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# COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY: A CASE OF LITHUANIAN COMPANIES

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**ABSTRACT**. Sustainable development has become a strategic objective for contemporary businesses. It aims to ensure long-term economic growth by creating innovative products and services, efficient resource management, environmental preservation, and promoting social welfare. The interplay between client communication and the development of sustainable innovation has emerged as a critical area of study, intersecting theories of sustainability, innovation management, and communication science. This study aimed to investigate how communication facilitates customer engagement in sustainability initiatives and to explore the creation of sustainable innovations in the Lithuanian business context. The research employed qualitative content analysis to examine the web pages of the largest Lithuanian business organisations. The primary objective was to identify the communication strategies used by these organisations to involve clients in sustainable innovation processes. One hundred publicly available organisational websites were analysed, alongside documents related to their sustainability activities (e.g., sustainability reports, corporate social responsibility reports). The research results indicate that strategic communication of sustainability efforts is essential for promoting client participation in sustainable development processes. Moreover, client involvement is a critical factor in achieving the desired outcomes of sustainability initiatives, particularly in the context of sustainable innovation within Lithuanian businesses.

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## Introduction

Given the mounting emphasis on sustainable business development (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; San Miguel et al., 2021), there has been a concurrent rise in the importance ascribed to the creation and dissemination of sustainable innovation as a vital component in achieving and maintaining sustainable growth (Evans et al., 2017; Stofejova et al., 2025; Iskakova et al., 2025). Many organisations have notably been seeking to incorporate sustainability into their operations in a way that could create economic value and provide social and environmental benefits (Liotta et al., 2020; Eisenreichet al., 2021; Mura et al., 2024).

Sustainable innovation is crucial when developing sustainability activities since it makes it possible to increase the effectiveness of environmental, social and economic solutions (Juntunen et al., 2019; Mohamed et al., 2024; Išoraitė et al., 2024). The issue of sustainability is of great relevance in contemporary society and organisations, and as such, many companies are adopting a communication strategy focused on this topic. Communication is an important dimension of any sustainability strategy (Borges et al., 2023; Msosa et al., 2024).

Various stakeholders' contribution is paramount to developing organisational sustainability within a business. Consequently, developing communication to involve stakeholders in this process is becoming increasingly relevant (Fobbe, Hilletofth, 2021; Sady, 2023; Handayani et al., 2024; Khumalo et al., 2025). A sustainable society and a corresponding economic system would help to improve social welfare and address the worsening problems of climate change, depleting resources, and environmental protection. However, new management strategies and methods are required for their establishment. This can be achieved through a more active harnessing and empowerment of business stakeholders (De Luca et al., 2022; Eisenreich et al., 2021). It is observed that successful communication on innovation in creating value in business builds a culture of continuous change and renewal as well as new business models (Ye et al., 2015; Hurtado Jaramillo et al., 2018; Smaliukienė, & Monni, 2019). To sustain the growth of organisations, it is significant to involve stakeholder groups (Lopez-Rubio et al., 2019), emphasising the clients' perspective (Bakar et al., 2020). The perspective of clients and their participation is a key turning point in modern organisations seeking to move from activity coordination to collaboration (Kurki et al., 2024). Sustainability development poses many challenges due to numerous emerging requirements, activities, actors and applied tools (de Paula et al., 2022; Bagh et al., 2023). Research shows that client engagement in sustainability activities of business organisations is of particular importance for the creation and development of new business models (Reppmann et al., 2024; Kurki et al., 2024; Quyet, 2024), but such studies are still fragmentary.

Therefore, this research focuses on the role of communication with clients in developing sustainability and sustainable innovations in Lithuanian business organisations. The research employs several methodological approaches, including a comprehensive analysis of relevant scientific literature, synthesis of key theoretical and empirical findings, secondary data analysis, focusing on publicly available information and qualitative content analysis of corporate websites to examine how organisations communicate their sustainability efforts and engage with clients in the development of sustainable innovations.

Digital communication has facilitated new opportunities to analyse and assess how business organisations convey the importance of sustainability to clients and actively involve them in its development. Websites, social media platforms, and digital reports are key resources for analysing sustainability strategies, stakeholder engagement, and public communication. This study represents one of the pioneering efforts to examine the role of Lithuanian business organisations in advancing sustainability within society. The research revealed how sustainability is communicated and how clients are involved in implementing sustainability.

This is essential because change is only possible by mobilising stakeholders, especially one of the most important stakeholders for business organisations – clients. The capabilities of the Internet have enabled a more comprehensive evaluation of both the communication of sustainability values and the degree of client participation in sustainability initiatives.

## 1. Literature review

### *1.1. Development of sustainability activities of business organisations and creation of sustainable innovations*

Despite the worldwide economic development, threats to the economy, society and the environment have increased (Greco & De Jong, 2017; Gqalindaba et al., 2024).

