The Triple Bottom Line: Reporting tool or reflexive framework?

An employee perspective on Corporate Responsibility in practice

by

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Abstract

Title: The Triple Bottom Line: Reporting tool or reflexive framework?

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Purpose: In the context of contemporary organisational challenges regarding Sustainable Development, our inquiry's purpose is to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means for employees to work with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in the practical and local context of a global pharmaceutical company's sustainability strategy.

Research question: Our study is led by the research question "how do the employees of a global pharmaceutical company perceive and give substance to the Triple Bottom Line in a local context?".

Method: Using an interpretivist approach, we investigate the TBL within GlobalPharma by revealing the perceived reality of employees in working with this concept. We explore how they interpret and give substance to the concept of TBL in relation to their function. This study is based on semi-structured interviews with thirteen respondents from different countries.

Findings: Our main empirical finding suggests that employees use the TBL as a reflexive framework to find purpose in their work. We contribute to the literature on Corporate Responsibility by showing that the TBL in practice is more than a reporting tool, which is how the TBL is commonly understood. On this basis, we argue that the criticism of the TBL as a reporting tool is partly misdirected. This as the TBL can help employees to make sense of their work and their company's higher societal purpose in relation to its commercial needs.

Keywords: Triple Bottom Line, Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Responsibility, Sustainable Development

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1   Introduction

Contemporary organisations increasingly show consideration for their contribution to Sustainable Development, which the reader can interpret as developing an organisation while meeting the needs of the present without jeopardizing the needs of future generations (WCED, 1987). As the work by Carroll (1999) indicates, organisations' concerns for their societal responsibilities dates several centuries back, while the current conceptualisation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) starts to shape from the 1950s onwards. These changes in contemporary working life have resulted in largely ambiguous pictures of sustainability and Sustainable Development. Next to being difficult to live up to, they complicate the task of managers to express an integrated, consistent, and coherent idea of their ambitions and what they stand for in terms of sustainability.

In line with these broader movements, the purpose of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means for employees to work with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in a practical and local context of a global pharmaceutical company's sustainability strategy. Hereafter, the company GlobalPharma is used as a pseudonym for the company under study that will be maintained throughout the report to ensure confidentiality. More frequently than not, the TBL is understood in both the literature and practice as defining the organisation's contribution as a corporate citizen in terms of their social and environmental commitments in addition to their economic bottom line. Thereby, the understanding of the TBL within corporations has slowly moved towards its use as a reporting tool and is commonly defined as an organisation's social, environmental, and economic performance. While recognising the complexities and ambiguities that prevail in the literature from a reporting standpoint, our belief is that the current research on the TBL benefits more from a social science perspective that addresses to what extent the TBL is represented in practice through a case study of perspectives amongst GlobalPharma's employees in the contexts of both its headquarters and affiliates.

1.1.   Problematisation and research question

The reason for selecting explicitly the TBL framework is the increased attention for the TBL in popular press and media as well as scholarly journals. A stand-alone search for the TBL on Google Scholar generates 1.25 million results. The TBL's expanding popularity as both a reporting tool and a way of doing sustainable business also means that new streams of research

such as the integrated approach to sustainability reporting emerge, which challenge some of the TBL's characteristics. Hence, studying the TBL is considered relevant as it has faced many criticisms on its characteristics (Isil & Hernke, 2017). This strengthens our argument that the TBL's prevalent assumptions need to be studied within the confines of contrasting perspectives ranging from a management fashion and performance measurement tool to its exploitation for commercial needs. Consequently, this study develops an insight into how the TBL within GlobalPharma contributes to the changing field of Corporate Responsibility by researching how the TBL affects GlobalPharma's employees and culture. Corporate Responsibility is our way of referring to the voluntary integration by organisations of the social and environmental business activities in addition to the financial bottom line. For a detailed explanation of the terminology, the reader is referred to the literature review. Despite the undeniable contributions of the TBL to the field of Corporate Responsibility, one can also make the counter assumption that it has resulted in an ambiguous debate revolving around performance measurement and indicators. Hence, studying the TBL within GlobalPharma shows the potential to provide new insights into how Corporate Responsibility can be incorporated effectively within contemporary organisations.

Supporting the aforementioned, within the theoretical debate surrounding this definition of Corporate Responsibility revolving around the TBL we identify a lack of empirical insights into the underlying meaning of the TBL as either a reporting tool or a way of doing business (Alhaddi, 2015). Between the all-encompassing terminology and performance indicators concerning sustainability reporting, the empirical domain appears to be forgotten. More specifically, the explorative insights into practical relevance within explicit industries and organisations is lacking as most focus on accounting, finance, or organisational behaviour (Alhaddi, 2015). To illustrate, Hidayati (2011) has qualitatively researched the extent to which different organisations use the TBL in their CSR programmes. In addition, a quantitative empirical analysis of TBL reporting has been conducted by Ho and Taylor (2007). Another example is Goel's (2010) empirical research, which focussed on the TBL's benefits, its link to Sustainable Development, and using these findings to establish a set of TBL indicators for sustainability reporting. However, each of these still show a strong limitation of either being a comparison, quantitative, or accounting focussed inquiry, whereas our research investigates practitioner perspectives on the TBL within a multinational firm renowned for practicing the TBL. Accordingly, the following section describes the associated research aim and question that we established.

With our research, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means for employees to work with the TBL in a practical and local context of a global pharmaceutical company's sustainability strategy. Thereby, we answer to Alhaddi's (2015) call for qualitative empirical material that constructively scrutinises the TBL. To achieve this aim, we consult practitioners from different countries by conducting semi-structured interviews. Ensuing the above problematisation and purpose, we formulated the following research question: *how do employees of a global pharmaceutical company perceive and give substance to the TBL approach in a local context?* Dey and Burns' (2010) research explored the TBL through a case study regarding GlobalPharma's "integrated reporting and how this reporting has served to embed sustainability into decisions taken at all levels in the company" (p.215). Their inquiry will be consulted in more detail in the next section as we describe the setting of our research.

1.2. Case description

Following the above, our inquiry focuses on developing this empirical frame of reference by conducting a case study of GlobalPharma. This global leader in pharmaceuticals has over 40,000 employees spread across 80 countries, which is frequently referred to as a leading example for its renowned managerial approach to sustainability (Dey & Burns, 2010). The way GlobalPharma's employees perceive the TBL approach needs to be studied as it continues on Elkington's (2018) reflection on his study of the TBL within GlobalPharma, which he conducted almost twenty-five years ago. Dey and Burns (2010) argue that in current operationalisations of the TBL the focus has shifted towards the quantification of non-financial indicators for the social domain, such as employee safety, and environmental domain, such as waste management, signalling its use as a reporting tool. Based on the foregoing, GlobalPharma provides an intriguing case for an in-depth analysis of their presumably unique approach to the TBL, in the view of Dey and Burns (2010), to achieve alignment between sustainability and business strategy. They argue that the former uniqueness lies in GlobalPharma's management of meaning through specified values and principles in combination with tangible commitments and outcomes. According to Dey and Burns (2010), the development of GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy is impressive in comparison to its peers, but the company "also recognises that this is an ongoing, incremental task" (p.227). Following this recognition, several lessons can thus arguably be learned from the GlobalPharma case as there is still a potential for improvement to be investigated.

Dey and Burns (2010) describe how GlobalPharma started with sustainability as an element of its wider strategic approach in the 1990s. They explain that, while the initial focus when starting in the 1990s was on the environmental domain, GlobalPharma's approach has developed to the social domain, specifically health and business ethics. However, they stress how this followed three decades of bad publicity and several allegations. As for that, GlobalPharma's efforts were driven by external stakeholder concerns resulting from the media attention following these allegations, and thereby, impacted the development of their sustainability strategy (Dey & Burns, 2010). Among the plaintiffs was John Elkington, who subsequently performed an external analysis, thereby, introducing his TBL into the organisation (Dey & Burns, 2010). Following this first encounter, the year 2001 marks the formal adoption of TBL reporting by GlobalPharma (Dey & Burns, 2010). Elkington and GlobalPharma's joint focus on the social and environmental aspects in addition to the financial bottom line has over time evolved into the currently alleged front-running approach to integrated reporting (Dey & Burns, 2010). GlobalPharma is a globally operating pharmaceutical company, and therefore, it is interesting to further investigate the discrepancy as suggested by Dey and Burns (2010) between the deep-rooted and value-based culture in the headquarters striving for common direction, and the national cultural diversity at the affiliates, for example, in the assumption that sustainability is 'the right thing to do' (Dey & Burns, 2010).

1.3. Relevance

For researchers and practitioners alike, who are interested in how the TBL is exerted within a pharmaceutical company, this study arguably provides a starting point through new insights about different positions and the role of the TBL in contemporary organisations as a reflexive framework. Thereby, we aspire to provide inspiration and advice for actors when engaging in the integration of Corporate Responsibility. Through its qualitative nature, this study answers the call for empirical data regarding practitioner's perceptions, which is currently very limited to non-existent as reflected in the earlier problematisation (Alhaddi, 2015). Consequently, we present the societal contribution of our inquiry as contributing to the frequently contested and often misunderstood jigsaw that is the TBL by focusing on exploring this topic from an empirical viewpoint. This is necessary since practitioners are subjected to external pressures, for example, from the government, NGOs, consumers, and media, but also importantly employees, which all increasingly demand sustainable business models (Porter & Kramer, 2006). This means that organisations feel compelled to be engaged with activities that are, or

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seen as, being corporately responsible by looking beyond making profit. Hence, human capital and the planet should be accounted for when pursuing a sustainable business model. Furthermore, as will be developed in our literature review, the TBL has become distorted by corporations through its use in reporting efforts (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Milne & Gray, 2013). In an attempt to clarify this misconception regarding the TBL's distortion, we aim to establish the relevance of Elkington's (2018) originally intended notion as a critical, reflexive, framework on the future of capitalism in contemporary organisations. This in the practical local context of a multinational global pharmaceutical company renowned for its approach to the TBL. Conclusively, the relevance of our study can be argued to reside in adding to an increased understanding of the language and discourses that surround the TBL as a reflexive framework within GlobalPharma. This qualitative approach will be further elaborated upon in the methodology, but first we provide an overview of what the reader can expect from the remaining chapters.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

In the next chapter, we commence by outlining the theoretical background for our inquiry. We start discussing the TBL by providing a brief overview of the different terms and conceptualisations that are encountered in the Corporate Responsibility literature. After defining Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability, we continue to discuss how the concept of the TBL is typically understood in CSR literature. We finish our discussion of the TBL by outlining several of its critiques.

The third chapter entails the methodological details of how we plan to conduct the research. We start by elaborating on our research approach in which we take an interpretivist stance. Subsequently, we provide insight into the research design by elaborating on our qualitative approach. Additionally, we demonstrate our data collection method of conducting semi-structured interviews. Lastly, the data analysis is outlined in the sequence of transcribing, sorting, reducing, and arguing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

The fourth chapter includes an analysis of our empirical material. This chapter is organised in line with the four main themes that formed our interview guide, namely, understanding of the TBL, experience of working with the TBL, tensions regarding the TBL, and achieving an integrated approach. Based on these primary findings, we engage in the fifth chapter concerning

a discussion of how these findings contribute to the current body of Corporate Responsibility literature that we highlighted in the second chapter. Therein, we discuss how GlobalPharma's employees perceive the TBL as a source of intrinsic motivation by functioning as a mindset that allows them to think about questions of sustainability in their function. They mainly see and use it as a framework for reflexivity, which contrasts its contemporary use as a reporting tool as the dominant perspective in theoretical debates. Moreover, we see that there is a complicating factor within the process of integrating the TBL in practice, namely, the influence of the local setting of operations.

The sixth and final chapter summarises our study, and thereby, provides an answer to the research question that we developed in this chapter. After arguing for the empirical and theoretical contributions of our inquiry, we conclude our research by indicating potential directions for further research and outlining the practical implications of our study.

2   Literature review

Instead of adding another critique to the ongoing debate on the all-inclusiveness of definitions for sustainability, we consider it more relevant to study the TBL by identifying how the different meanings regarding the TBL are discursively produced within GlobalPharma. Accordingly, it will be possible to constitute and acknowledge alternative perceptions to the current theoretical discussion that tends to focus around indicators for quantitative performance measurement. Thereby, we adopt a critical stance towards the contemporary literature that surrounds the debates on Sustainable Development, Corporate Sustainability, and CSR. After outlining the dominant, or conventional, views on Corporate, Social, Responsibility we narrow down to the discussion around the TBL, which has evolved into one of the leading frameworks in this field. In contrast to this dominant view, the below literature review will conclude by outlining different critiques leading to our argument for an alternative position towards the TBL.

2.1.   Defining Corporate Responsibility

Supporting this call for a critical stance in the Corporate Responsibility literature, Alhaddi's (2015) review paper on the TBL argues for the researchers' attention towards the conceptualisation of sustainability that they subscribe to. Within both the Corporate Responsibility literature and practice there is a lack of consensus, inconsistent use, and much ambiguity surrounding the definitions of Sustainable Development and CSR (Hubbard, 2009; Ahi & Searcy, 2015). This uncertainty can be attributed to the ambiguity resulting from a wide range of interpretations, which turned Corporate Sustainability into a combination of CSR, corporate philanthropy, Corporate Social Performance, stakeholder relations, sustainable business, Sustainable Development, and ethical business, which are all used interchangeably in the literature (Nielsen & Andersen, 2018). Over time, many researchers, for example Carroll (1999), have attempted to find clarity on the definitions of sustainability resulting in numerous conceptualisations of the term. Hence, we consider how these concepts are construed by multiple leading scholars to find similarities on which we can subsequently base our definition in relation to our empirical findings, which we will after this section refer to using the term Corporate Responsibility. Accordingly, we will hereafter describe the definitions of Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability, which are based around the notion of the TBL.

2.1.1 Sustainable Development

Possibly the most frequently accepted and cited definition in the Corporate Responsibility literature is that of Sustainable Development by the World Commission for Environmental Development's Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), namely, "development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (p.43). Consideration for this formulation frequently follows increased external societal and stakeholder pressures (Dey & Burns, 2010; Epstein, 2008), and many later definitions follow a similar construct (e.g. Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Its widespread acceptance is partially resulting from the fact that it avoids the paradox of infinite financial prosperity within environmental confines (Daly, 1990). However, Loorbach, van Bakel, Whiteman and Rotmans (2010) exemplify how the practical implementation of such holistic and comprehensive definition of Sustainable Development still requires targeted aims for sustainability at the level of individual organisations, which is elaborated upon below.

2.1.2 Corporate Sustainability

When discussing Corporate Sustainability, it is essential to take into consideration the different viewpoints on what sustainability entails. Therefore, we consider Kuhlman and Farrington's (2010) definition of sustainability as:

> a state … where the sum of natural and man-made resources remains at least constant for the foreseeable future, in order that the well-being of future generations does not decline. … It should both lead to higher well-being and to a positive or at least neutral effect on the overall state of resources for the future - in which case we can speak of Sustainable Development (p.3442).

However, there is an issue in this conceptualisation of sustainability as it insinuates an emphasis on the environmental side in its focus on natural and man-made resources, and Corporate Sustainability is more than preserving the environment as will be clarified in the next section outlining the TBL as sustainability construct. Similarly, Jennings and Zandbergen (1995) describe sustainability at the corporate level as firms that "can survive and profit over the long run in both economic and natural environments" (p.1017). Discussions on sustainability in management studies often revolve around such self-serving questions of how sustainability can support business (Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss & Figge, 2015). Previous

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attempts to scrutinise this ambiguous relationship between Corporate Sustainability and CSR have been conducted by Van Marrewijk (2003) in combining the work of Wempe and Kaptein (2002) and Elkington (1997). Van Marrewijk (2003) argues that business perceives Corporate Sustainability as the ultimate goal, and therefore, companies pursue CSR since it shapes an intermediary state in which they aim to balance the TBL. In other words, according to Van Marrewijk (2003), CSR acts as a linking factor between the TBL and Corporate Sustainability. Accordingly, to contribute to the purpose of conceptual coherence, we devote the next section to a revisit of the TBL including a critical evaluation of its core underlying assumptions.

2.2. The Triple Bottom Line

This section unpacks the TBL including its visualisation and use as a reporting tool before discussing the critiques on its underlying assumptions. The TBL was initially explored by John Elkington (1997), cofounder of the think-tank and consultancy SustainAbility, who stressed extending the economic layer through integrating the environmental and social pillars. He first coined the phrase in his work "The Ecology of Tomorrow's Work" (Elkington, 1980). According to an interview with Elkington (2018), the underlying meaning of the TBL got distorted by corporations, namely, the TBL was intended to initiate a discussion and opposing discourse concerning the ruling capitalism. Moreover, he mentions how the TBL should be revisited in order to return to its originally intended meaning of pushing toward the transformation of capitalism, or as he explains it:

> it was never supposed to be just an accounting system. It was originally intended as a genetic code, a triple helix of change for tomorrow's capitalism, with a focus was on breakthrough change, disruption, asymmetric growth (with unsustainable sectors actively sidelined), and the scaling of next-generation market solutions (Elkington, 2018).

