustainability, which is widely discussed in various contexts: strategic management and long-term competitive advantage (Samsudin & Wahab, 2018; Baumgartner & Rauter, 2017); social while emphasizing that sustainable development is a process in which the needs of the present generation are met without harming benefits or resources needed to meet the needs of future generations (Pieper et al., 2019; Lee & Jung, 2019); organizational, when the importance of economic, social, and environmental dimensions is highlighted in sustainability objectives in order to achieve qualitative changes, gaining a lasting competitive advantage (Lemańska-Majdzik, 2018; Farias et al., 2020).

Considering new global contextual economic and technological changes, an important role falls on business organizations that have to develop in specific environmental conditions, taking responsibility for the organization's strategic sustainability and environmental management. Baumgartner and Rauter (2017) note that progress towards sustainable development was slow, which indicates the need for more specific guidelines that would enable enterprises to operate strategically and successfully in a sustainable way. The importance of the integrated strategy is highlighted, which means a business strategy aligned with the principles of sustainability and aimed at promoting business to solve global sustainability challenges relevant to the enterprise. By applying the integrated strategy, the company can emphasize the importance of strategic management for sustainability and use sustainability challenges as a source of innovation, seeking the company's competitive advantage (Manninen & Huiskonen, 2022; Vargas-Hernández, 2021). Seeking to plan and smoothly develop sustainability in the organization, communication plays a crucial role in any sustainability strategy. Failure of internal communication activities and poor external communication with customers, partners, and the community in the organization make it difficult to implement changes related to the organization's becoming sustainable (Genç, 2017).

Authors note the importance of communication (Ye et al., 2015) and the benefit of stakeholder engagement in creating value and innovations in organizations (Eisenreich et al., 2021; López-Rubio et al., 2020) in assuring smooth creation and dissemination of sustainable innovations. Many authors emphasize that seeking to set strategic directions for sustainable activities of a business and develop them, collaboration with various interested parties (Eisenreich et al., 2021; Badurdeen & Jawahir, 2017) is required. In the context of the activities of business

organizations, emphasis is placed on the importance of a strategic approach to communication, since communication becomes part of strategic planning and implementation of organizations, and communication itself is defined as strategic. Strategic communication is linking the organization's strategic goals with various stakeholders (investors, shareholders, business partners, employees, customers, government, etc.) and building a certain expert system that would help the organization strengthen relations with different audiences, institutions, and stakeholders (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Strategic communication in the context of sustainability development is considered an essential condition and tool for effective policymaking and public participation, starting with vision formulation, negotiations and finishing with preparation, creation, and implementation of plans for monitoring the decision impact. It is observed that innovation occurs in multi-channel dynamic innovation ecosystems consisting of researchers, funders, businessmen, legislators, experts, and employees, where dynamic processes of creating innovations and experimentation take place (Ackermann, 2013; Luoma-aho & Halonen, 2010). Many authors point out that innovative activities become more efficient when organizations involve more actors from different settings in their activities (López-Rubio et al., 2020), make use of relationships and strategic partnerships (Hein et al., 2019), since this enables faster identification of stakeholder needs, problems, and various offers (Ranjan & Read, 2016), understanding value dimensions from the perspective of various groups (Boyd & Koles, 2019), activating stakeholders' creativity and knowledge (Mathrani & Edwards, 2020), use of both internal and external resources (Hein et al., 2019), accelerate of organizational learning (Mastio et al., 2019), more consistent development of new ideas and ensuring their implementation and dissemination (Gustafsson et al., 2012). Communication helps to exchange information, creates a consensus among different opinions and interests, and facilitates opportunities for practical experience, decision-making, and implementation of actions, which is the basis for collaboration between government, civil society groups, and the private sector (Tomowski, 2006). It is noted that when looking for innovative solutions, it is especially important to pay a lot of attention to the development of collective creativity and cooperation (Lazzeretti, 2012). It is not only relevant for creative organizations to apply models for the creation of new ideas, which would encourage the cooperation of various interested groups, sharing ideas, collective cooperation in a risk-tolerant environment, promote the applicability of various creative methods, learning from mistakes, and use new and unusual solutions to solve emerging problems (Atkočiūnienė & Siudikienė, 2021). Höjer et al. (2012) emphasize that various partnerships and collaboration are beneficial for all parties involved and their lasting value can be expressed as acquired knowledge and competencies, new contacts and developed networks, increased reliability, new products in the form of publications, methods, and technologies, procedural and behavioural changes while seeking greater sustainability, growth in business value.