Globalisation, intensifying economic competition, consequences of environmental degradation, social inequality, and poverty are just a few of the many problems that require global and local solutions. Commonly, such ecological and social problems cannot be solved by individual actors separately – their solution requires system-wide change encompassing different levels and actors of society (Eller et al., 2020). In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets to be implemented by 2030 in addressing global challenges and seeking a better and more sustainable future *United* (Nations Sustainable Development Summit, 2015). Alimohammadlou and Khoshsepehr (2022) and Zecca et al. (2023) noted that specially devised policies for sustainable development could help create a society with much better conditions than today, especially for future generations.

Kneipp et al. (2019) pointed out that globalisation has determined the emergence of new requirements and opportunities in creating management models for organisations, which encompass aspects of sustainability and prerequisites for large investments in innovation. It is noted that sustainability must be grounded on the innovation-oriented approach since novelties change the external environment and people's way of life and are the main factors determining the implementation of sustainability in organisations, institutions, communities and countries (Silvestre, Ţîrcă, 2019; Rosário et al., 2022). Nowadays, to survive in the long run, businesses must control the environmental impact and use resources sustainably. Therefore, companies must integrate corporate social responsibility and sustainability practices into their management strategies, making it possible to implement sustainability goals and acquire a competitive advantage (Baharudin & Nik Azman, 2019; Mostepaniuk et al., 2022; Nasiri et al., 2022; Manchidi & Mkhize, 2024; Quyet, 2024).

Sustainable development requires new principles that challenge society’s standard methods of production and consumption and promote the transition from a linear extractive economy to a circular renewable economy.

Sustainable innovation constitutes creating new products, processes, services, and technologies that contribute to meeting human needs, the development of institutions, and well-being. These are innovations where upgrading or improvement of products, services, technological or organisational processes improves not only economic performance but also environmental and social efficiency and can create a positive social and environmental impact both in the short- and long-term (Nasiri et al., 2022; Aboelmaged & Hashem, 2019; Oliinyk et al., 2023). It is noted that lifestyle and business models existing in most developed countries are overly resource-intensive and harmful to the environment from the social and ecological standpoint. Therefore, targeted development of new sustainable innovations is a key activity in seeking sustainable industrial growth (Stock et al., 2017; Churikanova et al., 2025). Combining sustainability and innovation is essential when seeking to implement new solutions that can stimulate the innovation process and solve current sustainability challenges. Sustainable innovation should help achieve sustainability goals and, in particular, improve the environmental impact of current life, business and consumption models (Kropp, 2018). Climate change, lack of resources, biodiversity loss, and population growth are critical aspects that must be taken into account in promoting sustainable innovation.

Sustainable innovation is a particularly important theme in developing sustainability activities; however, business companies do not always resolve to create and invest in the innovation due to its extended payback period and sometimes lack of consumer interest. It should be noted that innovation constitutes commercialised knowledge that acquires meaning in new or improved products and services with certain payback periods (Woodfield et al., 2023; Kayal, 2024).

Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss communication of sustainable organisations when creating sustainable innovations by asking what would help to create their payback, forming respective cultures and client attitudes towards sustainable innovations.

### *1.2. Sustainable innovations and communication with clients*

Businesses adopting sustainable innovation are not only addressing these pressing issues but also positioning themselves as leaders in their industries by attracting environmentally and socially conscious consumers, complying with evolving regulations and standards, mitigating risks associated with environmental degradation and social unrest, unlocking new markets and opportunities through the creation of responsible and forward-thinking solutions (Adams et al., 2016; Oláh et al., 2023). Sustainable innovation represents a shift in business practices and a commitment to creating lasting value for the planet and its people.

Researchers emphasise that sustainability development and innovation activities are multidimensional, involving many groups of people, constraints and requirements; therefore, the field of sustainability communication encounters many challenges (Ye et al., 2015; Samašonok, Išoraitė, 2023; Išoraitė, Alperytė, 2024). In the context of the activities of business organisations, emphasis is placed on the importance of a strategic approach to communication since strategic communication is purposeful communication focused on the implementation of the organisation's strategy (Bencsik, Belas, 2024; Hallahan et al., 2007; Holtzhausen, Zerfass, 2015; Čičmancová, Soviar, 2024). The development of sustainability and orientation towards sustainable innovation requires strategic decisions by any company to be a sustainable organisation and to integrate sustainability principles into the business strategy. Many authors accentuate that striving to establish strategic directions for sustainable activities and develop them requires that business should collaborate with various stakeholders (Hein et al., 2019; López-Rubio et al., 2020; Eisenreich et al., Stuchtey, 2021). Considering the complexity of sustainability challenges and to increase the innovation capacity of organisations, it is proposed that companies should use their stakeholders' ideas, knowledge and experience (Juntunen et al., 2019; Koe et al., 2024). In modern society, new collaboration-based relationships between organisations and their stakeholders are emerging (Kurki et al., 2024; Kuzior et al., 2024). However, it is observed that among all stakeholders, consumers and clients are one of the most active and significant groups with which companies seek to develop relationships based on long-term partnerships (Reppmann et al., 2024).