The TBL is one of the conceptualisations which is often used interchangeably with Corporate Sustainability (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Despite its at times confusing connection to broader concepts, such as sustainability, eco-efficiency, and CSR (Goel, 2010; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002), the TBL has a unique character that deserves to be scrutinised (Dey & Burns, 2010) and is consequently regarded as a valuable metaphor within sustainability theories (Brown, Dillard & Marshall, 2006). Savitz (2006) defines the TBL as something that:

captures the essence of sustainability by measuring the impact of an organisation's activities on the world ... including both its profitability and shareholder values and its social, human and environmental capital (in Slaper & Hall, 2011, p.1).

Savitz's (2006) definition arguably reflects how the TBL's contemporary meaning is that of a reporting tool, which contradicts Elkington's intended meaning of the TBL as a reflexive framework that initiates discussions about the capitalistic business models. The TBL is also invoked as the '3Ps' as it distinguishes between the terms profit, people, and planet, which represent the economic, social, and environmental domain of business performance and organisational success (Alhaddi, 2015; Slaper & Hall, 2011). The foregoing emphasises the importance of transparency by simultaneously addressing all three components, which Goel (2010) describes as an important feature of the TBL. Moreover, referring to three interrelated lines adds consistency to the perception of sustainability (Alhaddi, 2015). Accordingly, this conceptualisation of sustainability as showing a balanced concern for three distinct pillars has unfolded into the prevailing definition of Corporate Sustainability in management studies (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins, 2015). Relatedly, Brown, Dillard and Marshall (2006) argue that the TBL can be deemed a metaphor for sustainability that is grounded in an equal relationship between all three domains. The commonality of this reference is also exemplified by the earlier mentioned high number of publications featuring the TBL since its establishment. Table 1 shows how the three bottom lines could be defined allowing us to be more concise when referring to the TBL.

Table 1 - The Three Pillars of the TBL Defined

Domain	*Definition*
Social; CSR	"Interactions between an organisation and its community." (Goel, 2010, p.32). "Incorporates practices in the areas of public health, public controversies, skills and education, social justice, workplace safety, working conditions, human/labour rights and equal opportunity" (Xia, Olanipekun, Chen, Xie, & Liu, 2018, p.345).
Environmental	''Impact of business activity in an organisation on both living and non-living natural systems in the environment, including ecosystems, land, air and water. … [I]ncorporates practices such as environmental protection, reducing pollution and waste, use of resource efficient materials, management of carbon emissions, and sustainable design'' (Xia et al., 2018, p.345).

Economic	"Issues conventionally reported in a company's annual financial report, but also considers matters such as: the ratio of market capitalisation to „book value", investments in human capital and research and development, wages and benefits paid, community development initiatives, and the value and location of outsourced goods and services" (Goel, 2010, p.32).

In line with the WCED (1987), the contribution of organisations to sustainability can be defined in terms of eco-efficiency, "which combines environmental and economic performance and Corporate Social Responsibility" (Goel, 2010, p.35; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Hence, the TBL is considered a sustainability-related construct (Alhaddi, 2015), which is understood as the creation of value based on a reduced amount of resources (Milne, Kearins & Walton, 2006). Isil and Hernke (2017), based on McDonough and Braungart (2002), add to this that the TBL has increasingly become part of the sustainable business agenda, and consequently transformed the contemporary management discourse. Corporate Sustainability, as Ebner and Baumgartner (2006) call it, is subsequently affected by external legal (i.e. laws, human rights), technological, societal (i.e. NGOs, society), cultural (i.e. attitudes, behaviour), market (i.e. suppliers, customers, competitors, trends), and environmental (i.e. nature, availability of resources) influences (p.14). In accordance with figure 1, we came across their alleged relationship between Sustainable Development, Corporate Sustainability, and the TBL as follows:
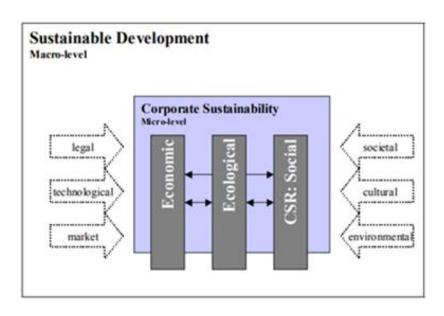

Figure 1 - Relationship between Sustainable Development, Corporate Sustainability, and CSR (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006, p.14)

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To illustrate, Ebner and Baumgartner (2006, p.13) "see Sustainable Development as defined by Brundtland and the model of the [TBL] as an ethical concept which offers ideas concerning the sustainable orientation on the macro-level". In other words, CSR forms the social pillar of Corporate Sustainability, and Sustainable Development on an organisational level is defined as Corporate Sustainability. Moreover, Corporate Sustainability focusses on corporate engagement (i.e. "realising responsibilities as a member of society" (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006, p.14) in the social, environmental, and economic realm). Hence, we argue that the role of the TBL in both the definition of Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development causes the confusion surrounding these concepts. A potential definition supporting Ebner and Baumgartner's (2006) perspective is presented by Dahlsrud (2008), who conducted a literature review study aiming to identify 37 of the most commonly cited definitions for CSR in an attempt to resolve the confusion surrounding this and related concepts. In his research, phrases with a similar connotation have been grouped, which resulted in five dimensions of CSR, namely, the environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness dimension. Based on his work, we selected one definition that describes a firm's economic, social, and environmental responsibilities, namely, the definition by the Commission of the European Communities (2001), which addresses all five dimensions:

> CSR as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

The Commission's definition is acknowledged for its high frequency of usage in combination with its consideration for all dimensions. However, Brown (2012) argues that the conceptual focus of the Commission's definition forms a limitation. Consequently, this definition has the risk of being limited to an organisation's activities in the social domain. Dawkins and Lewis (2003) propose using Corporate Responsibility as a synonym for CSR and interpret responsibility as employee treatment, community commitment, ethics, and the environment. Brown (2012) accordingly clarifies the relationship between these phenomena as follows:

> Sustainable Development is essentially an aspirational target or aim for business and society, while Corporate Responsibility is a process which can be used for monitoring and measuring the activities of an organisation in relation to achieving this target (p.35).

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Hence, our research will hereafter use the term Corporate Responsibility to refer to the Commission of the European Communities' definition to avoid overlooking the other domains. However, we see a complication in this explanation as it entails assumptions regarding the TBL's visualisation and quantification through measurement in sustainability reporting. Hence, now that the reader has insight into the terms as described above, we can move to a deeper analysis of the Corporate Responsibility literature and its critiques on the TBL.

2.2.1 Visualisation of the Triple Bottom Line

Based on the foregoing, it should be noted that the TBL does not advocate a new conceptualisation of sustainability, but rather an argument for the interdependence of the social, environmental, and economic pillar (Goel, 2010). A successfully sustainable organisation is often defined as one that achieves the perfect balance within the TBL, and Sustainable Development as the sum of these sustainable organisations (Isil & Hernke, 2017). The bottom line here is that the TBL is a concept that embodies coexistence and independency of the three pillars rather than being intertwined and mutually dependent. Usually, this is visualised with a Venn-diagram as seen in, for example, Cohen, Smith and Mitchell (2008, p.110). Providing a critique to this understanding, Marcus, Kurucz and Colbert (2010) propose that this visualisation of mutual enhancement is obscuring alternative distributions of value across the three pillars. To specify, such a figure signifies a lack of hierarchy and "interdependence" rather than the "coexistence" that the holistic perspective reflected in figure 1 (Sridhar & Jones, 2013). As mentioned by Lehtonen (2004), there are grounds to argue that there is then no equal distribution within the dimensions of the TBL. A major implication of this contention is that economic activity is no longer considered a necessary pillar of Corporate Sustainability. This is a point made at the end of Isil and Hernke's (2017) publication, which we aim to explore further through our analysis. Another implication pointed out by both Daly (1990) and Hahn, Figge, Aragón-Correa and Sharma (2010) is the inherent contradiction within the term 'sustainable growth' asking for further exploration. Hence, the TBL should be seen as complementing, rather than trivialising, a discussion of an organisation's accountability through the earlier discussed concepts of Sustainable Development, Corporate Sustainability, and CSR as suggested by both Goel (2010) and Isil and Hernke (2017).

The above discussion results in the absence of an agreed-upon framework for Corporate Sustainability since many researchers approach the balance between the three pillars

differently. For example, Yan, Chen and Chang (2009) focus on the environmental aspect, whereas Bibri (2008) and Xia et al. (2018) chose to focus on the social domain. To complete with an illustration of the third domain, Collins, Steg and Konan (2007) mention the economic aspect and how its significance is marginalised radically. Alhaddi's (2015) review reveals that most research studying sustainability tend to centre around the environmental or social pillar. To illustrate, Graafland and Eijffinger (2004) form an example with their research on how different companies have come to add the social and environmental domain to their economic value creation. Contrastingly, Rogers and Hudson (2011) refer to the TBL as a practical framework for Corporate Sustainability by signifying how it specifically is tailored towards corporations. Finally, despite contesting their diverging scope as argued in the introduction, the studies by Hidayati (2011), Ho and Taylor (2007), and Goel (2011) provide examples of empirically focussed publications that address all three pillars of the TBL. Instead of arguing for the superiority of any notion, we continue on Alhaddi's (2015) final recommendation, which stresses the need for gathering empirical material that is scrutinising the TBL's practical implementation as a reporting tool. Given that existing research on the TBL is largely focussed around theoretical dissensus, the existing body of literature can benefit from an empirical understanding that attempts to shed a more positive light on its contemporary relevance and operationalisation.

2.2.2   The Triple Bottom Line as sustainability reporting

Sustainability reporting is a term used to refer to the broader practice of reporting on an organisation's social, environmental, and economic impact, and consequently, frequently used interchangeably with TBL and Corporate Responsibility reporting (Goel, 2010). Despite most companies issuing a separate sustainability report there is a lack of consensus on its operationalisation (Brown & Dillard, 2014), which results in confusion regarding reporting requirements (Flower, 2015; Perrini & Tencati, 2006). The foregoing can be seen as a consequence of context dependence resulting in a variety of practices and a lack of structure in reporting across sectors and organisational contexts (Xia et al., 2018). This despite ninety-three percent of the G250 allegedly adhering to internationally recognised attempts to bring such clarity through, for example, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as indicated in the 2017 KPMG survey, which signifies higher representation among larger sized companies. The multitude of reporting practices arguably results in a subsequent lack of objectivity and informative reporting at the expense of simplicity and credibility (Goel, 2010). This goes

against a prevailing characteristic of sustainability reporting guidelines, namely, providing a balanced representation of both positive and negative impacts organisations have on their environment including their commitments, strategy, and management approach (Butler & Henderson, 2011).

Conforming the preceding, it can be argued that over time the TBL has developed into a reporting initiative focussed on identifying a universal set of ideal social, economic, and environmental activities, which can be measured by organisations through a set of performance indicators (Goel, 2010). Reporting involving the TBL is driven by publishing non-financial information where "non-financial reporting is the system of measuring organisational performance in the environment and social (non-financial) dimensions and disclosing this information to internal and external stakeholders" (Sridhar, 2012a, p.90). Moreover, non-financial reporting is argued to benefit the transparency and accountability of organisations in their performance measurement, and relatedly, their contribution to Sustainable Development (Hartman, Rubin & Dhanda, 2007; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007, in Sridhar, 2012a). Accordingly, Goel (2010, p.33) points out several benefits of adopting TBL reporting, see Appendix B, which have inspired the structure of our analysis. She goes as far as arguing that structural communication on performance in all three domains potentially makes "concrete what a company stands for, how it behaves, and how it delivers on its promises" (Goel, 2010, p.34). Consequently, the TBL has become recognised as a generally adopted framework for internal and external communication for evaluating a company's progress towards Corporate Sustainability (Sridhar, 2012a; Herzig & Schaltegger, 2011). However, following the development of the TBL from a metaphor for sustainable business to a sustainability reporting tool, the next section will account for its broader critiques as recommended by Isil and Hernke (2017). Acknowledging shortcomings of the TBL follows the result of their literature review being a quantitative reflection of the vast uncritical acceptance of the TBL in both scholarly and non-scholarly literature signifying the need for a critical outlook.

2.3. Critique on the Triple Bottom Line

As pointed out in the previous section, several critiques are accompanying the seemingly superior saviour of corporations that limits the wider successful adoption of the TBL. As mentioned by Isil and Hernke (2017), the critical aspect of the TBL is underrepresented with only eight percent of current publications drawing attention to its limitations. They have

identified two assumptions that prevail in the TBL metaphor, which are referred to as the 'win-win' and 'firm-level sustainability' assumptions. Hence, problematising the TBL enables an alternative perspective towards the commonly accepted assumptions in contemporary research, which can subsequently be put under empirical scrutiny.

2.3.1   The win-win assumption

Firstly, the win-win assumption holds that economic prosperity can go hand in hand with its environmental and social counterpart, thereby, overlooking the complex issue of trade-offs (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse & Preuss, 2010; Savitz, 2006). Complementing this train of thought, Margolis and Walsh (2003) propose a more expansive approach that recognises and adopts any trade-offs underlying social and financial objectives in order to encourage corporations to scrutinise their daily operations. Arguably then, trade-offs flow from the tension between the neo-classical economic argument (Friedman, 1970), which is refuted by the contemporary pressure on organisations to deploy their resources for social causes. The TBL proponent Bob Willard (2012) describes these tensions between the economic and the other two pillars as a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or' consideration resulting in the conclusion that pursuing social and environmental objectives makes "good business sense" (p.2). While this tension surrounding the earlier mentioned eco-efficiency is emphasised by the broader concept of 'techno-optimism' (Milne, Kearins & Walton, 2006), critics argue that eco-efficiency results in illusionary Corporate Sustainability through short-term improvements that are insufficient to solve larger Corporate Sustainability challenges (Young & Tilley, 2006; Könnölä & Unruh, 2007). According to Dyllick and Hockerts (2002), eco-efficiency only achieves relative improvements. Hence, as stressed by Reijnders (1998), a more structural solution for an organisation's impact on the environment is required. Arguably then, the first limitation of the TBL lies in the association of Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability through eco-efficiency (Isil & Hernke, 2017). Accordingly, we deem the case of GlobalPharma compelling to provide qualitative empirical insight on *how* the task of balancing social, environmental, and financial performance in working with the TBL is experienced, which is what Margolis and Walsh (2003) call for.

2.3.2   The firm-level sustainability assumption

The second complication is what Isil and Hernke (2017) call the reductionist assumption of firm-level sustainability meaning that a combination of individually sustainable organisations

would have the result of global, or planetary, Sustainable Development. Thereby, they argue that the concept of Corporate Sustainability is made "ontologically reducible to the firm" (p.41). An example of such a publication is Van der Byl & Slawinski (2015). This perspective is, however, conflicting with the standpoint of Corporate Sustainability as "systems - not an organisational concept" (Gray & Milne, 2004, p.79). Moreover, firm-level sustainability is in stark contrast with the Brundtland definition, which also suggests system-wide conditions for Corporate Sustainability (WCED, 1987). The reductionist assumption, thereby, implies that corporations carry both the necessary expertise and resources that have the capacity to actualise Sustainable Development (Milne, Tregidga & Walton, 2009). Finally, it presumes the possibility of achieving a holistic set of indicators that is representative of these tensions referring back to a reporting focus (Milne & Gray, 2013). It then becomes clear that there is no such thing as Corporate Sustainability as in firm-level sustainability, but rather "individual organisations simply contribute to the large system in which sustainability may or may not be achieved" (Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995, p.1023).

The foregoing, however, entails the drawback of political interests that organisations have in shaping the definitions of Corporate Sustainability and associated debates favourably to serve these interests (Isil & Hernke, 2017). Therefore, some scholars consider Corporate Responsibility nothing but a rephrasing of business-as-usual coloured by political interests (e.g. Tregidga, Kearins & Milne, 2013). These scholars argue for the falseness of the assumption that organisations can adapt to sustainability challenges through minor improvements to current operations (Milne, Kearins & Walton, 2006). Thereby, the profound potential of Corporate Sustainability is reduced (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins, 2014). Hence, firm-level sustainability forms the critical management perspective within the Corporate Sustainability literature by focusing on the self-interest of companies (Welford, 1998; Levy, 1997). Consequently, it is argued that one way of regulating the ambiguity in definitions is to discipline the affiliated language (Joutsenvirta, 2009). The TBL has, as a result, come to be embodied by organisations as a tool to make the largely abstract construct of Sustainable Development more concrete in their everyday operations (Tregidga, Kearins & Milne, 2013). Springett (2003) even argues for a certain 'semiotic control' of the TBL in the definition of Sustainable Development, which has resulted in the two often being integrated and used synonymously, and thereby, confirming Ebner and Baumgartner's (2006) interpretation of Corporate Responsibility.

