

The Durability Paradox: LEGO's Billion-Brick Dilemma

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Teaching Plan

The following teaching note is designed to support educators in presenting the LEGO: The Durability Paradox case. This case is intended for use in corporate brand management or sustainability strategy courses to illustrate the complexities of transitioning a brand from a linear to a circular economy model. These notes provide a structured roadmap for a 45-minute classroom session, including learning objectives, theoretical linkages, and a board plan for organizing student discussion. The teacher is encouraged to act as a facilitator, guiding students through the tension between maintaining a “new brick” growth engine and managing an indestructible “shadow inventory” of over 10 billion bricks produced annually.

Case Synopsis

For over 60 years, the LEGO Group has built a global empire on the “System of Play”, utilizing petroleum-based ABS plastic to create bricks famous for their “clutch power” and extreme durability. However, this legendary quality has created a Durability Paradox: LEGO bricks are virtually indestructible, persisting in the environment for 100 to 1,300 years. This permanence results in a massive idle inventory in households, which creates a robust secondary market that appreciates at an average of 11% annually, directly competing with and potentially cannibalizing the sale of new products.

In 2019, LEGO attempted to close the loop through two key strategic actions: launching LEGO Replay, a take-back pilot program to redistribute used bricks, and acquiring BrickLink, the world’s largest digital secondary marketplace. While Replay enhances CSR, it remains an expensive cost center due to a reverse logistics nightmare involving manual sorting and cleaning. Meanwhile, BrickLink acts as a strategic data engine to manage cannibalization risk but does not yet solve the underlying material crisis of virgin plastic dependency. By 2024, LEGO faces a profitable deadlock: its linear sales remain the primary engine, funding circular experiments that have yet to achieve a standardized, systemic solution to the material wall. This leads to the case questions:

“Should the LEGO Group continue its current circular efforts as well as the return schemes?”

Learning Objectives

This case study provides insight into a variety of topics, such as sustainable practices within corporations and creative ways companies can innovate their business models' ability to remain circular, as well as how brands adapt to material limitations. After completion of this learning experience, the target audience should accomplish certain learning objectives. Among the primary goals of the instructor and facilitator is to explain and facilitate a discussion evaluating the durability paradox. A second major goal of the instructor/facilitator will be to assist each participant in identifying the

relationships between their line of thought and the theoretical frameworks presented: Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix, Triple Bottom Line and Circular Business Model Innovation Theory. The final objective of the instructor/facilitator is to help each participant apply the theory to similar corporate situations. For example, participants will evaluate the strategic alternatives between implementation of physical take-back systems and use of secondary market platforms; they will assess the extent to which the predicted cannibalization risk will remain high in a circular marketplace; and they will create viable partnerships for ecosystem development to reconfigure complex supply chain barriers.

Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix

This case offers an opportunity to use the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM) (Urde & Greyser, 2016) to help students understand how a long-established corporate brand deals with strategic change and paradox. In line with Urde (2021)'s view that a brand is fundamentally a promise that must be kept over time to build trust, LEGO's situation raises the question of whether the company is still "keeping its promise" when its historic strengths (durability, plastic precision, crossgenerational compatibility) have become environmental liabilities.

Urde (2021) describes a brand as a promise supported by a clear positioning and an earned reputation for keeping that promise. A strong corporate brand remains true to its purpose and core values even as circumstances change. In LEGO's case, the promise has long been centred on high-quality play, creativity, learning, and products that can be passed down through generations. Extreme durability and the "System of Play" are not marginal features; they are central to LEGO's brand core.

The "Durability Paradox" challenges this promise from a new angle. The very features that once embodied care and responsibility towards children (safety, longevity, compatibility) now contribute to large volumes of nonbiodegradable plastic that may persist for centuries. At the same time, LEGO has committed to climate and circularity goals and presents itself as a responsible, forward-looking company. The tension between these elements makes LEGO an ideal case for CBIRM, because the framework explicitly connects:

- The inside-out perspective of corporate brand identity (purpose, values, competences, expression, positioning)
- The outside-in perspective of reputation among different stakeholders and the role of communication

Using CBIRM allows students to examine how LEGO's intended identity interacts with evolving stakeholder perceptions and to identify where misalignments emerge as the company experiments with circular initiatives such as LEGO Replay and the acquisition of BrickLink.

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) by Urde (2013) provides the foundational structure for analyzing LEGO's internal brand architecture (**Figure 1**). This model shows how all nine identity elements interrelate around a coherent brand core, creating mutual reinforcement between strategic, operational, and relational

dimensions. **Figure 1** maps LEGO's identity elements, with durability anchoring both its engineering competences and value proposition.