A particularly important role in organizational communication is played by corporate websites, which present the vision, mission, strategic goals, operational codes, and policy guidelines of organizations; in addition, they also perform many other functions. Researchers note that a corporate website is a corporate communication tool that presents the organization's activities, produce and contact information, service standards, news, events, marketing campaigns (Bernal Jurado et al., 2018), introduces the organization to internal and external stakeholders (van den Bosch et al., 2006), develops corporate social responsibility activities

(O’Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008). It also helps to develop partnerships while seeking strategic goals and implementing fundamental changes (Jun & Kim, 2021), to increase stakeholder involvement in the organization’s activities (Jun & Kim, 2021; Hoffmann & Lutz, 2015), acts as an online shopping and service booking platform (Kim et al., 2012). The increasing significance of communication is determined by the necessity to convince and involve all interested parties in the processes of building new behaviour models and operational practices.

Innovations become a key guarantee of business sustainability. Already now, novelties fail not so much because of the lack of necessary ideas and discoveries but because of a hostile environment. Studies on sustainability (Sadiku et al., 2019; Kropp, 2018; Stock et al., 2017) have shown that purposeful communication, knowledge, raising awareness, guidelines, and models bring about less change than internalisation of cost structuring and clear regulatory methods. In order to enhance dynamism of sustainability-oriented innovations and transformation processes, the most promising solution would be consistent restructuring of unsustainable infrastructure systems. Purposeful development of new sustainable innovations is a key activity to achieve sustainable industrial growth (Stock et al., 2017). Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without undermining the opportunities of future generations to satisfy their needs, while the main pillars of sustainability are the environment, society, and economy. The combination of sustainability and innovations is essential to implement new combinations that can boost the innovation process addressing current sustainability challenges. In most developed countries, lifestyles, and business models require too much resources and harm the environment from the social and ecological standpoint. Sustainable innovations should help achieve sustainability goals and considerably improve the impact of current life, business, and consumption models on the environment (Kropp, 2018). Sustainable innovations aim to facilitate lifestyles, promote well-being, and protect the environment in transparent and fair ways related to less use of resources and greater responsibility. Critical aspects that must be considered in promoting sustainable innovations are climate change, lack of resources, loss of biodiversity, and population growth.

The importance of responsible and sustainable innovations means that these ideas are considered the most recent holistic and multidisciplinary concepts highlighting the problem of dynamic capability used to develop the company’s long-term sustainable advantage (Sudolska et al., 2019). The focus on responsible and sustainable innovations forces companies to learn new approaches. Today, there is an obvious growing interest of the academic community in responsible and sustainable scientific research. The main areas of scientific research are dominated by topics such as innovations, sustainable development, sustainable innovations, responsible innovations, sustainability, etc. (Trivellas et al., 2020; Cillo et al., 2019). Ethical and sustainability certification of products is the main thing that customers take into account when making purchase decisions. It is stated that innovations should not only ensure the competitive advantage but also benefit nature and create social welfare. According to some authors, the effectiveness of sustainable innovations can be attributed to the company’s internal activities related to the creation of products and services, their commercialization and management of dissemination stages (Cillo et al., 2019, p. 1012). A sustainable approach to innovation should guide all decisions on products or services as well as the adoption and introduction of new business and organizational models within the organization.

Innovations are commercialized knowledge that is given meaning in new or improved products and services with certain payback periods. However, purposeful communication of companies when creating sustainable innovations would help to create its pay back and respective culture as well as customers' attitude to the development of sustainable innovations. After the theoretical analysis of the topic, the empirical study is conceptualized by a sequence of important constituents (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Conceptualization of the empirical research (source: created by authors)

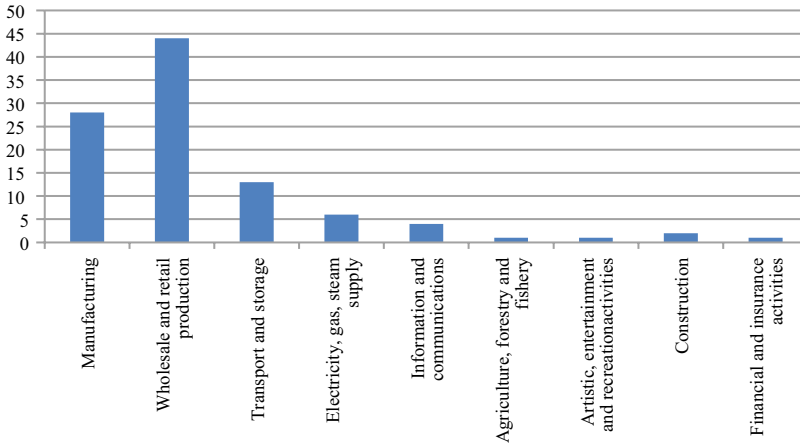
Summarizing the theoretical part, it can be stated that the development of sustainability in business organizations is influenced by many factors and it is a multidimensional process where the overall configuration of acting forces is highly important.