2.3.3 Drawbacks of Triple Bottom Line reporting

Another line of criticism is directed at the TBL as a reporting tool. Practitioners face difficulties regarding the practicalities due to uncertainties that accompany the implementation of the many different reporting principles and guidelines (Calabrese, Costa, Levialdi & Menichini, 2016). One possible explanation for this is the infancy of sustainability reporting as a corporate practice, which has only been around for six to ten years resulting in differing levels of "quality, comprehensiveness, and content" (Goel, 2010, p.39). Hence, there is the risk of the TBL getting stuck in what Goel (2010) refers to as a tick-in-box exercise if no universal set of standards is established through regulation. Furthermore, there is an extensive ongoing debate in the literature on whether quantifying non-financial aspects of business is possible at all (e.g. Norman & MacDonald, 2004; Calabrese, Costa, Levialdi & Menichini, 2016). There is much unclarity regarding the units of measure for Corporate Responsibility related activities following their qualitative nature (Slaper & Hall, 2011). Therefore, it is difficult to quantify non-financial indicators as it is hard to attribute value to non-financial aspects. With regards to environmental aspects, for example carbon dioxide emissions, it can be argued that the usage of natural resources and impact on the environment can be quantified through units of measurement. However, the social aspects, such as public health and workplace safety, are rather abstract and intangible issues, and therefore, it is harder to impose a quantitative value.

The latter two issues result in a level of ambiguity that complicates the establishment of best practices in sustainability reporting, and hence, widespread adoption of the TBL can only be realised if all of the above-mentioned complications are subscribed to and embraced by organisations in their discourses (Goel, 2010). To illustrate, within TBL reporting organisations repeatedly communicate the creation of value, but how exactly is value defined? Value is a rather subjective and broad concept since value has a different meaning for each person and each discipline. Hence, we shall limit ourselves to what value means in the field of Corporate Responsibility. In this, we follow Flower's (2015) thought on value who states that one interpretation of value is 'value to stakeholders'. In contrast, he advocates for adopting a broader conceptualisation of value, namely, encouraging organisations to reflect on how their Corporate Responsibility operations contribute to larger societal developments through their sustainability strategy. To understand the usefulness of the TBL through its attributed meaning, it thus has to be studied in a real-life setting by talking to people. Hence, our aim to explore the social mechanisms and attributed meaning by GlobalPharma's employees, and thereby, going beyond quantitative measures.

2.3.4   Corporate Responsibility as a window-dressing concept

Building further on the drawbacks of TBL reporting, companies to date are relatively free to "cherry-pick" areas to report (Milne & Gray, 2013, p.17), which results in issues concerning 'window-dressing' (Kolk, 2003). Window-dressing is described by Sridhar (2012b) as a legitimacy exercise organisation use for conforming to governmental and public pressures. In other words, companies only disclose information on the basics of each TBL realm without attempting to achieve integration of the three (Moneva, Archel & Correa, 2006). If we follow the thoughts of Sandell and Svensson (2016), we can argue that Corporate Responsibility is susceptible to being used as a tool to show off the efforts an organisation is taking in implementing environmental and social considerations into their perceived strategy. This idea is sometimes referred to as impression management, or "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p.34).

A negative consequence of the TBL's use as a reporting tool is thus that it has arguably turned Corporate Responsibility into a strategic communication exercise without substantial proof of action that actively responds to an external evaluation or accusation, which results in 'window-dressing', or 'greenwashing' (Wikström, 2010). More specifically, greenwashing is understood as a means to "cover-up vested corporate interests [by conducting] excessive levels of Corporate Responsibility activities" (Bhardwaj, Chatterjee, Dogerlioglu Demir & Turut, 2018, p.215). This carries the risk of turning sustainability reporting into a public relations exercise focused on enhancing organisational reputation (Herzig & Schaltegger, 2011). Companies can avoid similar accusations by explicating their context-specific Corporate Responsibility operations (Searcy, 2016; Herzig & Schaltegger, 2011). Nevertheless, the disagreement revolving around KPIs and benchmarking exercises substantiates an ignorance of how companies shall disclose information on their Corporate Responsibility activities (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2006). Hence, the need for organisations to report beyond monetary results (Hubbard, 2009). The reader at this point might ask, why do companies continuously engage in sustainability reporting although they are well aware of the critiques they might face regarding greenwashing and impression management? Since many sustainability reporting studies focus on quantitative performance measurement, that assumption needs to be challenged on the grounds of qualitative empirics as a truly integrated approach is a more complex construct embedded in organisational narratives. Consequently, GlobalPharma is deemed a promising case for adding an opposing qualitative evaluation in advocating for the integration of the TBL within its sustainability strategy.

2.3.5   Implications for this research

Isil and Hernke (2017) argue that besides the earlier explained widespread acceptance of the TBL as a reporting tool it also embodies the aforementioned two drawbacks. According to Weick (1989), appealing philosophical paradigms like the TBL have to be studied through identifying practical discourses in the form of images and narratives. This is because metaphors such as the TBL are powerful in turning abstract theoretical debates into something concrete and tangible through its depiction as three pillars (Morgan, 1980). Moreover, by outlining the above considerations, we aim to follow the critical stance suggested by Jones, Parker, and ten Bos (2005). These authors stress that they advocate 'for business ethics' in a nuanced manner by maintaining a rather sceptical distance to limitations that arise in the practice. Hence, our research is particularly rare in contesting the TBL's exertion through critically analysing practitioner's viewpoints by conducting a case study on an organisation this well acquainted with the concept. This is crucial to uncover all complexities that underly the phenomenon of the TBL as a practical approach to Corporate Sustainability strategy.

2.4.   Chapter summary

The above literature review has outlined the journey of the relationship between Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability into the contemporary use of the TBL as a reporting tool. Thereby, the literature aided in refining the problematisation and rationale of our study as Margolis and Walsh (2003) stress that a normative approach enables a practical and constructivist viewpoint towards challenges surrounding the TBL. In doing so, we highlighted the expanding popularity and relevance of the TBL as a research subject.

Firstly, we guided the reader through different definitions and influential conceptualisations of Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability before providing our interpretation of the term Corporate Responsibility in relation to a description of the TBL. This was realised by explicating the ambiguity that surrounds the TBL's conceptualisation in order to establish clarity by developing a nuanced interpretation to overcome its contemporary distortion as an idealistic concept that lacks empirical support. More specifically, we acknowledged the controversies surrounding the TBL's visualisation and different critiques towards the concept in the form of the 'win-win' and 'firm-level sustainability' assumptions. Furthermore, the latter was complemented with an evaluation of the TBL as a reporting tool and associated drawbacks.

Accordingly, the relevance of evaluating GlobalPharma's approach regarding the TBL stems from the company's asserted distinctive approach to the concept as a social process embedded in their cultural norms and human relationships. Thereby, their allegedly successful and frontrunning sustainability strategy provides potential for additional empirical insight into how this organisation encounters the outlined dilemmas in their operations. The next section will provide more details on how we explicitly constructed our methodology.

3   Methodology

Following the above-mentioned research question and theoretical framework, this chapter will describe the methodological details of how this study was conducted between February and May 2020. Firstly, the research approach entails a detailed explanation of the decisions and considerations made in choosing for an interpretative research tradition including the philosophical grounding that impacts this thesis. Additionally, the process of collecting empirical material by conducting thirteen semi-structured interviews is highlighted. Building on this, we specify how the gathered data is analysed through a process of sorting, reducing, and evaluating the findings. In concluding this section, we critically reflect on the methodological validity, reliability, and limitations, thereby, focussing on the ethical considerations of the study.

3.1.   Research approach

In our attempt to analyse the TBL's manifestation amongst GlobalPharma's employees, we consider an interpretive tradition as most suitable (Prasad, 2017; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This tradition allows for targeting the employees' mindsets corresponding with our aim of exploring the subjective perspectives, experiences, and opinions of GlobalPharma's organisational members in specific contexts (Bryman, 2016; Prasad, 2017). Hence, the focus of this research will be, in line with Prasad (2017), to exploit the human capacity for interpreting to uncover the different meanings, experiences, and understandings that constitute GlobalPharma's way of working with the TBL. Hence, the chosen tradition allows us to make sense of these different meanings, and thereby, potentially overcoming the challenge that identifying the originally intended meaning of the TBL is undeniably problematic because of the multiple connotations held by different organisational members (Prasad, 2017). Following Alvesson and Sveningsson's approach (2016, p.280), we try to "capture the phenomenon of [the TBL] in a wider but also deeper and richer meaning based on [employee's] own horizons of experience and attempts to create meaning and coherence" in their understanding of the concept. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), researchers can broaden the meaning of a particular concept by placing it in context, and thereby, exploring how a certain phenomenon is perceived. For our research, this entails how the consulted GlobalPharma employees perceive the TBL based on the assumption that a largely open-minded encounter with practitioners enables the emergence of qualitative

empirical insights that add a practical dimension to the theoretical body of knowledge on the TBL. In our case, we expected to learn more about how employees relate to the TBL as a reporting tool, but we were surprised to find that they primarily see and use it as a reflexive framework. Moreover, we operate according to the assumption mentioned by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) that organisational studies increasingly target pieces of a socially constructed world and argue for the relevance and value of interpretivism in understanding how employees perceive this social reality. Prasad (2017) considers human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world, and relatedly, allowing to account for specific cultural contexts in conducting an in-depth analysis of GlobalPharma's case. In sum, we employ a qualitative study within the interpretive paradigm involving how the TBL is perceived and substantiated by employees of a global pharmaceutical company.

Within the interpretive tradition, we account for the sub-tradition of symbolic interactionism for its focus on how people make sense of themselves and others in social situations, thereby, accounting for the symbolic value of a phenomenon like the TBL (Prasad, 2017). Accordingly, symbolic interactionism enables an increased consideration for the subjective lifeworlds, or "lebenswelt" (Weber, 1949, in Prasad, 2017, p.14), of the interviewees in investigating their socially constructed reality. In other words, understanding the meaning and intention behind what is said holds more value than explaining causalities. Following this approach, conducting semi-structured interviews is advisable, and involving employees from different hierarchical levels is deemed particularly aligned with symbolic interactionism through its focus on sensemaking (Prasad, 2017). Within the variety of analysts, managers, and directors that we have consulted, sensemaking played a prominent role in gaining knowledge on GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy from different angles. However, as stressed by Schaefer and Alvesson (2017), researchers should be careful in taking interview statements for granted at face value. Rather than perceiving them as facts, researchers should maintain a critical distance towards their subjective nature. Therefore, we also consider hermeneutics relevant to our study as it enables a critical understanding of employee's interpretation and experience regarding the TBL allowing for an in-depth analysis of their perspectives (Prasad, 2017). Interpretation here is understood as asking questions in relation to texts, or the transcribed interview conversations, whereby we focus on the different meanings reflected in the language of the respondents' answers (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In other words, hermeneutics allows for presenting contrasting ways in which individual employees are affected by the TBL, and thereby, generating a nuanced picture of the entire phenomenon by combining fragmented pieces of

information in all its complexities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Conclusively, as part of the interpretive tradition, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism both acknowledge the significance of understanding the social construction of the world concerning our research's phenomenon.

3.2.   Research design

Conforming our aim of understanding how GlobalPharma's employees make sense of the organisation's approach to the TBL through exploring their subjective lifeworlds, we followed a qualitative approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016; Prasad, 2017). According to several prominent scholars in qualitative research, for example Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews have significant potential in uncovering the subjective realities of individuals in terms of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Thereby, conducting semi-structured interviews is aligned with our research approach as investigating the socially constructed realities of GlobalPharma's employees requires adopting an open mind. Hence, we most closely associate with an abductive approach, which Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) describe as entering the field with a restricted amount of preliminary knowledge while allowing for additional insights to emerge. A case study, for example focusing on a specific pharmaceutical company, is arguably most suitable for such in-depth inquiry into "a phenomenon within its real-life setting" (Yin, 2014, in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p.184). Moreover, this method of problematising the TBL in the local contexts of GlobalPharma in order to add practical knowledge to established theory led us to an explorative approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This derives from our discovery, as mentioned in the introduction, that more empirical investigation, or exploration, is required in this field. Conforming Kvale's (1983) perspective on analysing subjective life-worlds where knowledge stems from the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted for acquiring our empirical data. The next section elaborates on how these interviews were conducted.

3.3.   Data collection method

The data collection process started with drafting our interview guide, see Appendix A, in preparation of the interviews. The basis for our set of semi-structured interview questions revolves around the journal articles on GlobalPharma's approach to the TBL by Dey and Burns (2010), and the literature review on the TBL by Alhaddi (2015). Based on this initial overview

of our topic, we established a set of themes that emerged as promising areas for further inquiry. Such thematization is suggested both by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Following these themes, we developed a set of questions for each based on the knowledge from our CSR course. The preliminary interview guide was discussed with our supervisor, which resulted in final adjustments to the themes and questions before commencing our interviews. Such thorough preparation is crucial since "the better the preparation for an interview, the higher the quality of the knowledge produced in the interview" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.99). Our ambition was to memorise the themes while simultaneously keeping an open mind to recognising the respondent's input (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thereby, the interview guide functioned as support rather than a static script, which resulted in spontaneous follow-up questions arising to elaborate on each topic. Instead, the guide thus served as a checklist to not overlook any of our topics. The interview guide started with broad questions on the interviewee's definition of sustainability before narrowing down to specific questions regarding the TBL. Consequently, respondents were unaware of our explicit focus in advance of the interview, thereby, limiting the extent to which their knowledge of our topic affected their answers by letting them be the first mentioning the TBL.

Our interviewees were selected by our contact person at GlobalPharma. Hence, we followed convenience sampling meaning selecting individuals for their availability (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). GlobalPharma is a large, globally operating company, and to reassure the possibility of conducting interviews we decided that it would be convenient to consult someone with insight into the job profiles of the employees. Thereupon, he considered several aspects, namely, an equal distribution in experience, work location, and departments in providing the contact information. Thereafter, we were responsible for further communication, and thus, we were able to exert influence regarding the final four interviewees who have been approached through referrals by the first nine. Specifically, we have talked to individuals working in the headquarters and remote offices in Denmark, Indonesia, Canada, and the United States. We aimed for an equal division between employees based in the headquarters and at affiliates. Having disparate respondents resulted in a diverse array of conceptualisations regarding the TBL adding to a holistic understanding of the topic as far as our limited timespan allows. Hence, the focus was on how the TBL is talked about by uncovering its meaning and representation by analysing different individual experiences. Who are the individuals that work with this approach and how do they experience working with the TBL? The commonality of these interviewees, which we communicated as strong specification, lies in their functions as they all

represent an international background with a focus on project management and strategy. Through their diverse experience with varying organisational questions, these individual interviewees, which are presented in table 2, were all able to provide us with insights concerning their experience of working with the TBL. To maintain confidentiality the names of the individuals are anonymised, thereby ensuring the individuals' privacy, which enabled them to be sincere in their reflections.

Table 2 - Overview of interviewees

Interviewee	*Current position*	*Total years of employment*	*Country-based*
Diana Daffodil	Graduate	0-2 years	Denmark
Jane Jones	Graduate	0-2 years	United States
Andrei Antonov	Graduate	2-5 years	Denmark
Raj Ruthrapali	Analyst	2-5 years	Indonesia
Craig Cranston	Consultant	2-5 years	Denmark
Pierce Pearson	Project manager	2-5 years	United States
Hendrik Heinz	Director	2-5 years	Denmark
Isabel Isenhower	Specialist	5-10 years	United States
Bjørn Bjølsen	Project manager	5-10 years	Denmark
Garry Graves	Director	5-10 years	Canada
Selina Sösmann	Vice president	5-10 years	Denmark
Kristoff Kraft	Manager	10+ year	Denmark
Wendy Windsor	Vice president	10+ years	Denmark

Given the interviewees' various profiles and geographical dispersion, we conducted all interviews through video conferencing. Each respondent was consulted once between 30 and 75 minutes by both researchers. Conducting the interviews with both researchers allowed for a larger extent of subtle clues to be identified in the interviewees' responses. Or, in the words of Jacques Derrida "language is never neutral and passive, but what actively constructs and helps us to make sense of our lifeworld" in Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018, p.45). Moreover, we did not divide the questions to support the emergence of a natural dialogue and encourage an open conversation. Finally, after each interview, the researchers reflected on the conversation for half an hour on the content, how it was presented by the interviewee, and our personal development of interview skills. Resulting notes became of use in the analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2020. All interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewee's consent to later be transcribed. These recordings were deleted upon completion of the project.

In the selection of our interviewees, we aimed to combine cases that together provide a succinct overview of the headquarters' perspectives, which can then be held against the situation at a variety of subsidiaries. However, note how we refrain from claiming that this allows us to draw a representative comparison. Nevertheless, we consider the selected cases of particular interest, and insightful in exploring how the respondents actualise and are faced with the TBL in their working situations. All the consulted actors are reasonably familiar with, or working with, the TBL through their function, and therefore, facilitate the construction of its surrounding discourse. Interviews were conducted with individuals that have worked across different countries to research whether there is a global adoption of the TBL as an integrated approach. Accordingly, the international spread of the interviewees allowed for the emergence of a cultural element in the empirical investigation. The aforesaid global focus is especially relevant due to the difficulties that GlobalPharma faces in embedding sustainability, which are identified by Dey and Burns (2010) as their focus on the qualitative and cultural dimension of management in terms of its values. Despite the risk of such interviews generating a rather simplistic view, we believe that there is also a large advantage in potentially providing a rich description of the complex, nuanced, and context-dependent social processes that underly GlobalPharma's allegedly successful integrated reporting approach.