Loyalty of clients has always been important to ensure stable and smooth operation of business organisations (Bourdeau et al., 2024; Mishchuk et al., 2023), because otherwise, the loss of clients is followed by the decline in sales, profits decrease, and, in some cases, a rapid loss of clients may even lead the company to bankruptcy (Schein, 1997). Client loyalty is a long-term commitment of clients to continuously buy from a particular brand and be loyal. Such commitment involves creating an emotional connection between clients and organisations and building a relationship management system by offering a personalised experience, excellent client service, value, quality products and services and a reward to clients in exchange for their loyalty (Rane et al., 2023). The stakeholder theory emphasises that organisations that demonstrate their behaviour with clients, grounded on fairness, transparency, trust and collaboration, gain a competitive advantage (Bakar et al., 2019; Belás et al., 2024). Aspects of building client loyalty have been analysed and studied quite widely over the last few decades (Bourdeau et al., 2024; Hallowell, 1996), but it is highlighted that in the business environment, value has been defined through the prism of satisfying consumer desires and needs (Huratado Jaramillo et al., 2018).

Current affairs show that clients are decisive in implementing sustainability activities and seeking positive societal change in the environmental, social and economic fields. It is noted that sustainable solutions acquire meaning when they take root and become the client's choice (Reppmann et al., 2024; Huang, Rust, 2011). First, organisations incorporate social and environmental aspects into their business strategy to attract clients looking for sustainable and responsible products. At the same time, a higher level of environmental and social awareness is associated with greater process transparency, moral commitment and ethical standards (Stauropoulou et al., 2023). Research shows that client involvement in sustainability activities of organisations leads to the formation of responsible purchasing behaviour (Reppmann et al., 2024). It is stressed that organisations must look for ways to motivate clients to choose sustainable products, encourage their involvement in sustainability activities and shape their behavioural changes in the context of sustainability activities (Reppmann et al., 2024; Stauropoulou et al., 2023). Promoting clients' ethical and responsible behaviour in reducing waste, conserving natural resources and the environment, and choosing a more sustainable lifestyle and behaviour (Macca et al., 2024). Sustainability communication – the organisation's communication on sustainability issues – should not be seen as an additional area of the public relations programme but rather as integration of sustainability issues into the existing areas of the ongoing programme (Signitzer, Prexl, 2007). The communication strategy in the organisation must be focused on sustainable relationships and long-term partnerships that would help create an environment favourable to the creation of sustainable innovations and encourage not only employees but also clients to engage in collaborative processes through sharing useful experiences, effective solutions to emerging problems and generation of new sustainable ideas based on their experiences and insights (Atkočiūnienė et al., 2024).

The interest in corporate sustainability has grown rapidly in recent years and has encouraged organisations to adopt appropriate digital communication strategies, in which the corporate website plays an important role (Siano et al.,2016). In the digital communication environment, the web becomes a key tool for interaction with stakeholders because it can transmit corporate statements and sustainability initiatives more directly (San Miguelet al., 2021; Jun, Kim, 2021). Organisations and stakeholders often use online tools such as websites to communicate more quickly and directly about sustainability initiatives (Sanil, Ramakrishnan, 2015; Baláková et al., 2024).

The programmes for developing cooperation with clients, the forms of maintaining clients' relations with the organisation, and the initiatives of involvement in communication are also revealed. Golob et al. (2023), who conducted a systematic literature review on the topic of sustainability communication, note that future SC studies should focus on the micro- and macro-aspects related to SC and move from sporadic studies on instrumental perceptions and consumer behaviour to a more holistic approach that would allow a better understanding of the role of the heterogeneous context and institutions in sustainable practices.

Client involvement is particularly significant for business companies seeking to develop sustainability activities and create innovations. This collaboration also has great potential, but the communication aspect has not been sufficiently researched, and there is a lack of knowledge on how to develop it. In order to fill the research gap on the role of communication in developing such significant sustainability activities, an empirical study was planned, focused on examining one of the most important stakeholders – clients. In order to identify the ways in which organisations promote client involvement in sustainability development activities and based on the theoretical analysis, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1: How do business organisations motivate clients to choose sustainable products and services?

Q2: How do business organisations promote clients to choose sustainable lifestyles, changing their usual consumer behaviour patterns?

Q3: How do business organisations promote clients to collaborate in creating sustainable innovations and engage in developing sustainability activities?