### 3. Methodology

The topic of sustainability in the Lithuanian business environment is particularly relevant and widely discussed. However, practical activities are being developed very sluggishly; therefore, the content analysis method was purposefully chosen as one of the most appropriate not only to collect the necessary data about the current situation in the largest Lithuanian companies but also to investigate the overall approach of business organizations to sustainability problems, the manifestation of organizational leadership in solving them, implemented solutions, and the level of integrating sustainability principles into strategic documents as one of the most important features of the sustainable organization.

The content of the organizations' websites thoroughly reflects the strategic directions and value orientations of the organization's activities; therefore, it is assumed that corporate websites and communication taking place in them as well as their content are saturated with data significant for the research and will provide opportunities to implement the purpose of the empirical research: to identify the forms of promoting stakeholder engagement, applied by organizations, and their activation in developing sustainability activities and introducing sustainable innovations.

Selection of business organizations for the research was carried out using the list of Lithuanian business leaders, annually compiled by the publication *Business News* (in Lithuanian: *Verslo žinios*), which ranks companies by various performance indicators. The list was compiled in 2022, using the official statistics of organizations' performance data. The activity of business enterprises was assessed according to such indicators as size, income, profit before tax, profitability, growth, number of employees, average salary. All the criteria listed above are



**Figure 2.** Distribution of the largest business organizations on the top 100 list by the fields of activity (source: created by authors)

important in describing the effectively operating company. Top 100 business leader positions from the leader list of 1000 largest organizations were selected for the research. It is expected that data significant to the research will be collected from them (Figure 2).

The content of the websites of these business organizations was selected for the research, and the method of qualitative content analysis was chosen for text analysis. The qualitative research approach provides opportunities to group, systematize, compare the obtained information and to study not only facts or symbols but also possible links between them as well as relations with the context and environment (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 25). The essence of the content analysis is grouping of information into categories, each of which represents individual variables provided for in the research tasks. In order to perform the content analysis, the following categories relevant to the research according to the distinguished essential aspects of the topic were formulated:

- integration of the sustainability policy at the organization's strategic level;
- promotion of innovations and the level of their connectivity with the organization's sustainable development;
- the level of engagement and empowerment of the organization's stakeholders.

Distinguished categories and subcategories are supplemented with interview quotes and presented in the Table 1.

## 4. Results

Analysing the information provided in the websites of business organizations in the aspect of integration of the sustainability policy at the strategic level, the following essential qualitative categories communicated by the organizational sustainability activities were distinguished: directions for the development of sustainability activities and reflection of sustainability in the strategy.

Based on the data obtained through the content analysis of websites, it can be stated that the directions for sustainability activities in business organizations include the essential areas of sustainable development: environmental protection, social and economic areas (Table 1).

The objectives of implementing sustainable development reveal the ever-increasing voluntary efforts of business organizations, communication of sustainability and its benefits, and shaping the society's attitude to environmental protection, social sphere and the economic sphere (Table 1). The concept of sustainability is considered an integral part of

**Table 1.** Directions for the development of sustainability activities (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Environmental protection	Standards	"The company has introduced an integrated quality, environment protection, employee safety and health management system that complies with ISO 9001:2015/ LST EN ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015/ LST EN ISO 14001:2015, and ISO 45001:2018/ LTS ISO 45001:2018 standards".
	Natural resources, energy	"We take action to keep the soil sustainable for productive use in the future and to preserve biodiversity"; "We use electricity produced from renewable energy resources, we use environment-friendly materials, raw materials".
Social area	Sustainable work environment	"To increase employee motivation and loyalty; employee satisfaction with the work environment and workplace relationships".
	Training and development of employees	"We care about continuous professional development of employees, organize internal and external training courses and ensure that employees have all mandatory certificates, improve competencies required for work, and strengthen departmental teams".
	Employee health and safety	"We seek to create safe and healthy conditions at workplaces".
	Support for local communities	"We aim to contribute to environmental protection, education, wellness, culture, science and vocational education, non-professional sports and children's and youth's sports or other areas of community welfare".
Economic area	Stable and secure infrastructure	"A stable and secure infrastructure is critical to the continued delivery of services to the population".
	Digitization of activities	"By digitizing and automating processes, we reduce the probability of a human error and use energy resources more effectively".
	Collaboration	"We understand that some of our strategic sustainability goals can be achieved only by collaborating with partners, sharing experiences and learning from others".
	Data protection	"Special attention to personal data protection and compliance with the European Union provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation".
	Prevention of corruption	"The company follows an anti-corruption policy, the purpose of which is to eliminate the causes and conditions of corruption, to create an efficient anti-corruption system".