3.4. Data analysis

In our analysis, the existing theory will be reconciled with our empirical material, which allows for an exploration of hidden meanings (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). We started looking for reoccurring themes during the data collection process. In this section, we will elaborate on this by adhering to Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) order of transcribing, sorting, reducing, and arguing to deal with the issues of chaos, representation, and authority.

3.4.1 Transcribing

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that within a qualitative study transcriptions functions as the main empirical material. Therefore, before sorting our data, we converted the audio recordings to text using the Otter.ai application. After every interview, we transcribed the audio

recording to prevent any loss of information and ensure accuracy. We distributed the interviews equally, which allowed for certain aspects and occurrences of each conversation to be included in subsequent encounters through enhanced follow-up questions. After two weeks, we revised the content of each other's transcripts by listening to the audio recording for quality assurance. Combining these approaches enabled us to acquire new insights and eliminated any biased interpretations by the individual researchers (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Due to the semi-structured design of our interview guide, it was sometimes difficult to keep up with the dialogue when transcribing. However, in our coding process, we were able to keep track through the funnel-shaped structure of our questions, which started broad and ended narrow allowing us to identify additional key areas in the findings of our research.

3.4.2   Sorting

The transcriptions of the empirical material are complemented with distinguishing between the 'what's' and 'how's as recommended by Gubrium and Holstein (1997, in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018), thereby, dealing with the issue of chaos within the transcripts by sorting the information. The latter is also referred to as analytical bracketing, which is an alternative approach that assists researchers to uncover social realities by adopting an interpretive practice. This answers the 'what' of a phenomenon by decoupling and understanding the 'how'. The 'what' is addressed by highlighting relevant answers in the transcripts. Afterwards, attention is paid to the choice of words and understanding how the interviewees perceive their relation to the TBL in order to examine 'how' they talked about it. To illustrate, we accounted for the influence of an interviewee's hierarchical level, for example managerial or non-managerial, and whether they had a more positive tone or adopted a more critical stance towards the topic. According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2013), such a stance towards empirical support is useful in identifying clashes between the empirics and established theories and concepts. Furthermore, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016, p.50) argue for the importance of "listening carefully to people in organisations and finding out when and why they talk about [the TBL], what they mean by it, their convictions, values and emotions [regarding the TBL]". Additionally, they mention that a focus on how people talk about a phenomenon can draw attention to the larger underlying cultural patterns in an organisation or industry. More specifically, when facing the difficulty of a wide variety of all-encompassing definitions, focussing on people's opinions aids in an understanding of how practitioners relate to a certain phenomenon. Exploring such variations shows potential to uncover alternative interpretations. Reconciling the whats and the

hows in this way added to the complexity and nuance of the results. Relatedly, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue that the emergence of breakdowns flows from the researchers' willingness and ability to discover the unexpected. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) continue by stressing that breakdowns lead to a mystery by combining "theoretical framework(s) and vocabularies, and the inspiration of empirical material" (p.1278). This analytical approach will thus allow for the establishment of new insights through multiple perspectives and metaphors that were identified in the empirical material (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Styhre, 2013).

3.4.3   Reducing

According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), dividing the data into topical areas assists researchers in categorising unstructured information into different discourses and opinions, thereby, dealing with the concern of representation. Hence, it provided guidance by revealing dominant meanings in how the interviewees expressed themselves. Based on this knowledge, an informed selection can be made of interesting or reoccurring themes to be presented in the analysis. Such a reduction is necessary to ensure that the presented findings remain comprehensive and realistic given the scope (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Moreover, a thematic discussion aids in the description of our current findings in comparison with existing research (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Thereby, the process of reducing brought focus to our findings by brainstorming on prevailing themes in addition to previously identified key areas. This successfully uncovered any discrepancies between the current situation and how interviewees describe the ideal state.

3.4.4   Arguing

The remaining complication is authority (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Accordingly, our analysis is based on quotes from the interviews that have been selected for their effective representation of compelling substantive arguments. In other words, we looked for testimonies that reflected a certain aspect of the interviews openly by including detailed explanations or examples of how they give substance to the concept in their role. In analysing these, researchers should be mindful that what is being said as taken-for-granted in an interview is not necessarily reflecting the truth and reality as stressed by Silvermann (2007, in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Hence, the goal of our analysis is to overcome what Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016) describe as social scripts and cultural standards by identifying "inconsistencies between what they say, what they actually believe, what they feel deep down and how they act" (p.72).

Therefore, the findings entail excerpts that describe how the interviewees talk about themselves and their social world in terms of the TBL, which enables an informed summary of existing interpretations within the company. Analysing these comments facilitates a critical stance towards differences between established norms and beliefs, and the expressed talk.

Nevertheless, despite the interpretive approach that we deem most compatible with our research, we shall account for previous work and related theoretical assumptions associated with the TBL in this process. To put it in Prasad's (2017) words, we are thereby influenced by "prominent figures, central assumptions, and emergent conventions" (p.6) that dominate our research field. It is these taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the TBL as a tool for achieving Sustainable Development that we aim to uncover with this research by understanding its relevance in a practical context. Specifically, we believe the case of GlobalPharma to be suitable for an evaluation of how certain aspects of the TBL over time have developed into objective facts, and thereby, the concept is no longer sufficiently questioned. Therefore, to treat our findings and their relation to theory with discretion, we included a certain reservation in our tone of writing when presenting the empirical material. This to remain critical towards any correlation between our findings and contemporary theories encompassing the TBL. Any assertions thus surpass our personal, subjective convictions and interpretations by attesting the researcher's thoughts and social criticisms to the transcribed excerpt-commentary units as suggested by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), which is considered to allow for structural analysis of the empirical material.

3.5. Critical reflection on methodology

In this section, we critically reflect on the limitations that accompany the above methodology. We tried to address these limitations by the best means possible to ensure the validity and reliability of our research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Specifically, four factors will be addressed that have affected our inquiry.

First, the critical reader might expect our research to address the question of whether the organisation under study 'walks the talk'. In these instances, ethnographic studies entailing observations are useful to reveal whether organisations, or its management, practice what they preach (Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Although this certainly forms a promising opportunity for further research, we chose to explicitly focus on the meaning that

GlobalPharma attributes to their approach regarding the TBL and how this benefits the understanding of this concept. To specify, meaning should here be understood as the multitude of connotations among employees that together shape the perceived reality of what GlobalPharma's TBL entails. Therefore, we consciously made the choice not to engage in such ethnographic research. Moreover, the emergence of the "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2" (WHO, 2020; also known as COVID-19), and its consequences obstructed the later phase of our data collection in terms of both conducting observations and the number of interviewees. One important resulting delimitation is that our objective was not to address the degree to which certain claims correspond with corporate activities or are true or false. Thereby, our focus is on the sense-making of the language that constitutes their approach to the TBL rather than whether GlobalPharma's employees act on it. Or, following Sandell and Svensson's (2016) words:

> representational truth (i.e. the extent to which a representation mirrors reality) is not the main focus of this [research]. Rather, our main interest has been how truth is discursively produced by verbal accounts (p.20).

Secondly, regarding our interview guide, we noticed that in practice certain questions convey a similar message occasionally resulting in the interviewees being more concise in their response when noticing this. However, it also added an empirical layer in revealing either a coherence, or interestingly sometimes lack thereof, in their answers to these questions. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this layer involves subjective interpretation of the interviewees' responses, which might potentially result in a certain level of bias (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Moreover, the researchers were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement with the organisation. As a result, we were unable to disclose the company name or refer to individual interviewees, which refrains the reader from authenticating the accuracy of our findings, thereby, limiting the qualitative validity (Gibbs, 2007). Therefore, our interpretation and understanding of meaning in their answers was verified by asking confirmatory questions to overcome subjective interpretations. In other words, validity was assured by following a funnel-shaped structure of the questions, rephrasing questions when necessary, asking follow-up questions, and requesting examples to illustrate responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Another limitation is the generalisability of our results due to our inquiry's concentration on GlobalPharma. As addressed by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016), even when there is a seemingly coherent discussion and conformity on a broader level, there might still be

differences across industries and organisations that are left unexplored. Hence, there is the obvious risk of such interviews generating a rather simplistic overview of GlobalPharma's practices regarding the TBL. With half of the respondents having a close connection to the headquarters it could be argued that generalisability is non-existent. Due to the limited number of respondents from outside Europe, we have an uneven distribution, and hence, the generalisability of our study can be extended through either an industry-wide or cross-industry study. This might lead to the conclusion that our investigation and associated results are found to be less relevant in certain contexts that were not included in this research. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the organisational structure entails that all our respondents have an elaborate background of working at international affiliates, for example, Brazil and Panama. Thereby, we associate with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) argument for an emphasis on contextualisation above generalisation in line with our aim of targeting the organisational culture by investigating local contexts.

Finally, due to the corona crisis, employees are forced to work from home and students resort to distance learning. This imposed a large pressure on the current capabilities of the internet, which created moments throughout the day where the internet connection slightly deteriorated. During the interviews, this inflicted to be a limitation as the internet connection got lost, and therefore, we sometimes missed information. However, since video conferencing is daily routine at a global company like GlobalPharma, we were able to handle this professionally in collaboration with the interviewees by switching to audio only to limit any impact on the underlying meanings. Following these critical considerations regarding our methodology, the next section will be focussed on analysing the data that we collected using semi-structured interviews.

4 Analysis of empirical findings

This chapter analyses quotes from the empirical material. The first section highlights the different understandings of the TBL that emerged through an analysis of the interviewees' perceptions of sustainability and CSR. This showed how the TBL is deployed as a means to think about questions of sustainability within the organisation rather than a tool for reporting and communication purposes. In doing so, we exemplify the interviewee's notion of the TBL, which they perceive as a reflexive framework. The second and third section are devoted to an analysis of GlobalPharma's practical embodiment of the TBL in its daily operations including how GlobalPharma's employees approach the TBL's integration within GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy. Finally, we outline how the TBL's integration influences GlobalPharma's operations in its local contexts. Hence, we aspire to show what practitioners experience when adopting the TBL as a reflexive framework, and thereby, contributing to how its revised relevance is constituted within contemporary organisations.

4.1. Definitions and understandings of the TBL

At the start of each conversation, we asked the interviewee about their interpretation of sustainability and CSR. In doing so, we successfully aimed to reveal their initial thoughts regarding these concepts by uncovering their individual view and understanding as they were caught off-guard by this start. In the following sections, we will focus on the interviewee's definitions of sustainability and CSR, and their convictions of the TBL within GlobalPharma. Consequently, we are able to retrieve the TBL's interpretation in relation to these concepts according to our interviewees.

4.1.1 Employee conceptions of sustainability and CSR as purpose-driven

In asking for the interviewees' interpretation of sustainability and CSR, we found that these ranged from broader notions to definitions focussed on defining responsibilities at an organisational level. In defining sustainability, Bjørn provides the first perception by arguing in line with the WCED's (1987) definition for Sustainable Development:

> "Doing what we do without jeopardizing the possibility for future generations to live or do similar things on earth." - Bjørn

Bjørn's broader conception arguably reflects the extensive degree of consciousness regarding the organisation's high ambitions on this topic that prevailed throughout the interviews. Furthermore, it shows awareness of the organisation's larger responsibilities in contributing to Sustainable Development through its Corporate Sustainability initiatives. Building on this perspective, the second statement by Craig expresses another definition of sustainability:

> "I think it [sustainability] is about ensuring profit and so forth in a long-term, successful manner so that what we do now is not just harvesting something within the very near future, but that we can see profit as one example, or driving the purpose of the business on the long-term I would say. So, ensuring that there are not only short-term cost benefits, but other things included in thinking as well." - Craig

Craig's conception of sustainability entails a long-term focus on business operations. In addition, he testifies how the commercial needs of the organisation should serve the wider security of executing the business's societal purpose of improving patients' lives by defeating diabetes. He advocates how this requires a different thinking pattern, or mindset, regarding these topics. GlobalPharma's contemporary long-term business model is in stark contrast with the company's history as GlobalPharma was relatively short-term focussed before it incorporated the TBL in its sustainability strategy (Dey & Burns, 2010). GlobalPharma's business model historically focused on profit-making while neglecting long-term aspects, which should be seen as its effect on the planet, later described as the environmental performance. Whereas Craig does not straightforwardly express his understanding of CSR, thus the social aspect, Pierce does by providing a definition of CSR linking the two concepts together:

> "From the social responsibility side, I think that kind of ducktails in with that, but I think there are other things that you could be doing within the social responsibility area that could be more community-driven where you are supporting hospitals or something like that. So, it [sustainability] is a mix of their ... environmental type things and then also just being good neighbours on the CSR side." - Pierce

Pierce sees CSR as the social strand of sustainability that is revolving around local community engagement, and thereby, as a form of philanthropy. Contrastingly, Garry sees CSR from the perspective of going beyond a stakeholder approach to value creation in making the distinctions

between value-driven companies, and purpose-driven companies that conduct activities beyond their core business. Thereby, Garry is confirming Craig's testimony of the importance of GlobalPharma's purpose of defeating diabetes in the societal domain as their core business. Wendy takes this comparison of CSR and sustainability one step further:

> "The way I usually describe them is to say that CSR is about how you do business in a responsible way, and sustainability is then the outcome. … The only way you can stay in business is by contributing to sustainable development in society. For me, there are two levels. One is global sustainable development, the other one is sustainable business, and CSR is a means to an end." - Wendy

Wendy's quote reflects how employees perceive the close relationship of sustainability and CSR. In this section, we noticed that sustainability is defined from an environmental perspective, whereas CSR is often defined in terms of doing good for society. Moreover, the two are connected through the broader terminology of Sustainable Development as reflected in Wendy's expression of CSR as a means to an end. In other words, in practical terms the three pillars of the TBL can be seen as a tool for Corporate Sustainability by identifying an organisation's contributions to Sustainable Development. Moreover, we have noticed that these contributions are often substantiated through, and driven by, the organisation's societal purpose of defeating diabetes. The role of the TBL as bridging Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development is analysed further in the next section.

4.1.2   Employee definitions of the TBL as a means to an end

Within the foregoing reflections on sustainability and CSR, we noticed that interviewees frequently talked about CSR in terms of the TBL. By understanding this connection, we develop and analyse the organisation's connotation of the concept as a means to achieving Corporate Sustainability, and consequently, Sustainable Development. The following brief quotes reflect two instances where interviewees defined the TBL:

> "The social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and the financial responsibility."
> - Craig

> "So, financially, socially, and then environmentally viable." - Raj

To illustrate, Craig works on a strategic level, whereas Raj, who works in supply chain operations, is further away from this terminology. This is representative of the widely spread acquaintance that we experienced among interviewees with the TBL across functions in line with textbook-like definitions. Another exemplification of this is Isabel providing an extended conceptualisation of the TBL in relation to CSR:

> "As part of our TBL, it [CSR] is our responsibility that our operations and our business is responsible for what we are, who we are, how we are impacting our local communities in the world environmentally as well as socially and financially." - Isabel

As supporting staff, Isabel is closer to the production floor. Therefore, she sees the effect of environmental measures better. However, she still openly argues for the organisation's overall stability, and thereby, affirming the assurance of continued business operations. Accordingly, she refers to the TBL's role for defining the importance of each pillar to the company's purpose, or who they are, by specifying the what and how of the organisation. In other words, Isabel seemingly argues for the TBL as a thought-provoking framework that encourages reflexivity within the organisation. We found that our interviewees, especially at an operational level, do not think of the TBL in reporting terms despite the company issuing their annual report around this concept. We can conclude from these statements that employees are well-aware of the three pillars within the TBL, but their function influences its exact interpretation. Therefore, the next section explores the interviewees' personal reflections and values when dealing with the TBL in detail.

4.2. Aligning GlobalPharma's reflexive approach to the TBL within its sustainability strategy

In the previous section, we discussed the interviewees' perceptions of the TBL in relation to CSR, Corporate Sustainability, and Sustainable Development. Continuing on the foregoing, the following sections zooms in on the alignment of GlobalPharma's approach to the TBL as a reflexive framework within its sustainability strategy. Following several testimonies signalling how the TBL is encountered within GlobalPharma, we explore the personal conceptions and values of the interviewees in dealing with the TBL as a thought-provoking concept in their function. This to identify the alignment, or lack thereof, between the sustainability strategy and the practical experiences of GlobalPharma's employees deploying the TBL as a reflexive framework.