Summarising the theoretical part, it can be stated that sustainability development of business companiesis influenced by many factors and the increasing importance of communication is conditioned by the necessity to convince and involve the clients in shaping new behaviour patterns and management practices.

## 2. Methodological approach

The content of organisations' websites thoroughly reflects strategic directions and value orientations of the organisation's activities; therefore, it is assumed that corporate websites, communication carried out on them and the content of websites are saturated with data significant for the study and will provide opportunities to implement the purpose of this empirical research.

For the research Lithuanian business organisations were selected according to the official performance statistics. Companies were evaluated using indicators such as size, revenue, pre-tax profit, profitability, growth, employee count, and average salary. All the criteria listed above are important in describing an efficiently operating company. From the list of 1000 largest organisations, the top 100 business leaders whose websites were expected to provide relevant data were selected for the research. Selected business organisations included: 44 wholesalers and retailers, 28 manufacturing companies, 13 transport, 6 electricity, gas and steam supply companies, 4 information and communication, 2 construction companies, 1 of each – agriculture, forestry and fishing companies, companies organising artistic, entertainment and recreation activities, and finance and insurance sector companies.

The content analysis method was chosen as the most suitable because it can be applied when it is important to identify the essential peculiarities of the phenomenon under study, to highlight new aspects illustrating the studied phenomenon, while the texts reflect people's experiences, attitudes, feelings and specify the context (Morse, 1997, from Bitinas et al., 2008, p. 229). The term content analysis encompasses many tools to analyse words and other unstructured data just as statistical analysis refers to a broad set of tools to analyse numeric data (Krippendorff, 2018; Reger& Kincaid, 2021). The qualitative research approach provides opportunities to group, systematise, and compare the obtained information and to study not only facts or symbols but also possible connections between them and relationships with the context and environment (Riffe et al., 2005, p.25). Data were processed in the following sequence: reading and analysing the text, collecting data according to the distinguished categories, recording reflexive comments, performing descriptive and interpretive text analysis, extracting main themes, organising data according to themes (open coding of the text), connecting themes that share a common idea into subcategories, connecting the subcategories into categories according to the common idea linking them.

In order to perform the content analysis, the following categories relevant to the study were formulated according to the distinguished key aspects of the topic: presenting sustainability activities to clients and promoting their awareness; methods of promoting clients to choose the organisation's sustainable products and services; motivating clients to change their lifestyle and emphasising the value of change; promoting the organisation's client involvement and collaboration in creating sustainable innovations. The chosen research period was one year (2023-2024), which is sufficient to collect more objective data and generate new insights on the chosen topic.

## 3. Conducting research and results

Although most businesses note on their websites that sustainability is a very relevant topic, only one-tenth of the top 100 organisations have a formulated and approved sustainability policy and strategy. Organisations that have prepared sustainability policy documents emphasise the importance of the strategic level of sustainability and links between sustainability policy goals and corporate strategy. The documents reflect the significance of the sustainability policy and the contribution of sustainable business operations not only at the organisational level, but also at the national level: "*Sustainability policy aims to contribute not only to organising sustainable activities, but also to the state's progress in the fields of sustainability"*. Organisations have prepared sustainability plans that set out action goals for shaping sustainability policies in the environmental, social, and economic fields. Organisations pay a lot of attention to the efficient use of resources, waste recycling, and pollution reduction. They declare that the sustainability policy includes quality, environmental protection and worker safety standards and note the importance of performance compliance with the global standards in the field of sustainability.

The sustainable development policy in organisations is carried out based on national priorities, goals and objectives of sustainable development set out in The Lithuanian National Strategy for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2003, and five essential elements emphasised in The *2030 Agenda* for *Sustainable Development* to which actions should be directed: people, planet, welfare, peace, partnership. Lithuanian organisations follow one of the essential principles of sustainability policy implementation – participation, which stipulates that implementing the sustainable development strategy must involve various institutions and public groups. Sustainable development is based on three equally important policy areas: environmental protection, social welfare and economic development (Table 1).

In the field of social policy, aspects of employee well-being, openness to society, and safety are distinguished. Organisations declare on their websites that employee safety is the most important priority, which is why they constantly improve the safety of their workplaces. It is noted that they improve physical conditions and invest a lot in the safety culture and promotion of safe behaviour. Many organisations highlight the importance of effective social dialogue with employees and creating more comfortable working conditions by introducing advanced technological solutions and providing employees with the necessary work tools and benefits. In the field of economic policy, emphasis is placed on the aspects of governance, value creation, and risk management, as well as objectives such as stable and safe infrastructure, transparent and effective management, and development. Special attention is paid to preventive and timely risk identification and management and standardised risk management systems and processes, which are integrated into key activities and decision-making. Business organisations declare that they responsibly contribute to transparent operation in the market, the profitability of performed activities, assurance of a financial return to shareholders, improvement of operations by using and introducing smart and safe digital solutions and developing innovations that promote sustainability.