universal quality management; organizations declare that they have implemented one standard – ISO 14001, which establishes criteria for environmental management systems. Some organizations apply an integrated quality, environmental protection, occupational safety and health management system corresponding to ISO 9001:2015/ LST EN ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015/ LST EN ISO 14001:2015, and ISO 45001:2018/ LTS ISO 45001:2018 standards. Summarizing the directions for developing sustainability activities, it can be stated that they are in line with the fundamental aspirations of sustainability and are mostly aimed at the improvement of environmental, social, and economic activity areas in the short or long term.

After analysing the strategic information communicated in the websites of business organizations, it was found that the strategic documents of organizations emphasized the aspiration to be sustainable, giving a sense to it in the vision, mission, goals, objectives, and planned actions (Table 2).

It is noted that not only the economic aspirations of organizations are highlighted but also voluntary initiatives in the environmental and social, economic areas: creating a sustainable future for people, strategic partnership, innovativeness, *etc.* Summarizing the reflection of sustainability in strategic documents, it should be noted that the essential principles of sustainable development are included in the organizational sustainability strategies and the country's residents and stakeholders have the opportunity to get familiar with the organizations' sustainability plans for the future. Based on the data of the content analysis data of websites, it can be stated that in their websites, organizations widely communicate corporate

**Table 2.** Reflection of sustainability in the strategy (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Mission	Promoting change	"We promote energy changes and development".
	Building a sustainable future	"To provide an opportunity to enjoy a healthier and longer life".
	Development	"We take advantage of development opportunities and develop innovative solutions to make life easier and energy smart".
	Strategic partnership	"We seek collaboration with strategic investors to master new technologies and expand into new markets".
Mission	People	"We merge businesses for a better future, enabling people to enjoy healthier and longer lives".
	Safety	"We ensure secure connections for a better future".
	Innovativeness	"We are bold in implementing them and discovering new opportunities".
Vision	Change	"In pursuit of our vision, we are changing to make the world more sustainable"; "We are creating a sustainable future".
	Sustainable manufacturing	"To ensure a stable, coordinated zero-waste programme"; "To predict the future needs of the modern consumer already today".
	Responsibility	"An attractive and responsible company for employees, society and the environment".

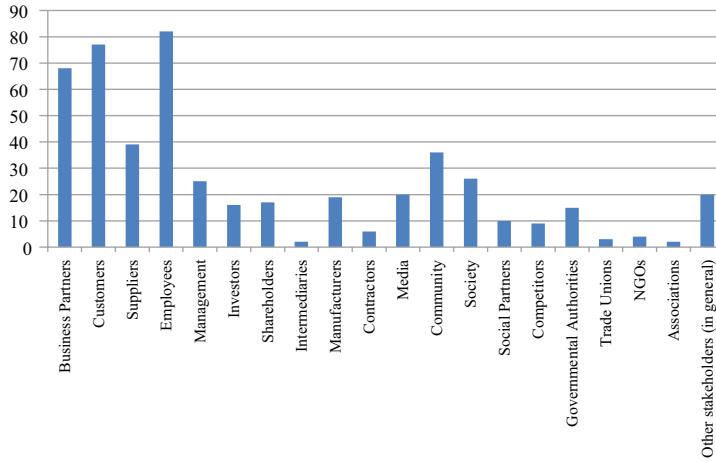
social responsibility activities by presenting corporate social responsibility reports detailing individual aspects of social responsibility. It should be noted that corporate social responsibility is often equated with sustainability without distinguishing the latter as an independent field of activity.

Organizations declare that they responsibly contribute to the Paris Agreement on climate change, the European Green Deal, and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals announced by the United Nations, which guide their activities, firmly committing to create positive changes in environmental protection, corporate social responsibility, and governance areas. The analysis of the sustainability performance documents of business organizations reveals a wide range of performed activities, while the communicated sustainability topics are divided into the following areas: social, environmental, and governance. The topics communicated show the directions in which business organizations in Lithuania operate and seek the implementation of sustainability activities. It should be noted that greater initiative is shown by international organizations that operate in extremely competitive conditions. Their communication reveals that sustainable development is a prerequisite arising from the market and customers, international and national regulations. There are cases when it is noted that the organization aims to develop sustainable business but does not detail how sustainable business development is implemented. Performed sustainable activities are based on the principles of responsible business, taking into account the reduction of the negative footprint of activities and the increase of the positive impact on the environment, society and employees. The responsibility of the organizational activities is based on compliance with international documents and standards, while the quality of implementing obligations is confirmed by the received sustainable development certificates, evaluations and awards.