4.2.1 The TBL forming the core of the GlobalPharma Way

In asking about the larger sustainability strategy, which is called 'the GlobalPharma Way of Management' consisting of ten unique statements, many interviewees pointed out its close connection to the TBL as reflexive framework. We start with Hendrik signalling GlobalPharma's journey of integrating the TBL:

> "I would argue that all in [GlobalPharma] is familiar with it [the TBL]. It is part of the value proposition and who we are, and it is something that the company has worked with since for, I don't know, 30-40 years in different ways. So, yes, that is like an ingrained part of our identity" - Hendrik

Hendrik hereby brought up GlobalPharma's long journey in the nineties as being an important defining feature for the further development of the organisation's focus in terms of its sustainability strategy. Wendy also mentioned this journey by arguing how the involvement with NGOs formed the company's early approach to stakeholder engagement and dialogue. In talking about this journey, they both stressed how the TBL has become a naturally embedded feature of the GlobalPharma Way in line with the impression that we conveyed in the case description. Relatedly, Andrei gave the following illustrative specification of how the TBL is reflected within the GlobalPharma Way:

> "When I started in the company, the company had just moved into a new headquarter building that was just built, and in the very centre of that big atrium, that is inside the core of that building, there you find three trees in the middle of the building. And at least when I started, I was told that those three trees are representing the TBL. So, you can say it is literally a core part of the business." - Andrei

Andrei portrays the GlobalPharma Way as a corporate code of conduct that shaped the organisational culture in how it conducts business both internally and externally. This quote describes the three trees placed at the centre of the atrium in the headquarters as an illustration of how the TBL functions as the core of the business, whereby each tree reflects a pillar of the TBL. Hence, we can argue that this metaphor reflects how the TBL lies at the employees' hearts and minds, and thereby, functions as an inspirational factor contributing to their intrinsic motivation. As someone from the higher management, Selina confirms this core function of the TBL in relation to the GlobalPharma Way:

> "What I think has changed has been how we interpret it [the TBL] and how we use it in our daily work and so I think that has been strengthened, but it has always been part of the company, the core of the company." - Selina

Selina seemingly feels that the TBL has lately moved to the forefront in the organisational narratives. Confirming this enhanced adoption of the GlobalPharma Way and TBL in the organisational identity Bjørn mentions:

> "I guess it [the TBL] is a lot of underlying things that you don't really see or hear always but it is kind of underlying values that set direction for what to do." - Bjørn

Bjørn here expresses and confirms the leading GlobalPharma Way, which includes the TBL, as defining and strengthening the organisational culture. The quote once more signifies the TBL's natural adoption within GlobalPharma's culture as many of the initiatives have become ingrained with the everyday tasks through its corporate code of conduct. However, Diana provides a contrasting perspective by arguing for a more structured approach:

> "I think there is a need for having some anchor outside of having it [the TBL] in the new purpose and the new strategy." - Diana

Opposing Bjørn's comment, Diana signals the need for guidance and prioritisation of sustainability issues, and that reference to the TBL potentially structures this decision-making process. This is something that frequently occurred in the data in terms of referring to the TBL as a framework to be critical towards which sustainability initiatives deserve investment of financial and human resources. The next section continues on how the TBL forms a core part of the GlobalPharma Way by presenting the employees' reflections upon the TBL in GlobalPharma's daily practice.

4.2.2   Experiences of substantiating the TBL as a reflexive framework

In analysing the different ways that employees give substance to the TBL in their work environment, this section serves to better understand how their expressions and perceived realities of GlobalPharma's approach to the TBL are influenced by the extent to which they are personally engaged with the TBL. The first interviewee provides an answer in which he reflects on how the TBL was incorporated in GlobalPharma's daily practice:

> "It comes back to this. I do not know what was first, the TBL or the company's success but I think during the last decade or before that [GlobalPharma], was a pretty, how do you say, lucky company because they had a lot of good development for the business where they earned shit loads of money without doing that much. So, they have been in a situation when they could afford to put a focus on these things because they were not that pressured financially." - Bjørn

In this quote, Bjørn argues that the TBL is enabled by GlobalPharma's financial history. Before the TBL got adopted, GlobalPharma was able to earn large profits from several successful product launches resulting in external stakeholder pressures as explained in the case description. This is supported by Pierce who considers the large amount of old money within GlobalPharma as favouring its possibilities in terms of facilitating and financing sustainability initiatives. He sees this as resulting from the mindset of Danish investors who attach more value to these topics. Hence, the TBL's successful adoption can partially be attributed to the Scandinavian culture according to multiple respondents. Accordingly, we argue that GlobalPharma was in the right place financially to afford its focus on these issues, which is supported by the Scandinavian mindset. Garry's example of how the company exploits these resources illustrates our argument:

> "It [the TBL] is working with the organisation to ensure they are being engaged in the right activities to help beyond what the company is doing. And there is a lot of other things where you can see that the business also interacts because some of our stakeholders are interested in organisations that will benefit everybody, and that is a part of what works." - Garry

With this quote, Garry provides insight into how the TBL may be reflected in GlobalPharma's daily practice by trying to steer their employee's energy towards those initiatives that would be most relevant and most value-adding in the context of GlobalPharma's core business, thereby, substantiating his earlier argument for purpose-driven organisations. He also argues that "the TBL works because it is simple" and adds that "it is about ensuring it becomes actionable". Garry here arguably refers to the use of the TBL as a useful and comprehensive communication tool for an organisation's sustainability agenda adding to their accountability for acting thereupon through its reporting efforts. Garry confesses how there are influences from external stakeholders on GlobalPharma's Corporate Responsibility initiatives, and thereby, shaping the

sustainability agenda. Jane confirms the presence of an increasing pressure from society at large to focus their efforts beyond their commercial needs, and that the TBL is one way to showcase this. Andrei continues how this stakeholder approach is reflected in the patient focus within the social pillar of the TBL through a reference to the organisation's purpose, thereby, creating a connection to the tension between the TBL's use as a reporting tool and interpreting it as a reflexive framework driving its societal purpose:

> "We have always had the purpose of driving change to defeat diabetes, and chronic diseases, and that previously meant to deliver innovative and good products to patients to help them live a better life, but looking forward through the lens of the next society there is more required by companies. Now it is not only about delivering innovative products, but it is also about access to care, affordability to our products, and then also prevention."
> - Andrei

Both Jane and Andrei stress this core function of the company needing to be able to provide its product to the patients that need them, hence, securing production but also ensuring their affordability and availability, and preventing the root cause as part of their Corporate Responsibility. As Jane and Garry mentioned, companies must understand that there is a pressure from different stakeholders asking them to be accountable on how they operate transparent and sustainable. Based on the latter arguments, we arguably see a secondary notice being attributed to the environmental domain and the financial being at par with the social goal that it sustains. The quote below by Wendy combines, and reinforces, the points from Andrei, Jane, and Garry:

> "It [the TBL] touches something human. It makes the company humane, because we actually think about being part of a society, being part of a community. So, not just thinking about our own interest, but really looking at that bigger perspective. … I think it is basically a mindset." - Wendy

This quote signifies how the TBL is not only used as a way of conducting business, but also seen as a cognitive mental attitude that helps our respondents to reflect on broader questions of sustainability. Consequently, GlobalPharma's employees are seemingly above-average engaged in making the company more sustainable by initiating ideas for a sustainable development of the company, but also by being involved in their local communities, and by

being engaged with the patient. Specifically, Wendy argues that the TBL unleashes a lot of energy with her colleagues, thereby, enabling them to come up with ideas to improve doing business. Conclusively, we can argue that the TBL is considered to function as a reflexive framework that triggers employee's intrinsic motivation, which will be supported by analysing some of the personal convictions in the following subchapter.

4.2.3 Personal convictions regarding the TBL as a reflexive framework

The previous section provided insight on how the TBL is perceived by our interviewees, which we continue below by addressing their personal convictions regarding the TBL as a reflexive framework. A first outstanding expression of this is how Garry reflects on the TBL as creating happiness in enabling employees to be a part of a solution by focussing on doing what you can. He does not see GlobalPharma's approach to the TBL as some kind of remedy for global problems but rather sees it as a contribution to society in general, thereby, referring back to the level of Sustainable Development. Hence, he confirms the earlier developed interpretation of the TBL as a means to an end. Supporting Garry's conviction regarding driven employees, Isabel is an example of an employee who would not work at GlobalPharma if it did not take responsibility from a social and environmental perspective:

> "I think I could not morally support a company who was not implementing good policy within the local community and within the world. I would not be able to put my best foot forward at work. I would not choose to stay there, and I know a lot of the younger generation specifically feel that way. They have to feel like their work has some sort of meaning." - Isabel

Isabel indicates that work shall be meaningful for younger generations to subscribe to the organisation's purpose. Similarly, Garry exemplifies the importance of having a sustainability agenda as a prerequisite for attracting a new, younger, generation of employees that is engaged with these matters whereas this used to be solely a differentiating factor. Isabel is an example of this in showing a large degree of voluntary engagement regarding how employees are personally involved with the company's objective. For example, she described being specifically focussed on improving the underdeveloped environmental initiatives within her department. Jane forms a similar example in choosing GlobalPharma as her employer:

> "With a background in public health this [the TBL] has actually been something really important for me. I never really saw myself at a pharmaceutical company, and also when I heard from GlobalPharma and the emphasis that they put on sustainability and paying attention to environmental and social responsibility that was actually quite important to me. … I really wanted to work in the area that I am working in now because of its connection to that." - Jane

Jane's citation presents a sincere evaluation, or testimony, of why employees choose to work for GlobalPharma following their strong association with the company's purpose. Her quote confirms how people from a younger generation have a strong affiliation with the TBL, which complements Isabel's point. However, we also received more critical personal convictions towards GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy as expressed in Kristoff's following citation:

> "I can see how in some places I think the company's values are probably a little bit more strict than my own. For example, on the environmental, I think it is a bit too much to do in terms of sorting waste although I try to recycle as much as possible. But I actually think mostly that when I am at work, I strive for higher standards than what I do at home." - Kristoff

Kristoff's quote illustrates how the company's ambitious targets have an impact beyond the work floor through how individual employees think about these questions in their personal lives. Thereby, he arguably scrutinises the organisation's recent transition to an environmentally focussed programme. Craig has a similar conception as he thinks "that the company is taking it one step further than" himself. They both seemingly feel that in certain instances GlobalPharma might raise the bar too high when it comes to the organisation's recently introduced environmental targets. Contrastingly, Raj argues for an alternative perspective since he deems the TBL's influence on his daily tasks nothing more than business-as-usual in terms of being cost-effective, while also remaining socially and environmentally responsible. The above-mentioned personal convictions are perfectly summarised by Wendy:

> "If your personal values are too different from the values of a company like [GlobalPharma], likely you would not want to stay with the company, or you might not even join in the first place." - Wendy

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We accordingly conclude that generally interviewees are personally involved in GlobalPharma's mission of becoming more sustainable by being socially, and environmentally, involved. For other employees, the company values are taking it a step further than their own values, but they remain working for GlobalPharma. Hence, we identified a large degree of willingness among employees to subscribe to the company's objectives, but given its elaborate portfolio employees at times are overwhelmed by these high ambitions. Accordingly, we can state that a certain extent of disillusionment on where to start occasionally limits actionability. Consequently, the next section will elaborate on the tensions that our interviewees experienced between the different pillars of the TBL.

4.3. Practical complications regarding the TBL as a reflexive framework

As mentioned in the previous section, respondents signify how they feel personally involved in GlobalPharma's journey towards Sustainable Development. However, each employee has a specific focus in their daily activities, which causes complications in aligning with the TBL while still doing their job. Consequently, this section analyses how they balance the three pillars of the TBL before exploring its synergies and associated complications. In doing so, we aspire to provide the reader with insight into what practitioners shall take into consideration when subscribing to the TBL as a reflexive framework.

4.3.1 Balancing commitments within the TBL as a reflexive framework

We start by reviewing several statements that express how the interviewees balance their commitments to the three pillars of the TBL when deploying it as a reflexive framework. Several interviewees argue that the financial aspect still prevails, which is closely followed by the social aspect and subsequently the environmental aspect. Both Garry and Kristoff illustrate the importance of the financial pillar within GlobalPharma:

> "The thing about the framework of the TBL is that if you are not doing well, as a company, you will not have the funds to invest in the two other things. Because at the end of the day, each company needs to survive. … And if you are not thriving as a company, it is very difficult to say okay, we are going to make better terms than anybody else for our

employees. We are going to donate more money than anybody else for diabetes camps, obesity camps in the world. … So, I don't know if it is a weight or just a means to a goal."
- Garry

"I don't have any problems with [GlobalPharma] investing money. I think that is part of it. I believe fully in the capitalist system. ... If we don't strive, [GlobalPharma], to make as much money as possible the company is going to die eventually." - Kristoff

Garry and Kristoff testify for the financial domain serving as an enabler of the other two pillars instead of denying the company's commercial needs. Together they form a means to an end, namely, to achieve Corporate Sustainability, and thereby, contributing to Sustainable Development. Especially significant is how Kristoff subscribes to the capitalist system as not necessarily being inherently flawed, which is what Elkington (2018) underscores by describing the TBL as a reflexive framework provoking deeper thinking about the future of capitalism. Similarly, Hendrik argues for the TBL as a holistic target, but likewise: "if you don't earn money as a company, you have an issue".

The preceding citations all exemplify discourses signifying the historical dominance of the economic domain within GlobalPharma, but also the prominent awareness that because of this financial position they can afford to focus on environmental and social initiatives. Multiple interviewees pointed towards the recent shift from the organisation's financial and social focus to their environmentally focused sustainability strategy as illustrated in the following quotes by Kristoff and Wendy:

"I think historically, there has been the biggest focus on cost, on the social aspect, whereas I think the environmental aspects has been a bit neglected, which I also think is kind of the reason is that this new ambition was put into place. But it is not that it was gone. It was very much, from what I saw, it was a time to focus on some areas to work with." - Kristoff

"I think historically there has been a lot of cost focus. I think right now the environment is a huge focus area, and I think we need to look into it a little bit with the social." - Wendy

Interesting in these quotes is the support by Craig, Selina, and Raj as they talk about this as an environmental, or sustainability, agenda that is significantly rising in the organisation's priorities. The sustainability agenda is used by the interviewees for referring to the Climate Neutrality Initiative. One issue in such notion is its extensive focus on the environmental pillar, which subsequently causes tensions in balancing both the environmental and financial sustainability. Andrei later told the researchers that balancing the commitments "probably depends a lot on who you ask in the company" showing how the employee's position within the company can influence the way they balance the three pillars. Thereby, the earlier developed argument of employees not always having the opportunity, or necessary resources, to meet all the organisational objectives is confirmed. To put this in perspective, the next section elaborates on how the three pillars are reconciled through their respective synergies.

4.3.2 Mutual enhancement of the three pillars within the TBL as a reflexive framework

This section will show the importance of viewing the three pillars as interdependent in viewing the TBL as a reflexive framework by analysing their corresponding synergies. GlobalPharma is a commercial organisation, and hence, focusses on making profit. Therefore, the TBL is not merely a philanthropic construct but also a framework that creates certain synergies. It triggers both the company's and the employees' reflexive capabilities in becoming sustainable while acknowledging their profitability. Hence, the first synergy that we identified is between the financial and environmental pillar:

> "Environmental sustainability is always also good business. So, there is a link between the economical part of the Triple Bottom Line and the environmental in fact. If the way, that when you use resources that are more environmentally good, with lower impact, they would also be more economically feasible in the long term." - Selina

Selina's quote points towards viewing synergies as a business case. Thereby, she refers to the profitability of resource-efficiency initiatives, which Bjørn supports by referring to the example of reducing environmental impact by buying fewer materials. Diana similarly mentions the business case for reducing business travel, and thereby, reducing carbon-dioxide emissions and saving expenses at the same time. However, as indicated by the win-win assumption in the literature review, such interpretation risks overlooking trade-offs in other domains, and thereby,

only results in relative improvements. Accordingly, a synergy between the financial and social pillars is provided by Garry as he argues that by having a good corporate image you get better employees resulting in higher productivity and quality:

> "One of the obvious ones will be recruiting. The better image and the better brand you have, the better people you get; the better people you get, the better financials you will have." - Garry

From his perspective, a good image does not only bring skilled employees but also increases brand value from being socially active in the local environment, which results in enhanced political influence by making your voice heard. However, Selina counters this point in saying that, even with all the power and influence that GlobalPharma has, she does not consider them carrying sole responsibility for solving challenges regarding Sustainable Development. There is arguably then an inherent contradiction in these arguments as GlobalPharma's power and influence is what enables them to act responsibly and drive change. This brings us to Andrei's following quote, which summarises the synergies within the TBL:

> "If you don't make money, you cannot invest in the social aspects. If you don't invest in social aspects you have no right to be here in the society because you need to be a positive benefit to the society. If we don't put anything into the environmental aspect, we won't be able to run a business in some years .... It is a Triple Bottom Line, and they stand individually in this triangle, but they are really all the same image because you cannot do one without doing the other." - Andrei

Andrei indicates that money, or the financial pillar, is necessary to invest in the social pillar, and each pillar of the TBL shall thus be accounted for be it to a larger or lesser extent. Consequently, embedded in this quote is that the three pillars of the TBL cannot operate individually. Meanwhile, Kristoff exemplifies that the three aspects have one common ground, namely, financial effectiveness. He argues that priorities shall be defined for each pillar as they are related in different ways. Subsequently, the company will be able to make a balanced choice considering all aspects to eventually come to the correct, or ethical, behaviour. Thereby, the TBL becomes a framework explaining what the company's actions are in each segment. However, this carries the paradoxical risk of turning the TBL back into a reporting exercise. Conclusively, integrating the TBL creates synergies, but in a practical context has been shown to face complications, which are continued in the next section.