Table 1. Dimensions of sustainability developed by business organisations

| ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY | SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY | ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| • Saving natural resources<br>• Zero waste<br>• Waste recycling<br>• Sustainable production<br>• Avoidance of polluting substances<br>• Choosing environmentally friendly raw materials<br>• Adherence to operational standards<br>• Education of the public and employees | • Creating social well-being<br>• Equality and empowerment of people<br>• Safe and sustainable work environment<br>• Sharing<br>• Openness to society<br>• Institutional stability<br>• Support to local communities | • Sustainable growth<br>• Sustainable governance<br>• Cost savings<br>• Risk management<br>• Research and development<br>• Innovation and innovation<br>• Digitalization of operations<br>• Data protection<br>• Corruption prevention<br>• State progress |

Source: *own compilation*

Corporate websites and sustainability performance documents presented on them distinguish various stakeholders, but 88% of business organisations mention clients among the most important stakeholder groups, and it is the second most important stakeholder after employees. Business organisations pay quite a lot of attention to clients, and the essential part of sustainability documents is the declaration of commitments to clients – the high-quality guarantee, the presentation of the implemented quality policy, ensuring the satisfaction of client expectations and needs, and the declared striving to create value for clients.

Responsibility for operations of business organisations is based on compliance with international documents and standards, while the quality of implementing commitments is confirmed by obtained sustainable development certificates, evaluations and awards. Organisations invite clients and business partners to follow applicable and accepted legal and other requirements in the field of environmental protection, as well as to promote client awareness through engagement in environmental conservation and pollution prevention activities, as well as by choosing sustainable raw materials, products, or services. Sustainability communication intended for clients primarily reflects the striving of business organisations to respond to client needs adequately, offer safe products and services, and ensure client data security requirements and the development of ethical relationships (Table 2). It must be noted that the content published by business organisations about their sustainability activities contributes to the education of both society as a whole and clients of organisations, their awareness raising by explaining why these activities are significant and what actions each of them could take to contribute.

Table 2. Business organisations' sustainability activities in developing relationships with clients

| Category | Subcategory | Illustrating statements |
|---|---|---|
| Implementation of commitments to customers | High quality of service | *"Satisfaction of our clients (..) and high quality of servicing them is a strategic topic of the Company."* |
| | Implementation of commitments | *"We work to keep our promises to our clients."* *"We fulfil all our commitments to the client."* |
| | Meeting client expectations | *"To produce fertilisers and chemical products that meet the company's standards, to fulfil the assumed commitments while meeting the needs and expectations of employees, clients, suppliers and stakeholders."* |
| Ethical client relationships | Mutual respect and trust | *"(...) we accompany our clients on the path of their expectations to mutual trust and respect."* *"Clients and other individuals should feel safe and trust the organisation and the business it develops."* |
| | Fair competition | *"We do not seek competitive advantage through illegal or unethical means. (...) we constantly compete following legal acts that regulate competition and fair operation in the market."* |
| | Prompt feedback | *"When we receive negative feedback from the client about the quality of the performed work, we examine it in detail and take corrective action immediately and in close cooperation with the client."* |
| | Client safety | *"We always consider our clients' safety when developing products and providing services."* *"All products and services must be safe, functional and acceptable in terms of environmental protection and ethics (...)"* |
| | Protection of data and information | *"Clients entrust us with their information, and the company must ensure the security of the information received."* *"We seek to ensure the secure functioning of our systems, the protection of client data and (...) secure access to digital services for private and business clients."* |
| | Accurate information to clients | *"Marketing of our products and services is always realistic and accurate."* *"The company aims to give clients (...) a comprehensive and accurate impression of [the organisation]."* |
| Supply of sustainable raw materials, products and services | Supply of sustainable raw materials | *"For a number of years, we have been moving towards sustainability in small steps, saving energy, collecting secondary raw materials, choosing and offering greener raw materials and tools to our clients."* |
| | Supply of sustainable products and services | *"We encourage to make healthier choices..."* |
| | Promotion of sustainable consumption | *"Clients can purchase a refurbished mobile phone, this way we ensure a longer lifecycle of the equipment and contribute to promotion of sustainable consumption."* |
| Creating value for clients | New solutions for clients | *"We are constantly developing new solutions that would provide the greatest possible value to our clients."* *"...we must actively reduce our impact on the planet and constantly look for new ways to facilitate and accelerate our clients' discoveries."* |
| | Introduction of innovations | *"Creating innovations, we work with partners and seek to help our clients become energy smart and achieve their environmentally friendly goals."* |
| | Benefits for clients | *"We seek that our clients could make the world healthier, cleaner and safer."* *"The goal of our activity is to meet our clients' needs, providing them with commercial benefits, and to create value for them."* |