VALUE PROPOSITION Creative, high-quality play experiences that foster learning and imagination for children (and adults) worldwide, built on an endlessly re-combinable system of bricks.	RELATIONSHIPS Long-term, trust-based relationships with children, parents, educators, and adult fans; community and co-creation are central to the brand.	POSITION Global leader in high-quality, educational play; a trusted, family-friendly brand rather than a low-cost toy maker; increasingly positioned as a responsible and sustainable company.
EXPRESSION Iconic stud-and-tube plastic bricks, bright colours, themed sets, Minifigures, LEGOLAND parks, and digital content all expressing creativity and fun.	IDENTITY CORE “Only the best is good enough”; safe, high-quality, durable products; creativity, imagination, learning-through-play; responsibility for children’s well-being and future.	PERSONALITY Playful, imaginative, optimistic, curious and caring; a trustworthy and child-centric personality that invites experimentation and building together.
MISSION & VISION Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow; enable meaningful, creative play that supports children’s learning and development.	CULTURE Scandinavian, design-driven culture emphasising craftsmanship, long-term orientation, responsibility, and continuous improvement (“only the best is good enough”).	COMPETENCES Precision engineering of ABS bricks with clutch power, System of Play (cross-generational compatibility), storytelling and IP collaboration, community and platform capabilities.

Figure 1: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013) applied to the LEGO case

To understand stakeholder reactions to LEGO's sustainability transition, the analysis extends to the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM) (**Figure 2**). This managerial tool connects LEGO's intended identity with external reputation realities, making visible the tension between internal promises and stakeholder perceptions. The CBIRM reveals where durability, once universally admired, now creates identity-reputation friction.

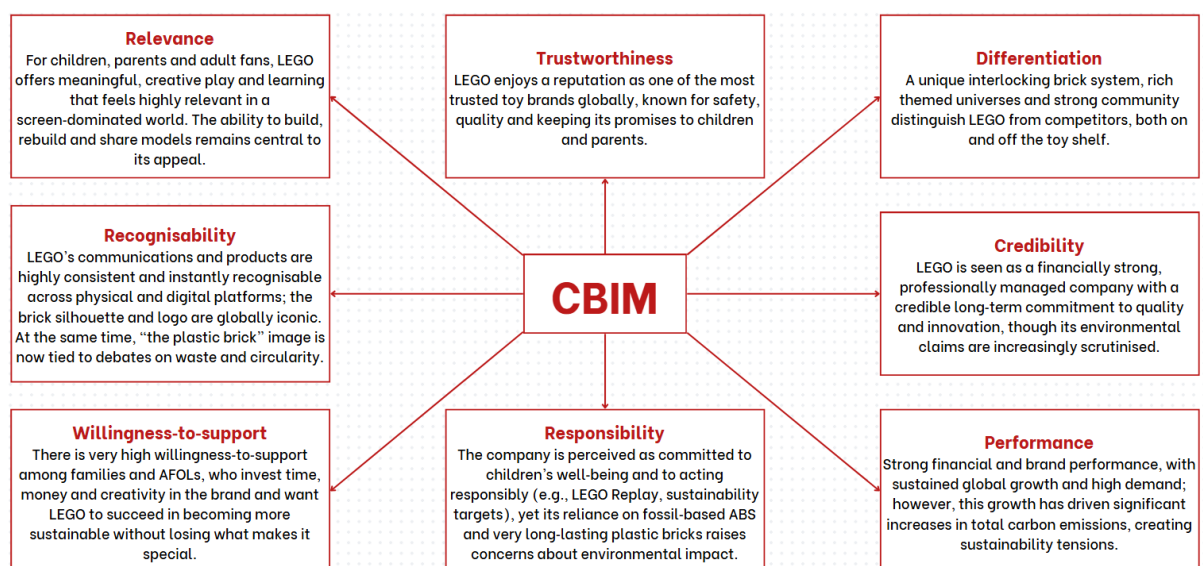


Figure 2: Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016) applied to the LEGO case

Applying both matrices to LEGO's Durability Paradox uncovers specific elements under maximum strain from the shift between linear growth and circular ambitions.

The brand core and responsibility dimensions bear the heaviest pressure. LEGO's promise of quality, safety, and intergenerational durability once perfectly aligned with parental values investing in toys that endure rather than disposable plastic. Today, however, this same permanence undermines responsibility perceptions as stakeholders recognize that every brick produced remains in existence, creating massive environmental persistence. Parents who once saw durable bricks as evidence of responsible spending now question whether LEGO bears responsibility for the planetary footprint of its “forever toys”.

Competences and credibility also reveal critical tension. LEGO's world-class engineering created the stud-and-tube system that maintains clutch power across decades, establishing unmatched technical credibility. Yet failed material experiments (rPET bricks abandoned due to higher lifecycle emissions) and slow substitution of fossil ABS expose limits to this competence when applied to sustainability. Stakeholders wonder whether LEGO's engineering rigor serves environmental innovation as effectively as it serves play performance.

Finally, relationships with adult fans and collectors add complexity. BrickLink's acquisition aims to deepen community partnerships, yet some perceive it as corporate control over a fan-driven resale ecosystem. This tension between co-creation ideals and marketplace realities tests whether LEGO can maintain authentic relationships while addressing cannibalization risks from its own durable products.