4.3.3 Complications underlying the practical integration of the TBL as a reflexive framework

During the interviews, we were introduced to a number of complications underlying the TBL's practical integration as a reflexive framework. As we outline these below, we analyse how the distortion of terminologies and messages accompanying the TBL has the risk of creating ambiguity regarding its use for communication purposes. This opposes its use to provoke deeper thinking about the organisation's purpose. First, Craig describes the complications of integrating the TBL as a reflexive framework in business strategy when discussing this process in more detail:

> "In terms of the purpose and the feeling as such it is very inspiring, but it can be challenging because I think people have slightly different approaches and perhaps perceptions on what the purpose is and will come from different backgrounds. I think the challenging part in high terms would be that people are working at different levels." - Craig

This citation illustrates the complexities that employees encounter when implementing the organisation's vision at a local level resulting in a two-fold complication of embedding the TBL within organisational strategy. Firstly, there is the implied risk of the message getting distorted when reaching the organisation's lower levels, which results in uncertainty and ambiguity among employees regarding the strategy's purpose and how it should be achieved. Relatedly, there are difficulties in ensuring alignment regarding the strategy between the different cultures and backgrounds. Thereby, the willingness to act is potentially affected through these two challenges. Isabel elaborates on the uncertainties surrounding the company's purpose:

> "Before the COVID-19 issues, we were putting together a strategy for the year for the group. … And when we were talking about it, we got a little bit of pushback from leadership saying maybe we are taking on a little bit too much at one time. Let's focus this a bit more." - Isabel

As this quote mirrors, the practical integration of the TBL approach faces resistance by higher management when trying to implement initiatives locally as GlobalPharma aimed to narrow the ambitions down. This can be related to the fact that doing too much can create the illusion of

impression management because of losing its connection to priorities. Accordingly, the decision was made one year ago to focus on initiatives related to the Climate Neutrality Initiative, and thereby, limiting the exploitation of other initiatives. In doing so, the sustainability strategy cannot be adapted to local needs, which could imply that blind spots occur on a local level regarding the TBL as a reflexive framework. Garry places this integration of the sustainability strategy in a bigger perspective:

> "I think the biggest problem with the TBL is that I hope it will not distort or take away the conversation about what truly matters in terms of the impact. Because I think [Climate Neutrality Initiative] is a very important initiative, [but] I think discovering a new drug in a new therapy class for an untreated disease is more important as I see it. … So, I just hope that TBL will not take equal amount of space in communication because the true communication should be about where you make them the most, how to say, your opportunity impact, … where can you have the largest impact." - Garry

As indicated above, the practical integration of the TBL as a mere communication and reporting tool risks distorting what truly matters regarding the impact of GlobalPharma. What Garry implies is that there is a challenge in setting ambitious targets exactly right. If this is not done with integrity, for example by buying CO2 quotas, the TBL can become something like "putting on makeup" as Garry would say, thereby, imposing a risk of contaminating terms such as CSR. His conviction is that to overcome this challenge, and instead deploying the TBL as a reflexive framework, companies should focus on optimising their core business in cooperation with the customer in order to have the largest impact. In GlobalPharma's case, they should then arguably focus on developing drugs, and ensuring their availability to as many patients as possible while remaining operational. Garry does not deny that GlobalPharma can still have programmes like the Climate Neutrality Initiative, but the prevailing 'opportunity impact' within the company's purpose remains with helping patients as the societal mission prevails, whereas other activities may turn into incremental changes. Following this train of thought, the next section will further explore these complications of how the TBL as a reflexive framework is aligned with GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy and analyse resulting cultural implications.

4.4. Integrating a reflexive framework in a local context

This section discusses how the TBL is integrated as a reflexive framework within the GlobalPharma Way across the global practices of GlobalPharma. First, the impact of the organisation's internal communication is analysed before we distinguish how the GlobalPharma Way's integration is subject to the cultural influences at its affiliates. In other words, the integration of the TBL as part of the GlobalPharma Way is supported by an evaluation of the influence of internal communication and cultural differences at the affiliates. In analysing these two aspects, we attempt to understand how the organisation approaches the process of ensuring a coherent implementation of the TBL as a reflexive framework throughout its global operations.

4.4.1 The TBL as part of GlobalPharma's internal communication

Given the TBL's prominent reflection in GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy as outlined in the previous section, communication concerning the TBL approach plays a key role in creating awareness and alignment in understanding amongst employees. Kristoff indicates his ideal regarding how internal communication should take place:

> "I think you need to explain the value of what we do. I think when we have some values agreed and we show that we are really going to make a difference then you can also get people to prioritise it. So, you need to spend time on selling this value and explaining why this is actually a super good thing to spend your time on." - Kristoff

Kristoff refers to how the environmental focus was identified on a central level, and thereby, provides an example of the top-down information flow. Over the last one and a half years, the headquarters has identified why they want to see the Climate Neutrality Initiative prioritised. Hence, this quote signals how a push from top management can be necessary for exploiting already existing ideas in the lower segments of the hierarchy at affiliate sites. This quote by Kristoff complements Bjørn's point from the previous section of selling the values to employees to achieve alignment in the perception all across GlobalPharma. Bjørn, however, is rather critical on the company's internal communication approach:

> "I never hear anyone speak about the TBL... We did not hear about it. We read it in some presentation from management or something like that, but I am like very rarely, never in my everyday life, and very rarely in tasks." - Bjørn

Bjørn indicates the absence of the TBL in his everyday work, which can be perceived as weakness from higher up. In other words, the internal communication regarding the TBL is lacking in certain parts of GlobalPharma, and therefore, alienating employees such as Bjørn from the potential of the concept as a way of reflecting on their operations. When Wendy talks about her previous role of being responsible to profile GlobalPharma's role of an early mover in terms of CSR by embedding the TBL throughout the entire organisation, she argues the exact opposite:

> "That understanding of the why and the how was important to convey so that it is not something that is run out of an office. … But of course, communication alone cannot solve the problems. You also need to change your behaviour to change your practices. So, there my role has been to advise management teams on what would be necessary for them to do to earn that trust and licence to operate from the from the stakeholders." - Wendy

The first sentence of this citation expresses a vision of decentralisation in rolling out the TBL approach, which is especially emphasised by interviewees from the headquarters. However, this conflicts with guidance by the general management through their messages as we have seen how some interviewees suggested that they deem more support necessary in what deserves their resources, and hence, should be prioritised. Especially at the affiliates as mentioned, for example, by Jane and Diana. The practical concerns in GlobalPharma's horizontal and vertical dialogues are succinctly summarised by Pierce:

> "I think from a corporate aspect we are pushing things in the right way, and then it is still ensuring that at like site levels and other offices, and because we have sales affiliates and stuff, they are just so much in this as well. Making sure that they have what they object to this, and then I think there is probably some maturity that needs to happen in the dialogue between downstream and upstream on." - Pierce

This quote signals three issues concerning the GlobalPharma Way. First, there is the signalled complication regarding communication channels, which has been covered by this section. Secondly, there is the implied influence of the organisational structure in rolling out the sustainability initiatives to all levels signifying the integration of the GlobalPharma Way. Thereby, also introducing a cultural element following GlobalPharma's global operating structure. The latter two elements will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter by analysing how they influence the employee perceptions towards the TBL according to our respondents.

4.4.2   Achieving coherence in how the TBL is perceived at affiliates

Following the preceding discussion on communication, this section will continue to reflect on GlobalPharma's efforts to achieve a single understanding throughout the organisation. Elaborating on the organisation's approach to integrating the TBL within the GlobalPharma Way throughout the organisation, Garry talks about the audits that are done on the culture:

> "There are even audits on the culture where audit teams travel the world to see if people are in line with the [GlobalPharma Way] and if not, at the most extreme they can be removed from their job. When you have something that is enforced as strictly as that, and then in that you include the TBL, you don't really have a choice but to learn about it, because it is everywhere." - Garry

This so-called facilitator function is an intriguing feature of how GlobalPharma attempts to assure the full integration of the TBL as a reflexive framework within the GlobalPharma Way across all affiliates. Andrei illustrates this as a team of experienced senior managers who's "job is to travel around the world and ensure that the [GlobalPharma Way] is being enforced and is the same in all offices globally". Although arguably radical, it is an effective approach to ensuring coherence in the perception of and how the TBL approach is carried out at affiliates in line with the company's notion of a thought-provoking framework. To illustrate, Diana considers such occasions where they meet headquarter representatives as a refresher of what GlobalPharma is doing as a company, and thereby, adding inspiration to what her unit could be aiding. Isabel also mentions how the TBL is reinforced through the communication and 'quality business review meetings', hence encounters, that her department has with the leadership at headquarters. Continuing on her point, we examine Isabel's testimony of how she sees the TBL embedded at the departmental level:

> "There are ways that especially people on the production floor can probably see a greater impact for TBL in their daily work as opposed to what I am doing in the office. … The way I look at it is I am supporting the people who are making the biggest impact on the TBL if that makes sense. I am supporting the people on the floor. … I don't feel necessarily that my job directly connects to it in a big way, but it connects to it in the way that I am supporting those functions and those jobs that do directly connect to it." - Isabel

This excerpt illustrates how a bottom-up structure can be successful as the production floor arguably sees the impact of sustainability initiatives more clearly compared to office workers, and therefore, can provide valuable input for enhanced Corporate Responsibility supporting the substance of the TBL as a reflexive framework. To exemplify, Isabel mentioned how workers from finished production occasionally approach her with potential solutions that she as an office worker would not have considered. Supporting this point, Hendrik, Jane, and Wendy summarise that there might not be differences within Denmark as such, but rather that the local context is shaping the direction of affiliates based on their position in the value chain. For example, whether it concerns a production line or if you work in procurement. This illustrates the differences on a local context, thereby, targeting the perception of the different layers as well as how affiliates are substantiating the TBL as a reflexive framework in their context, which is further explored in the next section.

4.4.3   Cultural features impacting the integration of the TBL as a reflexive framework

This final section of the empirical findings combines the foregoing analyses regarding the integration of the TBL as a reflexive framework within the GlobalPharma Way as summarised in the following citation from Jane:

> "Everywhere you go it [the TBL] also changes a little bit for each affiliate. I would say that the culture in the office in Panama was not necessarily the same as the culture in the office in the US or in Canada. They all have, they are all sort of a blend. Like, each of the affiliates becomes a blend of the headquarters' culture and the local culture." - Jane

The above presents the alignment of different national affiliates on a higher level in terms of how they give substance to GlobalPharma's TBL approach as a reflexive framework. Jane describes how the targets for each affiliate are conform the European headquarters'

requirements through the example of working hours since in Panama there is a different mentality regarding this topic. She especially addresses the paid time off and working five days a week instead of six as is common in Panama. Thereby, she argues for the positive influence of the culture at headquarters on what is expected of GlobalPharma employees at local affiliates. Jane's quote of the working culture being subject to interpretation across local contexts thus confirms the earlier mentioned need among employees for the central expression of priorities by the headquarters. Her position is challenged, however, by Diana's experience regarding the complexity surrounding intercultural communication:

> "That is how different cultures receive or perceive giving input, and also on what level and how. I mean, if I were to approach someone in [an] Eastern European country, or let's say France, a different level of communication needed" - Diana

Diana expresses the complications in the willingness to approach people from a different culture. She explains how in the Eastern European context any initiative needs to be endorsed by a manager or director for it to be prioritised. In other words, position is said to impact urgency in certain contexts. Relatedly, Andrei reflects on Italian employees awaiting the approval of management before pursuing ambitious targets. One possible reason Diana provided for this is "because the headquarters is far from them", hence, indicating a physical and mental distance that creates a need to customise the TBL approach for local requirements. Thereby, she mentions how bridging these discrepancies asks for translation and communication before reaching the desired level of common understanding across local affiliates. A concrete example of how this is encountered is described by Raj:

> "The first one is language barrier. Some of us in Indonesia they cannot speak English properly. So, they are hesitant to reach out to people from Denmark. And then the other aspect is, I mean, we have this kind of perception that Danish people are cold, or effective, and avoid eating sugar and carbs, and then it is a bit different with Indonesia. Indonesian people are very open. We love to talk to each other; we love to reach out to each other, and then we love to bring foods to the company and then have everyone share the foods. So, and then some sometimes we are hesitant to include people from Denmark or from overseas to be part of that activity because we have this perception that they don't want to do that." - Raj

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Raj's quote reflects how intercultural differences between local affiliates can result in the creation of in-groups within these offices. Next to resulting in the exclusion of expats at the affiliate site, the described language barrier limits their confidence in reaching out to the headquarters for clarification on corporate strategies. Thereby, we see how culture influences the degree of guidance needed from the headquarters. Selina describes this as how China is very regulated, and therefore, dependent on management to set direction, whereas the local context in Montes Claros, Brazil, is more dependent on bottom-up engagement through employee input. Hence, despite GlobalPharma encouraging a flat hierarchy, there are some local contexts with extensive respect for decision-making processes requiring a top-down approach. Correspondingly, Selina mentions how cultures like the US have a different attitude and perspective when it comes to climate change as a consequence of the limited legislative requirements, which is reflected in the following testimony by Wendy reflecting on the American culture as having a differing perspective on what CSR entails:

> "In the US, for instance, … what we refer to as CSR is often in the shape of corporate philanthropy. It is built on the notion of giving back to society. ... But I think, to be honest, that notion of giving back is built on a false presumption because it is built on the assumption that companies in the first place are taking something away that they would need to give back, right? And that is where our colleagues in the US have embraced the notion of shared value thinking because that is consistent with the modern way that business in in the US understands CSR. So, the shared value thinking is their way of talking about TBL, and then they combine the two. Whereas there would be other parts of the world, say in China, where it is not so much about philanthropy, but it is more about contributing to society as an obligation. - Wendy

Wendy here refers to the US subscribing to the TBL in terms of philanthropy, which Jane illustrates by explaining the added value of her department having an intentional connection to the commercial aspects of the organisation. She explains that these relationships are there to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations regarding business ethics that the organisation shall comply with. Jane mentioning "protecting ourselves from the law" is indicating a contradiction where the organisation remains at the legal level of responsibility of Carroll's CSR pyramid (1999). Arguably then, when departmental initiatives touch the wider commercial needs of the organisation Corporate Responsibility seemingly no longer goes beyond these minimal legal requirements to address broader ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. From

that perspective, we can argue that the correlation between ethics and regulations is to some extent culture dependent. Wendy takes this one step further as the underlying notion of giving back to society in terms of shared value thinking being the way Americans interpret the TBL. She compares this to China as a country where they follow a more regulated character, which are two opposing perspectives that she considers to be reconciled in international standards and regulations winding back to a perception of meeting minimum legal requirements. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of value and its role within business ethics is further explored in the discussion, but first we will summarise this chapter.

4.5.　　Chapter summary

The preceding chapter presented the analysis of our empirical material by examining the perceptions of GlobalPharma's employees concerning how they view the TBL as a reflexive framework, and give substance to GlobalPharma's TBL approach in accordance with Elkington's (2018) originally intended notion as a triple-helix for reflecting on the future of capitalism within contemporary organisations. We found that our interviewees perceive CSR as one means to ensure the organisation's sustainability in conjunction with its environmental and financial counterpart, and consequently, its contribution to Sustainable Development. Thereby, the TBL is interpreted as a reflexive framework that functions as a means to reconcile the broader terminologies of Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development within contemporary business operations. However, several ambiguities prevail in the practice, which have been explored by analysing the interviewee's experiences of giving substance to the TBL in their working environments.

In analysing our respondents' experiences of working with the TBL as a reflexive framework, a second empirical finding revealed the persistent dominance of the economic domain at the corporate level following the organisation's, financial, history. In other words, the business case for integrating the TBL as a reflexive framework with GlobalPharma's sustainability strategy, or the GlobalPharma Way, prevails since the linking feature to the other domains within the TBL remains financial effectiveness. Nevertheless, the complexity of how the TBL shall be deployed in the practice is reflected in the late transition to an environmental focus in conjunction with the financial domain. This practical search for a balance indicated that the TBL requires consideration for all three domains be it in a larger or lesser extent. However, we argued that this carries the risk of turning the TBL back into a communication exercise because

of trying to do too much at a time. Instead, our interviewees suggested that the focus should be on exploiting the most value-adding and impactful initiatives. As a result, GlobalPharma's foremost challenge that emerged in the empirical data is to stay true to its original, authentic purpose and core business, which was affirmed to be its social objective of defeating diabetes. Throughout the findings, the TBL was established to be a helpful framework for employees to reflect on such underlying convictions in relation to their function. Thereby, the empirical material arguably shows the presence of a human factor accompanying the TBL that turns it into a mindset for employees to think about larger questions of Corporate Sustainability, and relatedly, Sustainable Development. We described how there is an intrinsic motivation among the interviewees to focus on such societal objectives, but they often find themselves working on other aspects that are a priority to their function. This affected the way how, and the extent to which, the interviewees substantiate the TBL as a reflexive framework in their daily practices.

Fourthly, and relatedly, despite the general management striving for full integration of the GlobalPharma Way, different interviewees stress how they would appreciate guidance on how to adjust corporate objectives regarding the TBL to their local contexts. One explanation is that some cultural contexts require a more authoritative approach to integration, whereas others can work with more abstract directions from above. These different interpretations, in terms of embedding the TBL as a reflexive framework at affiliates, provide a promising starting point for our discussion of these perspectives in relation to the theoretical framework that we established in the second chapter.