Source: *own compilation*

Business organisations highlight the importance of clients and the need for collaboration; therefore, they emphasise maintaining quality communication with clients as essential in developing sustainable activities. Client feedback helps to improve and provide high-quality services and products, promptly respond to expressed remarks and comments, identify emerging problems on time, and perceive client needs and expectations. This data becomes a source of knowledge of consumer behaviour and can be used to develop ideas for sustainable products and services. Organisations encourage client participation in citizenship projects and events intended for solving environmental protection or social problems. Business organisations state that new solutions and introduced innovations help create value for clients. Nevertheless, the highest level of client involvement in sustainability activities is participation in value co-creation processes, when clients, as equal partners, engage in the search for relevant solutions, the processes of generating new products and ideas, while the desired result creates value for all participating parties and promotes their sustainable growth (Table 3).

Table 3. Forms of promoting client involvement in organisational sustainability activities

| **Category** | **Subcategory** | **Illustrating statements** |
|---|---|---|
| Qualitative communication | Transparency | *“(...)our communication is fast, open, proactive, reliable and transparent. (...) We do not publish information inappropriately or selectively.”* |
| | Ensuring effective communication | *“We must ensure that it is easy for clients to get information from us, ask questions, make suggestions and complain.”* *“We regularly collect client feedback and improve our products and services based on this feedback information.”* |
| | Sharing information and knowledge | *“Project implementation works are adjusted according to the reasonable comments received at the meetings.”* |
| | Arrangement of meetings | *“We hold regular meetings to discuss issues.”* *"We initiate meetings as needed to discuss relevant issues.”* |
| | Invitation to participate in joint activities | *“We invite everyone to take part in the tree planting campaign.”* |
| Collaboration and partnership | Mutual benefit in partnership | *"We are a partner whose duty is to ensure that advanced technologies and next-generation solutions help businesses grow."* *“We are actively looking for new ways of communication and collaboration with clients.”* |
| | The need for collaboration | *"We emphasise sincere and constructive collaboration with each other, which creates conditions to seek the set goals harmoniously."* |
| | Recommendations to clients | *“(...) we advise [clients] on price fluctuations, business threats and climate risks.”* |
| | The importance of a long-term partnership | *“We value long-term partnerships.”* *“We want to be a reliable partner and the best choice for our clients.”* |
| Client involvement in value-creation processes | Solving problems relevant to clients | *"We believe that (...) a balanced solution will be found between the Government and market participants to amortise electricity and natural gas prices through the support scheme."* |
| | Development of joint innovative solutions | *“Together with partners and clients, we seek to create innovations that would ensure sustainable growth.”* *"(...) we are committed to actively reducing our impact on the planet and constantly look for new ways to facilitate and accelerate our clients' discoveries."* |
| | Generating new ideas | *"Please contact us if you would like to visit the company, learn about [the organisation's] activities and plans, invite us to a discussion or propose ideas that we could implement together."* *"(...) the organisation is always open to ideas, discussions, collaboration, social or environmental initiatives and other opportunities."* |

Source: *own compilation*

Sustainable organisations perceive their role as much broader than just the performance of their own activities in compliance with the established legal requirements. They disseminate sustainability ideas in society, educate and change the thinking and behaviour of members of society, forming new operational practices. Client involvement is associated with the development of collaboration, creating more advanced technologies and innovative operational processes together (Figure 1).

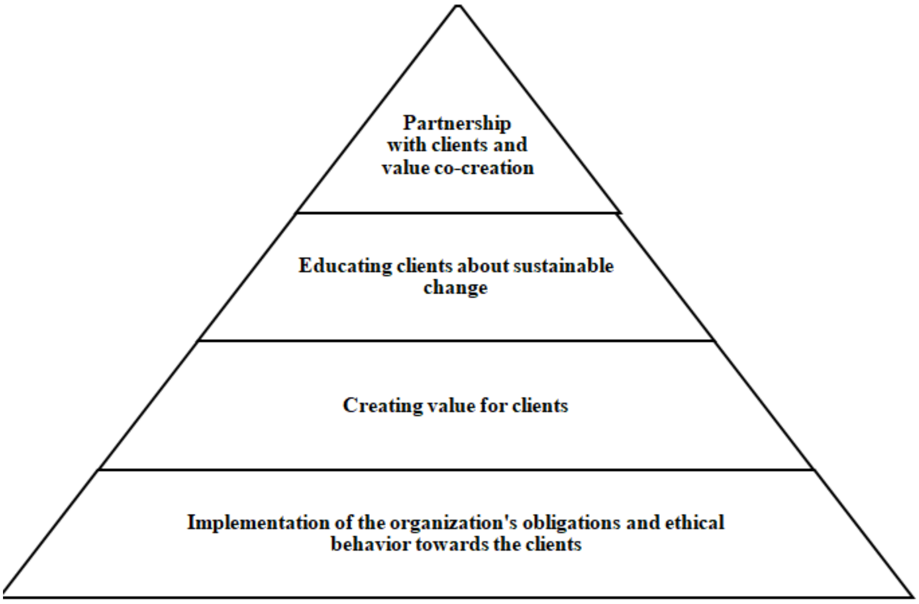


Figure 1. Sustainability dimensions in driving customer involvement.
Source: *own compilation*