Structuring of corporate webpages, the distinguished columns, the provided content and the performance documents allow the identification of the most important directions of the organization's activity and the role of stakeholders in the organizational sustainability processes. First of all, as far as stakeholders of business organizations are concerned, it should be noted that the activities of organizations can be related to lots of groups. Analysing corporate webpages and sustainability performance documents in them, the following stakeholders are distinguished: business partners, customers, suppliers, employees, community, society, the media, social partners, investors, shareholders, management, competitors, governmental authorities, intermediaries, contractors, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, associations, and interested parties in general. It can be seen that the greatest attention is given to employees, customers, business partners, and suppliers (Figure 3).

Sustainability performance documents record the objectives, measures, and priorities of organizational activities, and it can also be identified what role of stakeholders organizations seek: in what forms stakeholders should contribute to the development of sustainability activities. It can be seen that most companies, however, look at the involvement of stakeholders through the establishment of positions and responsibilities (Table 3).

However, it should be noted that sustainability communication is a very dynamic process, in which aspects of mobilizing organizational stakeholders, non-formal education, promoting change in lifestyle and behaviour are crucial. Organizations aim to ensure that stakeholders comply with all applicable and accepted environmental protection, legal and



**Figure 3.** Stakeholders distinguished in the performance documents of Lithuania’s largest companies (source: created by authors)

**Table 3.** The role of stakeholders in the development of organizational sustainability activities (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Assumption of duties and responsibilities	Distribution of responsibilities	“A sustainability committee must be established in the group of companies, whose duties are based on the provisions of the Corporate Governance Code regarding the board’s responsibility in identifying the company’s role in the society”.
	Compliance with legislation	“Operating both in Lithuania and abroad, we comply with laws, international agreements and legal acts that guarantee fair competition and trade”.
	Responsible use of the company’s assets	“Employees follow the established procedure for storing tangible assets and documents, protect the company’s assets, use devices and instruments effectively, use materials, energy, and other material resources economically and rationally”.
	Confidentiality of the company’s information	“The group’s internal information, which is not made public, is confidential, protected by the group itself, and it cannot be disclosed to the third parties: family members, friends or others who do not work in the group”.
	Quality assurance	“Suppliers and manufacturers must use the introduced management systems. They must be certified in accordance with the product safety and quality assurance standards applied by the third party”.
	Safety of products and services sold	“All products and services must be safe, functional and acceptable in terms of environmental protection and ethics and comply with the requirements of valid and approved labelling systems as well as be labelled according to them”.
	Mutual trust	“Customers and other persons should feel safe and trust X and the business it runs”.
	Political neutrality	“The employee participating in politics must ensure that the political views expressed or supported by him will be treated as a personal opinion and not as a position of the group”.

other requirements, also encourage them to consciously engage in pollution prevention activities, deepen their knowledge and take active part in improving environmental protection activities (Table 4).

Rapid sustainable development activities are quite complex, since they require a thoroughly thought-out strategy and the deployment of financial and other resources; however, for a responsible business that wants to grow, sustainability is an integral part of development. It can be observed that the definition of the objectives and benefits of the activities undertaken makes the need for sustainability clearer and more perceptible to stakeholders. At this point, the educational mission of business leaders in raising public awareness on important issues of sustainability activities becomes evident. Sustainability-promoting organizations

**Table 4.** Forms of stakeholder involvement in organizational sustainability activities (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Participation in activities	Participation in meetings	"We hold regular meetings to discuss issues".
	Participation in training	"It is required that each new employee of X should attend training on the code of ethics, which is repeated every three years for all employees".
	Participation in volunteering activities	"Blood donation – employees donate blood or bone marrow free of charge to different blood centres throughout Lithuania".
Sharing information and knowledge	Knowing how to act in case of an accident in the company	"Informing the public concerned and actions in the event of the accident. General recommendations in case of accidents".
	Stakeholders' insight-sharing on ongoing projects	"According to the justified comments received at the meetings, the project implementation is adjusted".
	Inducements to report observed violations of the code of business ethics	"Having noticed a possible violation of the provisions of the code, the employees of group X must take measures to prevent the violation and inform the responsible persons about it".
	Applicability of knowledge to ensure the quality of activities	"Employees of our companies and shops must be aware of the applicable quality, environmental protection, health, and corporate social responsibility requirements and take responsibility themselves that such requirements".
Adherence to established operational standards and ethical norms	Ethical behaviour and avoidance of conflicts of interest	"Employees are encouraged to avoid situations that may lead to a conflict of interest".
	Adherence to established operational requirements	"All suppliers working with X sign the supplier code of ethics. It sets out specific environmental requirements, which lead to real changes if they are followed by everyone".
	Formation of a responsible attitude	"With the knowledge from seminars, publications, and safety data sheets, our specialists constantly inform customers about the proper and environmentally friendly use of fertilizers and their storage".