5   Discussion

In the empirical material we aimed to present the TBL's originally intended meaning as a reflexive framework by investigating how it is discursively constituted and substantiated within GlobalPharma. This section considers the theoretical contributions that underlie the foregoing results. Our discursive stance allows for "thinking of theory production as something that is open to modification and discussion" (Styhre, 2013, p.77), or in the words of Swedberg (2012, in Styhre, 2013, p.77), "theorizing is a creative and imaginative act of 'thinking in new terms'". Hence, looking at the TBL's narrative constitution within GlobalPharma from this viewpoint shifts the focus from the largely theoretical discussion regarding its use as mere reporting tool to emphasizing how it is discursively produced and performed as a reflexive framework in the workplace. First, we make our argument for returning to Elkington's (2018) originally intended meaning of the TBL as a reflexive framework by explaining how it helps employees to make sense of their work and their company's higher societal purpose in relation to its commercial needs. Relatedly, we argue for the TBL's notion as a means to Corporate Responsibility to acknowledge the terminology of the TBL as going beyond being a sustainability construct as indicated by both our interviewees and the literature. Thereafter, we evaluate the connection of the practical complications that accompany the TBL's integration as a reflexive framework to the win-win and firm-level sustainability assumption, and thereby, refer to the critiques that we introduced in the second chapter.

5.1.   Returning to Elkington's intended notion of the TBL as a reflexive framework

The theoretical background has shown how the contemporary use of the TBL according to Elkington's (2018) original connotation as a reflexive framework has become distorted by corporations using it as a reporting tool for communication purposes. As stressed in the interview with Elkington (2018), managers should ask themselves "how should they best go about holistically incorporating CSR and sustainability into their strategic and operational thinking?". The preceding complements our empirical findings, which point out prioritisation as one of the key concerns in the TBL's integration as a reflexive framework when asking our interviewees what the term 'TBL' embodies from their viewpoint. Moreover, even though the TBL is still used in internal and external reporting efforts, the empirical findings provide

evidence of how GlobalPharma successfully creates an environment where employees can deploy the TBL as a reflexive framework. Most interviewees, but especially those at the operational level, refrain from thinking about the TBL as a reporting tool given that this was shown to carry the risk of losing oneself in numbers. Instead, the greatest strength of the TBL was described by our interviewees as encouraging to think about the relevance of their function in terms of contributing to Corporate Sustainability of GlobalPharma as a whole.

According to the interview with Elkington (2018), the CEO of Germany's Covestro argues that "proper use of the TBL involves, at minimum, progress on two dimensions while the third remains unaffected", thereby, mirroring our empirical finding of showing consideration for all three domains. This complements the argument in the literature for seeing the TBL as a mutually enhancing and holistic whole (Sridhar & Jones, 2013). The empirical material mirrors this stance in arguing that companies might have to find a combination of all three that fits their organisational context. Thereby, our empirical material confirms the call by Marcus, Kurucz and Colbert (2010), and Lehtonen (2004) for the mutual enhancement of the three domains and embracing alternative distribution of value across the three pillars. However, the prevailing assumption among corporations is the believe in a trade-off between profits and social responsibility (Margolis & Walsh, 2003), which reflects the conventional assumption of viewing the three pillars as independent and striving for the ultimate balance (Isil & Hernke, 2017). The empirical findings support the assumption of these two domains being mutually reinforcing as interviewees confirm how profits enable organisations to invest resources in the other pillars. Hence, it can be argued that the trade-offs between the social and financial domain reflect GlobalPharma's philanthropical core of remaining conscious of the organisation's commercial needs while fulfilling its original societal purpose of taking care of the patients. Despite the prevalence of the financial pillar in every interview, our empirical material at multiple occasions implies that the company's objectives should be socially oriented, and that the TBL has the potential to function as a reflexive framework for refocussing the organisational dialogue around the company's purpose of defeating diabetes.

Based on the foregoing, we arguably state that the current trade-offs regarding the financial and environmental domain surpass the true meaning of the organisation's existence as a healthcare provider. Moreover, our interviewees testified how such non-financial incentives are intrinsically motivating as they primarily associate with the mission of improving the lives of patients. There is a high extent of willingness among employees to adopt the TBL as a cognitive

mental attitude, but in practice they face limitations on what they can do. That willingness to act is supported by how they explain the impact of the organisation's ambitions on their personal lives. An example of this is how the Climate Neutrality Initiative lately seemingly draws the attention away from its societal purposes. This initiative goes well beyond the idea of the TBL as a reflexive framework, and therefore, the organisational dialogue shall be refocussed on trade-offs between the social and financial domain in conjunction with the current extensive attention for the environmental pillar. To illustrate, the empirical material shows that interviewees tend to feel torn between the organisation's commercial needs and societal purpose, and how they believe that the recent emergence of the Climate Neutrality Initiative has come to overshadow these domains. Hence, the preceding shows that the theoretical background and empirical findings both embrace the TBL as a reflexive framework that encourages, rather than trivialises, a discussion regarding the organisation's accountability, or Corporate Responsibility. Conforming the aforementioned, we can subscribe to Elkington's (1997) originally intended notion of the TBL as a reflexive framework that scrutinises capitalistic intentions, or as Daly (1990) and Hahn, Figge, Aragón-Correa & Sharma (2010) suggest, an alternative notion of what sustainable growth entails based on our empirical case study. This refined interpretation of the TBL as a bridging concept that clarifies the relationship between Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development is further developed below.

5.2. Corporate Sustainability as a means to Corporate Responsibility

Within the empirical material, we have identified different notions of the TBL that complement the theoretical background of scholars arguing that the TBL is considered a sustainability construct (Alhaddi, 2015). To see how this empirical support connects to the TBL's theoretical notions, we connect the two by specifically discussing our findings in combination with the interpretations from Ebner and Baumgartner (2006), Dahlsrud (2008) and Brown (2012).

Firstly, as an experienced employee in this field, Wendy provides her view of CSR as in line with Ebner and Baumgartner (2006), namely, that CSR is the social strand functioning as a means to the end of becoming a sustainable organisation when combined with the environmental and financial domain. She also confirms how these pillars subsequently flow into the broader level of global Sustainable Development. Similarly, Bjørn's interpretation of

sustainability corresponds with the WCED's (1987) definition of Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, as indicated by Gray and Milne (2004), such reconciliation of the two surpasses system-wide considerations by thinking of sustainability as an organisational concept. Given the reflection of Wendy and Bjørn's broader perspectives in the testimonies of Craig, Pierce, and Isabel among others, we disagree with Dahlsrud's (2008) label of CSR for the European Communities' (2001) definition. Instead, we argue for using Corporate Responsibility as an alternative label for illustrating Ebner and Baumgartner's (2006) explanation of Corporate Sustainability. The reason for using the alternative term Corporate Responsibility is its potential to aid in a more holistic understanding of Corporate Sustainability, and relatedly Sustainable Development, as associated concepts. We agree with Brown (2012) that the term Corporate Responsibility tends to have an overly conceptual focus in the contemporary literature, but we deem our research successful in overcoming this limitation by confirming the potential for empirical integration of Ebner and Baumgartner's (2006) visualisation. Therefore, we opt to use the term Corporate Responsibility as it embodies all pillars of the TBL.

In the theoretical background chapter, we described the main body of literature regarding the TBL as a sustainability construct. However, as outlined above, there are multiple variations on its notion, which over time resulted in unclarity about its precise interpretation. Hence, in an attempt to provide clarification concerning this ambiguity we hereafter describe how the TBL is substantiated within GlobalPharma as a reflexive framework by referring to its associated critiques. This as the theoretical background showed how organisations can only realise the TBL's successful adoption if they acknowledge practical complications, caused by the firm-level sustainability and win-win assumption among others, that are ingrained in the organisational narrative (Goel, 2010).

5.3. Discursive constitution of the TBL as a reflexive framework within GlobalPharma using the 'tree metaphor'

Continuing on the foregoing, this section elaborates on the prevalence of the firm-level sustainability assumption through a first example of how the TBL is discursively produced in practice as a reflexive framework. Following the firm-level sustainability assumption, as presented in the literature review, individually sustainable organisations combined subsequently result in global Sustainable Development. This forms the critical management

perspective to Corporate Responsibility that can be guided by advancing the affiliated dialogue (Welford, 1998; Levy, 1997). The empirical data presents this in thinking about the TBL as a means to an end within the GlobalPharma Way as developed in the previous section, thereby, making the organisation's contributions to Sustainable Development more concrete (Tregidga, Kearins & Milne, 2013). To illustrate the firm-level assumption as part of GlobalPharma's organisational narrative, the 'semiotic control' of the TBL as introduced by Springett (2003) is reflected in using the three trees at the headquarters, being the core of the business, functioning as a metaphor for GlobalPharma's Corporate Responsibility. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue for the meaning embedded in "the metaphors and expressions used by the interviewees, how they moralize with regard to others and justify themselves, their self-presentations in their interaction with the interviewer" (p.82). Hence, the three trees as a metaphor for GlobalPharma's approach to the TBL is arguably resembles the employee's high levels of engagement in contributing to a green future as a topic that lies close to their hearts and minds indicating a holistic view of Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development. In using the metaphor, they show a sign of commitment to becoming a Corporately Responsible organisation while, at the same time, it makes the TBL tangible for both the employees and external stakeholders as a reflexive framework instead of mere image management by using it for more than reporting purposes only. However, for the TBL to be truly a means to Corporate Responsibility its implementation shall also be flexible to contextual modifications, which would contrast these efforts to achieving a uniform perspective towards their TBL.

In the empirical findings, Craig pointed out a two-fold complication of embedding the TBL in affiliate organisations, which embodies a distortion in communication and cultural differences. In other words, there is alignment on a higher level in having the same objectives, but on a lower level there is less integration as national affiliates can decide individually how they accomplish these corporate objectives. The latter presents a certain level of inconclusiveness that deserves to be examined more thoroughly. After reading our report, the reader might subsequently wonder whether GlobalPharma is truly a global company or just a company operating in a global context as queried by Dey and Burns (2010). Viewing the TBL as discursive implies that its use is "always emerging out of the local interpretations and discourses of multiple organisational actors" (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p.402) as was also stressed by Garry. Our Indonesian interviewee Raj represents this argument by mentioning the perspective on the TBL as not being different from 'business-as-usual'. However, this understanding is tricky as it falsely assumes that organisations can adapt to sustainability challenges through minor

improvements to current operations (Isil & Hernke, 2017; Milne, Kearins & Walton, 2006). As a result, the organisations risks losing itself in its political interests in shaping the meaning of Corporate Sustainability, and thereby, obscuring its potential (Tregidga, Milne & Kearins, 2014). Hence, the empirical material arguably shows how, in addition to the executing function, individuals want to be involved in the operationalisation of the TBL as a reflexive framework in their situation. Considering the aforementioned, we argue that our qualitative research provided new insights into how individual personal features stemming from differences in culture and background contribute to shaping the interpretation of organisational ambitions in local environments. However, we see this as an interesting direction for further research given that our empirical material does not allow us to substantiate how general management is in control in detail, and neither did we find such explicit inquiries in the literature.

5.4.   GlobalPharma's business case for sustainability and its reflexive approach to the TBL

The aforementioned reflection on trade-offs brings us to the second critique towards the TBL that we promised to scrutinise, namely, by reflecting on how the narrative regarding GlobalPharma's business case for sustainability connects to the win-win assumption. As mentioned in our literature review, this critique is reflected by the argument of making 'good business sense' in assuming the compatibility of financial objectives with both its social and environmental counterpart (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse & Preuss, 2010; Savitz, 2006). GlobalPharma can then be argued to follow the win-win assumption as both Dey and Burns (2010) and the interviewees point out in their argument of Corporate Responsibility making good business sense.

However, during the analysis of the empirical results, the interviewees frequently resorted to a description of GlobalPharma's business case, which currently revolves around creating synergies between the financial and environmental pillar, whereas the social pillar is less present. This can be explained by the recent focus on the Climate Neutrality Initiative due to societal pressures concerning climate change. To illustrate this point, an interviewee confirmed the prevailing character of the financial pillar when decision-making has to happen in a timely manner, and consequently, the environmental and social aspects are often missed in the decision-making. In other words, the business case of CSR arguably still prevails as the linking

feature in the TBL when aiming for a successful, sustainable, business model remains financial effectiveness. The TBL is then no longer merely a philanthropical thought in which GlobalPharma tries to save the world. In pursuing its sustainability agenda, namely the GlobalPharmaWay, the company makes the TBL explicit in the practice, and therefore, walking a sustainable road to generating profits by targeting each pillar of the TBL. That is why GlobalPharma refers to their code of conduct as the 'GlobalPharma Way' as it resembles their way of doing sustainable and responsible business. The foregoing is traced back to the fact stemming from the empirical data that without the financial pillar the social and environmental pillar within GlobalPharma cannot exist. Nevertheless, as critics argue, such focus results in illusionary sustainability (Isil & Hernke, 2017; Reijnders, 1998; Young & Tilley, 2006; Könnölä & Unruh, 2007) and as illustrated in the literature review the business case thus carries the risk of resulting in a cost focus, and thereby, limiting more altruistic initiatives.

In sum, we argue that GlobalPharma's business case does not illustrate the win-win assumption as GlobalPharma's economic prosperity goes hand in hand with the environmental prosperity. Hence, GlobalPharma currently seemingly disregards the earlier expressed importance of the company's social mission in its sustainability strategy, thereby, contradicting the TBL's notion as a reflexive framework and means to Corporate Responsibility by reflecting on where it can achieve the largest impact. The next section elaborates on these philanthropical responsibilities in discussing how one shall interpret the term value.

5.5.   The meaning of 'value' to the TBL as a reflexive framework

As the third way that the TBL is discursively produced as a reflexive framework within GlobalPharma, this section addresses the role of business ethics within GlobalPharma by connecting the perceptions from our respondents to the contested meaning of 'value' as highlighted in our theoretical background. As Jane and Wendy pointed out in the findings, ethics across certain contexts tends to be denoted in terms of minimum legal obligations when meeting the organisation's commercial needs. Following this risk, one could argue that this is an example where Corporate Responsibility runs into the complication of image management. To illustrate, companies might market certain Corporate Responsibility efforts that are effectively enforced by law as Wendy implies when comparing the practice in China with the

mindset regarding the TBL that prevails in the US. GlobalPharma and similar corporations should then be mindful that they clearly draw a line between sustainability initiatives that are voluntarily adopted, and those having a more regulated character to prevent accusations of impression management when facing cultural discrepancies.

Despite the latter, making claims regarding the larger meaning of business ethics is something we refrain from as our focus is on Elkington's (1997) TBL, and not on Carroll's (1999) pyramid. However, as one of the commonly known definitions of CSR, considering the role of Carroll's terminology in shaping GlobalPharma's notion of the TBL is intriguing given that, for example, Ebner and Baumgartner (2006) describe it as an ethical construct. To illustrate, in her interview, Wendy pointed out GlobalPharma's value-based culture, which Goel (2010) stressed as one of the dominant characteristics of the successful adoption of the TBL. In our literature review, we asked what the meaning of 'value' is. The issue was identified as a lack of common understanding regarding purpose and values resulting in unsuccessful measurement attempts, which also came forward in our empirical material. This is reflected by the interviewees arguing for the need of prioritisation of the social domain. Flower (2015) suggested a wider interpretation than 'value to stakeholders' by encouraging companies and their employees alike to develop reflexive capabilities regarding the societal contributions of their business operations. Following the empirical support, the TBL's originally intended meaning is then, in addition to Elkington's (1997) view, helping established companies re-evaluate, or reflect upon, where they are headed in a unified way in terms of their values. In other words, the TBL functions as a reflexive framework enabling companies to reflect on their sustainability strategy while unifying it with their values, and thereby, staying mindful of why they are in business in the first place.

In sum, we acknowledge that the TBL's role depends on the position of practitioners, but based on the latter we argue that the TBL should be viewed as solely a reflexive framework for employees to interpret the company's values instead of attempting to quantify intangible phenomena in reporting efforts, such as society and environment, which creates rather subjective measurement units. Thereby, we arguably came closer to the underlying meaning of the TBL as a powerful metaphor that has the potential to turn the debates regarding this concept into a concrete, reflexive, framework that helps employees to find the underlying purpose of the organisation's objectives and values in relation to their function (Morgan, 1980; Elkington, 2018).

5.6.   Chapter summary

In this chapter, we created a three-fold typology to categorise the TBL's current state regarding its discursive constitution and relevance to practitioners as a reflexive framework. Thereby, we contributed to a successful pathway towards Corporate Responsibility of contemporary organisations by learning from GlobalPharma's case by revisiting the TBL's originally intended meaning as a thought-provoking framework for deeper thinking regarding the future of capitalism (Elkington, 2018). More specifically, we have described various ways in which the TBL is currently discursively produced by practitioners through the use of metaphors, preserving their business case, their interpretation of value, and consequently, unfolding their perceived reality regarding the TBL. Accordingly, the case of GlobalPharma arguably confirms the TBL's original intended meaning as per Elkington's (1997) pioneering work. As a reminder, this entails corporations condemning the role of capitalism in their contemporary operations by reflecting on, and perhaps critically evaluating, the nature of their business case. GlobalPharma incorporates this with their social and environmental initiatives, which are arguably solely possible due to the capitalistic system of conducting business operations in the 20th century. Thereby, we have reflected on the contribution underlying our empirical findings in arguing that the TBL is most impactful if organisations connotate it as a means to an end, namely, to give substance to CSR as one means that combined with the environmental and financial domain ensures the organisation's sustainability, and consequently, its contribution to Sustainable Development. In other words, the consensus amongst our respondents of how they both perceive and substantiate the TBL is that the organisations should remain mindful of where their core business can have the biggest 'opportunity impact', and thereby, focus their efforts. Relatedly, our research also included a valuation of the complexity that surrounds deploying the TBL in the practice. Instead of following the conception of the TBL as achieving an ideal balance, we rather see the pillars as holistic and interdependent in line with Goel's (2010) and Sridhar and Jones' (2013) perspectives, and adaptable to local contexts. The empirical material confirms these theoretical insights by showing how the exertion of the TBL highly depends on the individuals using it in their specific role and the cultural context that they operate in. Conducting additional empirical qualitative research in this field can aid in a further understanding of the TBL and how it is context-dependent in order to benefit the development of contemporary Corporate Responsibility literature.