In the context of communication with clients, at the level of creating innovations, 64 percent of surveyed organisations operating in Lithuania highlight the importance of innovation, but only 36 percent of all above-mentioned organisations provide information to clients on the importance of innovation at the strategic level on their websites next to presentation of the company's values or management area, while information on introduction of sustainable innovations in their activities is usually missing. Such examples of operations of business organisations reflect the identified links between sustainability and innovative activities: companies promote the production of renewable energy from wind, introduce smart energy solutions related to environmental protection and sustainability, to increase the synergy of businesses through the implementation of advanced "green" solutions, using sustainable growth; to reuse and continuously conserve nature in creating new products for the market. Considering the said insights, organisations communicate the importance of innovation in their activities, but possible results related to the development of sustainable innovation are not highlighted. The impact of sustainable innovation is usually associated with environmental protection, social and economic context, brand promotion, leadership in the market, and reaching new consumers while creating greater trust. Based on the conducted research, manifestations of sustainable innovations can be identified by grouping initiatives into several essential categories: *energy* ("green energy"); *waste reduction* (the recycling aspect); *transport* ("the green concept"); *circular economy* (the sharing aspect) (Figure 2).

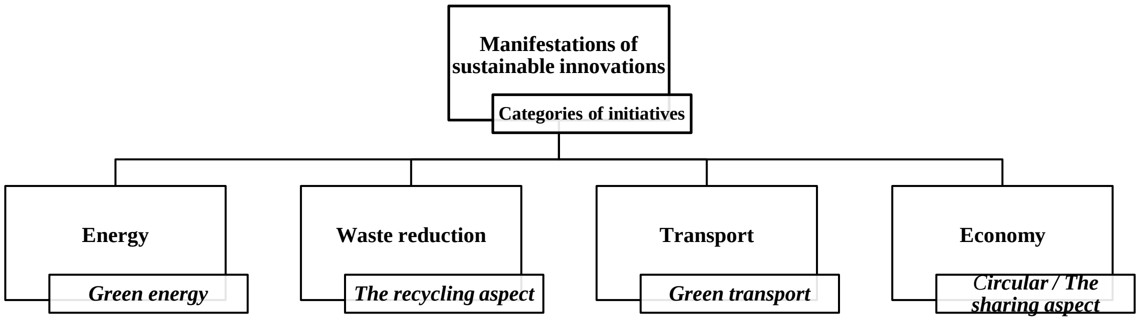


Figure 2. Forms of manifestation of sustainable innovation
*Source: own compilation*

Renewable energy sources are linked to environmental protection by mitigating human-induced damage to nature. Innovations focus on enhancing energy efficiency, sustainable production, and consumption, such as alternative energy, energy-saving measures, and sustainable transport solutions. Organisations increasingly prioritise employee well-being by incorporating green technologies in energy-efficient office buildings. Waste reduction initiatives, including recycling, composting, and sustainable packaging, are key aspects of sustainability efforts. Organisations aim to reduce food waste and promote sustainable production through innovative practices. Companies implement recycling programs, use ecological packaging, and favour electronic invoicing. A growing number also offer products made from renewable sources. Organisations encourage electric and hybrid vehicles, provide charging infrastructure at workplaces, and promote cycling to work as part of their sustainability efforts. To reduce environmental impact, they adopt sustainable transport solutions, such as shared transport and electric vehicles. Waste is considered a resource, recycled or repurposed in new products and processes. Through innovation, businesses enhance products, services, and customer experiences, increasing value while reducing waste. The above-mentioned initiatives are intended to promote business development, create collaboration opportunities, and grow the potential of business innovation by mobilising internal and external resources in order to build a relationship of trust with the client.