End of Table 4

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Collaboration and partnership	Proactive communication and mutual benefit in partnership	"The foundation of good relationships with our suppliers is open and proactive communication and collaboration".
	Ensuring effective communication	"We have to make sure that it is easy for customers to get information from us, ask questions, make suggestions, and complain".
	Generating new ideas	"Contact us if you wish to visit the company, learn about [the organization's] activities and plans, invite us for a discussion or propose ideas that we could implement together".
	Constructive collaboration and long-term partnerships	"We emphasize sincere and constructive collaboration with each other, which creates conditions for sustainable achievement of the set goals".
	Involvement in solving community and societal problems	"We aim to inspire the community to act: by hearing the community's voice, we help to identify problems, propose relevant ways to solve them and get involved in their implementation".
Sustainable use of resources and use of green energy	Saving resources	"For a number of years, we have been moving towards sustainability in small steps by saving energy, collecting secondary raw materials".
	Sustainable development of operational processes	"We aim to sustainably develop our locations, processes, and technologies".
	Energy efficiency	"Increasing energy efficiency and reducing the impact on the environment by conserving energy and resources".
	Pollution prevention	"Following the principles of pollution prevention, we seek to use natural and energy resources sparingly and rationally".
	Responsibility in the area of climate change	"When stocking up on products, products should first be purchased from suppliers of the respective market, who are as close as possible, at the same time taking into account the season and the quality of products. Air transport should be used only in exceptional cases".

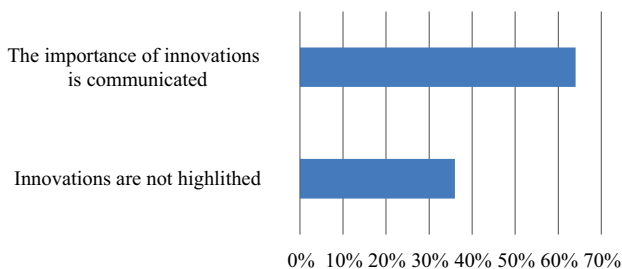
see their role as going well beyond their own compliance with the established legal requirements. They begin to spread sustainability ideas in the society, develop and change thinking and behaviour of the members of the society, shaping new operational practices. Stakeholder involvement is associated with their empowerment, the use of useful insights and knowledge in developing better operational processes and technologies, increasing community and public awareness, and respective development of their attitude and lifestyle. Proactive communication and collaboration allow organizations' management and employees to closely communicate with local communities, which leads to more effective identification of relevant problems and collaboration in solving them as well as the creation of voluntary and philanthropic programmes. Partnerships with non-profit organizations allow to support successful

programmes oriented to long-term and sustainable changes and also provide employees with additional volunteering opportunities. Investments in sustainable partnerships become part of the organizations' business activities and are reflected in their operating philosophy – a set of goals, performance documents, social, environmental, and governance programmes. Only complex solutions and the mobilisation of stakeholders make it possible to create positive societal change and introduce innovations.

At the level of innovations, many investigated organizations operating in Lithuania accentuate the importance of innovation; however, only 36 percent of all said organizations communicate about the importance of innovation in the area of values or management at the strategic level on their websites; information about the introduction of sustainable innovations in their activities is usually missing (Figure 4).

Some examples given below could reflect the identified links between sustainability and innovative performance: "Produce renewable electricity from wind", "Smart energy and harmony with the environment", "Logistics innovation leader, reliable partner providing the highest quality and unique services to the client, inspiring employer who is responsible towards society and the environment", "By increasing business synergy, introducing advanced technologies, we maintain a competitive advantage and aim for long-term growth", "Technological innovations. Constantly introducing innovations, we do not forget that they should bring you joy and make your life easier". The mentioned examples demonstrate that organizations communicate about the importance of innovations in their activities, but the possible results associated with the development of sustainable innovations are not highlighted. The impact of sustainable innovations is usually associated with the environmental, social and economic context. In relation to the research carried out, the manifestations of sustainable innovations can be identified by dividing initiatives into several essential categories: energy ("green energy"), waste reduction, transport, and circular economy (Table 5).