6   Conclusion

This thesis aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means for employees to work with the TBL in a practical and local context of a global pharmaceutical company's sustainability strategy. Following the lacking number of empirical researches on the TBL (Alhaddi, 2015), and the extensive quantitative focus that surrounds this concept's use as a reporting tool (Ho & Taylor, 2007), our qualitative case study has been designed to answer the following research question: *how do employees of a global pharmaceutical company perceive and give substance to the TBL approach in a local context?*

6.1.   Empirical findings

During our research, we found that GlobalPharma's employees in their work environment perceive and give substance to the TBL as a reflexive framework rather than a tool for sustainability reporting. Instead of losing ourselves in the endless discussions on ambiguous definitions and quantitative studies of performance indicators for measuring the three pillars of the TBL, we aimed to look at the underlying meaning to practitioners regarding its successful implementation. We have established that sustainability is frequently interpreted from an environmental standpoint, whereas CSR is from a theoretical perspective deemed to encompass the social angle, which our interviewees substantiate using the TBL. Both concepts are reconciled through the broader terminology of Sustainable Development, and therefore, the TBL arguably forms a bridging framework between Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development. Consequently, the outcome of this valuation was that practitioners tend to explicate the TBL as a means to an end, namely, to give substance to CSR as one means that combined with the environmental and financial domain ensures the organisation's sustainability, and consequently, its contribution to Sustainable Development. The following empirical findings elaborate the main practical complications that practitioners expressed in deploying this connotation, and thereby, showing how they substantiate the TBL as a reflexive framework.

First, this thesis explained the importance of understanding the TBL's relevance among GlobalPharma's employees as a reflexive framework. Their social realities were targeted through an in-depth study of the interviewees' perceived lifeworlds by showing how the

existing dominant perspectives within GlobalPharma are challenged through internal conceptions. We identified an alignment regarding the hierarchy of the pillars at the corporate level where the economic pillar still undeniably dominates in decision-making as GlobalPharma remains a commercial business. Additionally, the social pillar has an important role through the organisation's purpose of caring for patients by defeating diabetes, which implies a level of intrinsic motivation that confirms the TBL's facet of being a mindset. However, due to the recent shift from a social to an environmental focus, the social aspect is less present when interviewees talk about synergies following the late Climate Neutrality Initiative. This balance makes our argument that the TBL requires all three domains be it in a larger or lesser extent.

Secondly, and relatedly, what we found to be the foremost struggle companies face in the TBL's implementation is how to stick to their authentic purpose, and achieve consensus thereon, throughout the organisation. We identified distortion of the originally intended meaning of TBL as a reflexive framework as a risk since it can draw attention away from the truly impactful initiatives by resorting to deploying the TBL for solely communication purposes. The examples reflect this in that a corporate initiative, for example the Climate Neutrality Initiative, should not overshadow the core of the business, which is, has been, and shall always remain the social objective of serving the patient. If too much attention is paid in communication on such individual sustainability initiatives, companies risk returning to its use for sustainability reporting, and thereby, disregarding its potential as a reflexive framework resulting in accusations of impression management.

Finally, the TBL and its all-encompassing counterpart, the GlobalPharma Way, form the core of the business in attempting to achieve successful integration of the TBL as a reflexive framework across local contexts. We have especially identified a distinction between Southern-American, Southern-European, Northern-European, and Northern-American cultures. After reading our report, the reader might subsequently wonder whether GlobalPharma is a global company or a company operating in a global context (Dey & Burns, 2010). The problem seemingly is that the current strategy is too centralised causing issues for the integration of its strong, prominent, values on a local level. Nevertheless, employees still attach value to a top-down approach, but they want a framework of the central strategy which can be exercised on a decentral level. Hence, despite GlobalPharma's efforts to achieve a homogeneous culture, it is basically about finding a balance between central and decentral.

Nevertheless, given the overall predominantly positive picture that we have seen emerging throughout GlobalPharma's approach to governing Corporate Sustainability through the TBL, their case can be deemed promising in discovering the TBL's potential as a reflexive framework to lead the way towards global Sustainable Development. More specifically, GlobalPharma can guide best practices regarding Corporate Responsibility in the pharmaceutical industry and society at large by carrying out and sharing knowledge on its reflexive approach to the TBL, and thereby, providing a frontrunning example and inspiration for other corporations on how to embrace Elkington's (2018) originally intended meaning of the TBL.

6.2.   Theoretical contributions

Our current research contributes to the contemporary literature on Corporate Responsibility in several ways. First, by connecting the interviewees' perceptions to the different interpretations in the literature we found that there is empirical evidence for the TBL as a reflexive framework for evaluating sustainable business practices rather than a reporting tool. Hereby, our thesis supports the Corporate Responsibility literature in the notion of the TBL as a sustainability-related construct (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006; Alhaddi, 2015), but disagrees with the concept's contemporary use as a mere reporting tool that deploys the concept for marketing and image management purposes (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Milne & Gray, 2013). The latter supports Elkington's (2018) call for returning to his originally intended meaning of the TBL, namely, scrutinising the future of capitalism. Our resulting empirical argument for the hybrid consideration of each pillar of the TBL is aligned with main scholars in the field arguing the need for their interdependence (Marcus, Kurucz, & Colbert, 2010; Lehtonen, 2004).

Secondly, conducting a study regarding the TBL within GlobalPharma analysing the TBL's deployment in the practice contributes to the theoretical debates. More specifically, building on our theoretical and methodological framework, we established this company as forming an especially strong case for studying the TBL since GlobalPharma was the first company in which the TBL was extensively applied and studied (Dey & Burns, 2010). Moreover, it contributes to the Corporate Responsibility literature by acknowledging the complexities that the TBL faces when applied into practice, and thereby, answering to Alhaddi's (2015) call for qualitative, empirical, inquiries on the relevance of the TBL's contemporary manifestation in organisations. Finally, our research makes the TBL more tangible as it shows how practitioners deploy it instead of sticking to rather theoretical debates. The tangibility of the TBL touches upon the aforementioned controversy around the TBL of whether it is a framework or a reporting tool.

Thirdly, we identified how the perception of the TBL as either a reflexive framework or reporting tool is inherent to the practitioner's role. For example, our study demonstrates that people in Indonesia require targeted directives, whereas employees in the US attach more value to guidelines that are open to local interpretations. Hence, it depends on the practitioner's situation how they substantiate the TBL as a reflexive framework. Consequently, the current study contributes to the Corporate Responsibility literature by expounding on the contextual complexities of embedding the TBL in an organisation's global operations when conducting business across many diverse local contexts. We identified this as a new contribution that we have not come across in the Corporate Responsibility literature, but developed as a new insight that builds on Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) call for contextualisation in qualitative research, and thereby, substantiating the validity of our empirical findings.

6.3.   Limitations

We believe that in conducting this inquiry we have been able to generate new insights that are beneficial to practitioners in giving substance to the TBL as a reflexive framework in their situation. Nevertheless, we also realise that the limited scope of our investigation required us to resort to a relatively small sample of employees, which came with certain limitations. While already discussed in the methodology, it pays off to consider their influence on the research in retrospect. For example, we reflected on the generalisability of the results where we followed Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) suggestion for contextualisation resulting in our finding to adjust the TBL to local contexts rather than assuming a universal best practice. Another potential limitation is the lack of observations. However, this is a potential for further research when aiming to achieve representational truth through ethnographic studies as discussed in our critical reflection, which lies beyond our scope.

6.4.   Further research

Many of the limitations were related to the methodology, but there were also implied opportunities for further research that will be elaborated upon below. First, we acknowledge that the limited scope of our research required us to make a choice within the literature. We specifically and consciously selected the mainstream perspectives and authors in the field to create a framework in which we could place our findings regarding the contemporary state of the TBL as suggested by Elkington (2018). One resulting direction for further research is to shift the focus of the current inquiry to the literature on Integrated Reporting, which is an

alternative contemporary reporting framework that has a prominent role within GlobalPharma's approach to communicating its efforts. This would have added a layer to the theoretical background on contemporary sustainability reporting literature. However, given the large number of publications on sustainability reporting and its contested nature, we deemed an individual focus on employee perceptions as a refreshing addition to existing perspectives. Nevertheless, a comparative study of these two perspectives would form a potential direction for additional studies to see if it might influence the individual perceptions of the TBL's adoption as a reflexive framework that we found.

As aforementioned, our foremost limitation was the scope, which is reflected in our respondent base of thirteen interviewees and the timespan of the study being three months. Before generating a practical frame of reference, the nascent state of empirical research in this field needs to be bridged by looking into the heads and hearts of the individuals working with the TBL. Hence, additional qualitative investigations are vowed for to either confirm or refute the current study's empirical findings. An alternative way to test our material is to shift the contextual focus of the investigation to either a specified or different organisational context. To specify, this research might be reproduced at a different organisation or focussed around a single department within GlobalPharma. The company has an interesting ownership structure that explains, when analysed, the synergy between the social and financial elements of the TBL. However, this was purposefully excluded from our scope as it would risk drawing considerable attention to the corporate financial versus corporate social performance debate while the empirical material does not allow us to make any far-reaching conclusions on this debate based on our data (Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

6.5.   Practical implications

This final section highlights the potential practical implications of the study. Firstly, we believe that our thesis can aid practitioners in establishing an enhanced level of awareness on the TBL's role in helping organisations contribute to Sustainable Development. As reflected in the literature review, some authors argue that the TBL is a sustainability-related construct (Alhaddi, 2015), whereas others look at it as a sustainability reporting tool (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Milne & Gray, 2013). However, as reflected in our empirical argumentation, such communication perspectives are restrictive of the TBL's full potential as a reflexive framework. Instead, we propose in line with our interviewees to encourage organisational dialogues regarding the TBL's potential in a constructive contemporary outlook on Corporate

Responsibility by embedding the TBL in sustainability strategy as a means to an end. Hence, in providing new insights on the TBL's contemporary practical relevance, we aspire to contribute to a refined understanding of the TBL by providing inspiration and advice for actors on its integration within sustainability strategy as a reflexive framework.

After finishing this research, we deem the TBL a successful tool for practitioners to engage in a conversation on the contemporary relevance of Corporate Responsibility and scrutinising the future of capitalism with colleagues, leadership, management, and customers. This will contribute to preventing the TBL from the negative interpretation as a fashionable concept that facilitates greenwashing, but instead use it as something that is naturally embedded in the organisation's DNA. Thereby, the role of the TBL in contemporary organisations can turn into a reflexive framework for critical examination of sustainable business operations in comparison to the companies' values. Accordingly, we consider our thesis' second implication to be supporting the seemingly critical stance of respondents in their answers, namely, some employees subscribe their intrinsic motivation to the TBL whereas others are directed by a top-down approach.

Based on the perception of the TBL as a means to Corporate Responsibility, driven by the organisation's social purpose that dominated our empirical material, there is indeed a highly aligned and purpose-driven culture. Such strong integration, however, further increases the need for reflective thinking (i.e. considering several alternative positions to ensure more informed choices (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016)). What we noticed in the communication is that the natural adoption of the organisational narrative tends to be presented as a taken-for-granted assumptions resulting in a consequent message being transferred to external audiences. Nevertheless, the risk is that how employees speak about GlobalPharma's purpose might be generally accepted within the organisation but might result in an ambiguous understanding among external stakeholders creating a level of scepticism that defies the TBL's potential.

Finally, as also mentioned in the critical reflections of our methodology, there is an unequal distribution between the different consulted contexts whereas other locations could only be accounted for on a secondary note. To establish how our empirical findings hold up in a specific situation, it might subsequently be worthwhile to invest resources in a further exploration of these contextual discrepancies as this thesis was focussed on the approach of GlobalPharma as an entity. As reflected in the findings, practitioners can be supported in accounting for the impact on their functions and teams by recognising the existence of these differentiations.

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Appendix A - Interview guide

After a brief introduction of both ourselves and our research, we started the conversation with questions on the interviewee's background and knowledge on the TBL before narrowing down to their individual experience of working with this in GlobalPharma.

Project overview

Our research is focussed on investigating the perception of the development of the TBL within GlobalPharma, thereby focussing specifically on the relevance of working with the TBL to achieve an integrated approach towards Sustainable Development.

Pre-interview

Research information

Confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the interviewee

Public accessibility of the thesis

Permission to record the interview?

How much time do you have?

Any questions prior to the interview?

Background and context (± 5 minutes)

1. Could you introduce yourself?
    a. How long have you been working in the industry and at GlobalPharma?
    b. What is your current function? What are your main responsibilities?

Definition and understanding of TBL (± 15 minutes, aim: to understand the interviewee's individual view and understanding of the Trible Bottom Line)

2. What is your understanding of sustainability and CSR?
    a. I have understood that you work a lot with the TBL in this organisation. Are you familiar with this concept?
        i. If yes, to what extent?
            1. How did you acquire this knowledge of the TBL?
            2. Did you also receive any training regarding the TBL?

        ii.   If no, do you have any ideas about sustainability or different types of Corporate Responsibility?

            1. How would you relate profitability to sustainability?

            2. Do you see synergies between profitability and sustainability?

        iii.   Do you see synergies between the financial and social aspects of the TBL?

Experience of working with the TBL (±15 minutes, aim: the experience of the individual interviewee by having him/her reflect on how they work with the TBL in GlobalPharma)

3. Do you see the TBL reflected in your daily tasks?
   a. How do you experience working with the Triple Bottom Line in practice?
   b. What does the TBL mean for you as an employee?
   c. How is the interaction between your personal values and the values of the company?

Trade-offs and tensions regarding the TBL (±15 minutes, aim: to gain insight into the practical alignment of the different pillars within the organisation)

4. Are there any social, environmental, and financial commitments reflected in your daily tasks?
   a. How do you balance these commitments?
   b. We have been reading an article written on GlobalPharma and its way of management noticing an emphasis on the social and environmental commitments. Do you consider people and planet as important as profit?
5. Are there any challenges regarding the TBL that you experience while working in your position?
   a. Can you name a specific area in your division where you foresee having trouble with the integration of these concepts?

Integrated approach and full alignment (±10 minutes, aim: to explore the alignment or lack thereof between the claimed organisational strategy in terms of the TBL and the practical experience of the individual)

6. What connection do you see between the TBL and the GlobalPharma way of management?
   a. How do you work across business units to fully integrate this strategy?

        i. Do you see any cultural barriers?

        ii.   Can you think of any cultural features that have specifically contributed to the development of the TBL within GlobalPharma?

Final question

Is there anything else that you would like to add to what we discussed or any general comments?

In addition to the above themes and associated questions the below follow-up questions have been used to elaborate on each topic in order to reach a deeper level of insight:

- So earlier in the interview, you said […]. How does this relate to what you have just said?
- Can you elaborate on …?
- Could you specify …?
- Have you experienced this yourself?
- How did that make you feel?
- How did you experience it?
- What did you do?
- What do you think about it?
- What happened then?

Moreover, asking these questions allowed us to at the same time briefly summarise the answers of the interviewee in order to verify our understanding of their responses. On ending the interview, we asked for any additional comments, and if potential follow-up through e-mail is appreciated. This frequently helped the interviewees to think of additional interesting information.

Appendix B - Characteristics of the TBL

In her research, Goel (2010, p.33) specifically outlines that "organisations which have successfully driven change as a result of TBL reporting have identified the following benefits":

1. Embedding sound corporate governance and ethics systems throughout all levels of an organisation.

2. TBL helps ensure a values-driven culture is integrated at all levels.

3. Improved management of risk through enhanced management systems and performance monitoring.

4. Formalising and enhancing communication with key stakeholders such as the finance sector, suppliers, community, and customers.

5. Attracting and retaining competent staff by demonstrating an organisation is focused on values and its long-term existence.

6. Ability to benchmark performance both within industries and across industries.

7. There is growing evidence to suggest that over time these benefits do contribute to the increased market value of an organisation.

Given the structure of this list of characteristics of the TBL that Goel (2010) provides, and the fact that her research is one of the few empirically focussed inquiries that we came across, we have been inspired by the above-mentioned list in the selection and structure of our empirical findings. Despite these characteristics all playing a role in our study, there was a limited focus on number three and six as they were deemed of secondary relevance to the scope of our research. Accordingly, these were not awarded an individual section in the empirical findings chapter.