Communication with clients and promotion of their engagement constitute an important part of sustainability communication, as theoretical and practical activity insights show that client engagement in the organisation's sustainability activities determines its efficiency and enables the implementation of desired changes (Rubio et al., 2020; Hein et al., 2019). Our study confirms that the ability to present sustainable products and services to clients and encourage them to choose allows sustainable initiatives to take root in the market (Reppmann et al., 2024). In addition, educational activities on sustainability topics, carried out by business companies, help to attract more conscious clients (Kurki et al., 2024), increase client loyalty to organisations (Agu et al., 2024), which in the long term helps shape clients' more sustainable consumption habits (Stauropoulou et al., 2023). The results of the study demonstrate that collaboration with clients is also beneficial for business organisations since client criticism and proposals can help find new ways to solve problems and more sustainable alternatives for products and services, considering client needs. Client engagement and empowerment can manifest as an invitation to share ideas on sustainability activities, to participate in the discussions on organisational problems, observed operational shortcomings, and discrepancies, to work together in mutually beneficial joint value creation processes, and to act together in sustainability development projects. Client participation helps organisations self-assess the relevance of their corporate social responsibility, environmental protection and governance policies, achieve results and implement changes (Dvorský et al., 2023). As observed in previous studies, such collaboration helps to understand value dimensions from the perspective of various groups (Eisenreich et al., 2021), harness creativity and knowledge (Juntunene et al., 2019), create new ideas more efficiently and ensure their more effective implementation and dissemination (Atkočiūnienė et al., 2024). Client feedback and involvement in communication when presenting the activities to society allows for achieving a higher degree of persuasiveness of messages and trust in the organisation itself.

Many initiatives aim to encourage people to change their habits and contribute to sustainable development. However, there is little communication about them, nor are there enough projects to change the public's perception, form the appropriate opinion about the necessity and benefit of sustainable innovation, and create communication with clients based on that aspect and trust. Business organisations developing sustainability activities carry out the educational mission and seek to convince everyone that they can and should contribute to creating and developing sustainable innovations to safeguard vital resources for future generations.

As sustainability becomes a mainstream focus, communication with clients will grow in importance. Future efforts should leverage AI and data analytics to understand client preferences, personalise communication strategies, explore immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) to demonstrate the impact of sustainable innovations and establish global client communities to share best practices and insights.

## Conclusion

In Lithuania's competitive business environment, organisations recognise sustainability as a key driver of long-term economic value. They adhere to the principle of participation, engaging various institutions and public groups in the implementation of sustainable development strategies. Companies assume responsibility for their sustainability and environmental management by identifying key socio-economic and environmental impacts, which inform the formulation of sustainability goals. This approach integrates business strategy with sustainability principles to address relevant challenges. According to the literature review, organisations need to focus on communicating with stakeholders, especially one of the most important of them, clients, to promote the spread of sustainable solutions in society.

The study investigated how business organisations motivate clients to choose sustainable products and services. It was found that close and ongoing communication is essential for developing client relationships. Sustainability activities of business organisations must gain clients' approval and support; therefore, communication must encourage and motivate sustainable client choices, highlighting the benefit of such choices and the implementation of positive change in the long term. It also aimed to identify how business organisations encourage clients to choose sustainable lifestyles, changing their usual consumer behaviour patterns. The search showed that voluntary efforts to address social and environmental issues are increasingly incorporated into client relations and daily operations, advancing higher social and environmental protection standards. Client involvement in sustainability activities is important as a source of new ideas, and ongoing communication helps to create sustainable business development solutions. Clients influence the direction and adoption of sustainable innovations and act as co-creators, collaborators, and evaluators in ensuring sustainability goals align with practical needs and market realities. Research showed that by communicating sustainability ideas, businesses can drive client involvement in creating sustainable innovations and engage in the development of sustainability activities. Client involvement ensures that solutions are environmentally and socially responsible and aligned with market expectations and usability standards. Clients provide valuable perspectives on their needs and preferences, guiding sustainable solutions' design. Early engagement with clients helps validate ideas, ensuring innovations are practical and market-ready. Satisfied clients act as ambassadors, promoting the benefits of sustainable innovations to broader audiences. Involving clients in the co-creation process fosters innovation that is user-centric and more likely to succeed. Businesses can align sustainability goals with client expectations by fostering transparency and co-creation, driving impactful and widely adopted innovations. The research has shown that the topic of sustainable innovation is still not widely discussed today, although two separate areas – sustainability and innovation – are critical and are publicly communicated in order to involve both clients and other stakeholders as much as possible.

This article contributes to research on sustainability communication by highlighting the importance of collaboration between companies and their stakeholders. Clients can contribute to implementing sustainable solutions by purchasing sustainable products, shaping a more sustainable lifestyle and contributing their insights to creating new sustainable products and services. Developing and implementing sustainable innovations require organisational communication focused on educating the public and encouraging their involvement in sustainability activities. The synergy between communication with clients and sustainable innovation lies in fostering a shared vision for sustainability. By prioritising transparency, dialogue, and client collaboration, businesses can co-create innovations that address environmental and social challenges and resonate deeply with market demands. Communication becomes a transformative force that bridges sustainability aspirations with actionable, impactful innovation.

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