It must be emphasised that sustainable innovations are not, however, identified as a key investment potential, because their payback is long enough compared with the overall projected improvements. Foreign capital organizations are increasingly willing to invest in novelties that save natural resources and ground their activities on the principles of sustainability, which is becoming increasingly important for Lithuanian organizations as well.



**Figure 4.** Communicating the importance of innovation on organizations' websites (source: created by authors)

**Table 5.** Sustainable innovations in Lithuanian organizations (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statement
Energy: "green energy"	Renewable energy sources	"We create innovations that aim to increase energy efficiency, promote sustainable energy production technologies and sustainable energy consumption. These can be solutions such as alternative energy sources, energy saving measures and sustainable transport solutions"; "We prioritize green technologies and well-being in buildings. Innovative architecture adapts to the most demanding needs and corresponds to the highest quality standards".
Waste reduction initiatives: agriculture and food products	Recycling programmes, renewable sources, composting	"We implement waste reduction initiatives, including recycling programmes, composting, and sustainable packaging requirements"; "We want to create our products in a sustainable and innovative manner".
Sustainable transport: sustainable vehicles	Electric or hybrid vehicles, intermodal transportation	"Cycle to work – be sustainable and modern. Innovations to reduce the environmental impact of the transport sector and increase sustainable transport"; "We offer innovative solutions such as electric vehicles, shared transport services, sustainable logistics solutions, and the like".
Circular economy models	Waste is treated as a resource and recycled or used in new products or processes	"We have been constantly working to recycle resources to create new products with high added value"; "We increase the innovative potential of business, promote the development of existing innovations; improve customer experience; facilitate the work of employees; we update, improve the existing process, product, and service".

In summary, several organizations have established initiatives related to innovation development internally and externally (e.g., *Innovation Laboratory, Innovation Academy, Innovation Office, Innovation and Research Centre, Sustainability Innovation Awards*). The said initiatives are intended to promote business development, create collaboration opportunities, and grow the potential of business innovations by mobilizing internal and external resources. The main goal of such initiatives is to bring together scientists, students, employees, and representatives of various businesses to develop innovative business ideas, products, and services. Part of the investigated organizations directly or indirectly aims to contribute to the creation of an innovation ecosystem that would also include sustainable innovations: to promote the creation and development of innovations, sustainable business development, and the creation of new technologies – innovation incubators, sustainable business models, and new technologies, the application of which is oriented to conservation of natural resources.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the analysis based on the websites of business organizations suggest the diversity of attitudes towards the sustainable organizational development, the perception of sustainability, and its communication. The spectrum of information dissemination is quite

broad ranging from exhaustive reflection of sustainability policy and strategy, presentation of sustainability, corporate social responsibility reports to rather fragmentary distinguishing and presentation of individual areas of sustainable business. The performed analysis enables to envisage and confirm the insights of the conducted research that processes of sustainable operations support sustainable change strategies by changing the organizational models of employee behaviour towards the environmentally sustainable perspective (Dumont et al., 2017) and that external communication about sustainability can also promote the participation of stakeholders, customers in sustainable activities (McCoy & Chi, 2022). The performed analysis also revealed the lack of the holistic strategic approach to more fundamentally ensure and implement sustainability challenges in the long term. Manninen and Huiskonen (2022) stress that applying an integrated strategy, the company can combine the perspectives of corporate social responsibility and business strategy by harmonizing the company's core activities with the principles of sustainability. This way, the enterprise can adopt a strategic management approach to sustainability issues, using sustainability challenges as a source of innovation and increasing the company's competitive advantage.

The research revealed considerable differences between organizations in their approach and attention to the issue of sustainability, formalization of this activity, work experience in this area and the ability to communicate on this topic. Only a tenth of the top 100 organizations has approved the sustainability policy and strategy. The topic of sustainability is becoming increasingly relevant, which is evidenced by highlighting this aspect in the wordings of the mission, vision, and strategic goals of organizations. However, policies, guidelines, objectives, efficiency measurement criteria have been projected only by single organizations. It is evident that declaring a focus on sustainability is only the initial phase of sustainability activities. The spectrum of organizational sustainability activities is quite broad, ranging from single green initiatives to integration of sustainability principles into operational principles, organizational performance documents, specifically defined goals and criteria for measuring the effectiveness of sustainability performance. The formulation of the strategy requires a great deal of experience in this field, defining the directions of sustainability development, which are significant for the organization, identifying stakeholders, their attitude towards sustainability, the resolve of the organization's management to develop activities in a sustainable manner and to allocate the necessary resources for these activities.

Previous studies emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement and empowerment in sustainability activities (Eisenreich et al., 2021; López-Rubio et al., 2020); however, the results of this research show that organizations lack a deeper perception of how to effectively develop collaboration with stakeholders. Involvement and empowerment of interested parties can manifest themselves as an invitation to share ideas about sustainability activities, participate in discussions about organizational problems, observed operational shortcomings, discrepancies, to work together in the processes of creating the mutually beneficial joint value, to act together in sustainability development projects. The research results confirm the insights of the academic literature analysis, which emphasize the necessity of creative collaboration with stakeholders in identifying and developing the strategic directions for sustainable activities (Eisenreich et al., 2021; Badurdeen & Jawahir, 2017). Involvement of stakeholders and discussions with them help organizations to self-evaluate their corporate social responsibility, environmen-



tal protection and management policy guidelines, the effectiveness of their implementation, identify sustainability-related risks, analyse and find new opportunities for organizations to reduce negative impact on the environment. This confirms the insights of academics and researchers that relations with stakeholders facilitate the identification of stakeholder needs, problems, and various proposals (Ranjan & Read, 2016), understanding value dimensions from the perspective of various groups (Boyd & Koles, 2019), activate stakeholders' creativity and knowledge (Mathrani & Edwards, 2020), create new ideas more effectively and ensure their more effective implementation and dissemination (Gustafsson et al., 2012).

In the context of the need for constant innovation, the theoretical literature emphasizes the ability of organizations to creatively use the available knowledge and competences, which create a basis for the creation of innovations. The competence of innovation and creativity is related to the ability to generate new ideas and apply new work methods in organizational activities. Since innovativeness is related to the search for new ways to solve problems and a positive reaction to innovations, it encourages organizations to promote the expression of creativity of interested groups, the creation of networks and partnerships, and collective cooperation, which is increasingly considered the basis of the success of the entire organization. Empirical research has shown that innovative organizations see the need for sustainable and strategic partnerships, as this provides them with creative problem solving, utilizing the diverse experience, viewpoints, knowledge and creativity of stakeholders, and also provides an opportunity to find non-standard and innovative ways of solving problems and a niche in the market. In order to gain a competitive advantage and develop innovations, it is necessary to focus on creatively strategic creation of knowledge and its effective transfer and promotion during communicative processes, involving stakeholders.

## 6. Conclusions

In today's competitive environment, most Lithuanian business organizations understand that sustainability is a prerequisite and foundation for a successful business in creating long-term economic value. Business organizations seek to take responsibility for the organization's strategic sustainability and environmental management, identify the most important environmental, social and economic impacts of the organization, which form the basis for formulating sustainability goals.

Most of the studied companies operating in Lithuania name different aspects related to the improvement of operations and innovative activities: improvement of technologies; development of the integrated management system policy; transformation of ideas and knowledge into environmentally friendly innovations; looking for ways to reduce the impact on the environment; striving for more efficient and nature-friendly ways of using energy and other resources; efforts made to reduce environmental pollution and carbon dioxide emissions; promotion of waste sorting and its proper utilization; increasing environmental awareness by involving employees and partners; encouragement to consider environmental criteria when purchasing goods and services; the necessity to comply with legal acts regulating environmental protection; performance of environmental prevention, trying to avoid ecological disasters, and when they occur, readiness to solve them as soon as possible.

Stakeholder involvement and collaboration in sustainability activities is significant in several ways. First, when developing the topic of sustainability, organizations become public educators, since changes in this area are possible when stakeholders are involved and participate in sustainability activities. Another important aspect is that the involvement of stakeholders in sustainability activities is significant for the generation of new ideas and collaboration when looking for and creating sustainable business development solutions. As to innovation development, the role of collective creativity is growing, when different collaborating parties become the source of innovation. The communication strategy in the organization must help create sustainable relations between the organization's stakeholders and promote an environment favourable to innovation, which includes collective creativity, learning, sharing useful experience, effective solution of emerging problems, and generation of new sustainable ideas. Creativity can lead to a radically new idea, service or product that is implemented through innovation.

The empirical research has shown that the topic of sustainable innovation is still not widely studied today, although two separate areas – sustainability and innovations – are very important and are publicly communicated in order to involve stakeholders were possible. However, it is assumed that the creation and implementation of sustainable innovations in the context of investigated organizations operating in Lithuania is currently carried out insufficiently actively, more in a project format: there are many different initiatives aiming to encourage people to change their habits and contribute to sustainable development; however, there is not much communication about them and it is insufficient to change the perception of the public and to form the appropriate opinion about the necessity and benefits of sustainable innovations.

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