Triple Bottom Line - TBL

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework was invented by Elkington (1994); therefore, it is one of the primary analytical tools utilized for this case in order to encourage the audience to look for alternatives to profit maximization. The TBL framework allows for a systematic way to analyze the sustainability transition from a more holistic perspective across three interconnected criteria: Profit (P), Planet (PR), and People (PE).

Despite companies' ongoing transition towards a sustainable system, there remains a significant amount of trade-offs within the Planet (PR) dimension. For example, the high-profile failure with the rPET prototype demonstrates that efforts to decrease reliance on virgin plastic at the prototype development phase could lead to increased carbon emissions, as it consumes a large amount of energy to process and create rPET (Milne, 2023). The continuing issue with the environment related material innovation is the dilemma with circularity through take-back programs; while these take-back programs can prevent plastic from becoming exterior to the system, the reverse logistics of take-back programs could create a heavy environmental burden due to excessive Scope 3 emissions related to transportation (LEGO, 2023a).

As a huge financial burden on the green transition, the TBL clearly illustrates how take-back programs provide only burdening cost centers due to the labor-intensive sorting and sanitizing of the bricks. In contrast, the digital secondary market acts as a

significant profit center through monetizing large amounts of data without incurring all the overhead of logistics associated with used bricks (LEGO, 2019).

The analysis of the People aspect allows the audience to explore social equity and brand equity. Take-back programs generate significant social value through donations of bricks to disadvantaged children, thus deeply supporting the core educational purpose of the LEGO brand. In contrast to this, the digital secondary marketplace provides additional support for the adult LEGO fanbase, supporting loyalty to the LEGO brand.

From the TBL perspective, the facilitator can create awareness of the alignment of the three pillars (Profit, People, Planet) that exist within the corporate context created by the LEGO Group. The group is consistently utilizing the significant revenues from their traditional linear business model (manufacturing and selling new plastic bricks) to financially support their acclaimed CSR initiatives that are focused on social improvement, while the environmental aspect has yet to be addressed adequately (see **Figure 3**).

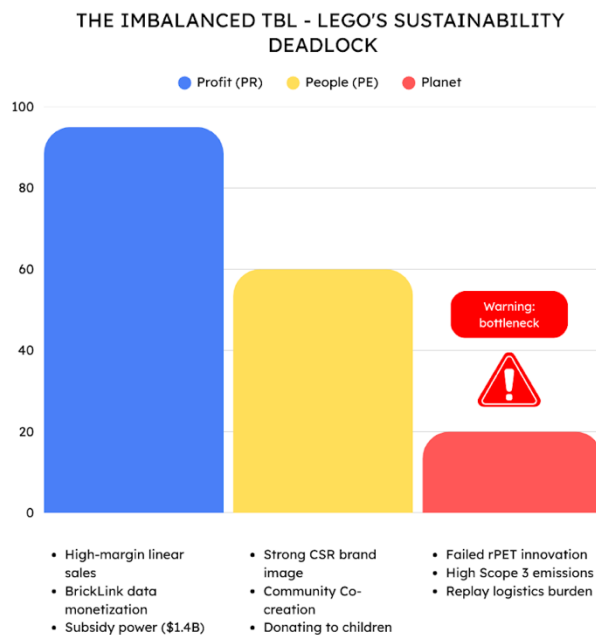


Figure 3: The Imbalance The Bottom Line (TBL) - LEGO's Sustainability Deadlock

Circular Business Model Innovation - CBMI

The Circular Business Model Innovation (CBMI) framework developed by Antikainen and Valkokari (2016) is used in this teaching note to decode the differences in how LEGO Replay and BrickLink operate. This theoretical model is important because it extends beyond the micro perspective of a single company and shows that circular innovation cannot be achieved without a collaborative business ecosystem and value co-creation. This perspective is the analytical key for understanding why LEGO is having so much difficulty on the physical side of its business and is thriving on the digital secondary market.

Antikainen and Valkokari (2016) have identified another major impediment to CBMI, which is designing and integrating reverse logistics networks. In applying this to Action 1 (LEGO Replay), it highlights a systemic operational failure. LEGO Replay does not have an integrated and closed-loop logistics ecosystem, as it relies on multiple, separate parcel deliveries from customers, resulting in high delivery costs and inefficiencies. The framework will help the audience see that unless all of the logistics partners work together in synchronizing their networks, physical take-back programs create circular costs instead of circular value and participants will not be tricked by the attractive, yet misrepresenting, CSR overture of the program.

In relation to the last point, CBMI can be used to assess Action 2 (the establishment and use of BrickLink), and this shows how clever LEGO's digital strategy is. The CBMI framework states that in a circular economy, a company's value is not only derived from the company itself but also from the user network and other stakeholders (Antikainen and Valkokari, 2016). By retaining BrickLink's peer-to-peer design, LEGO created an environment for overall ecosystem-level co-creation (see **Figure 4**). LEGO essentially outsourced the entire cumbersome process of performing reverse logistics (sorting, cleaning, packaging, and shipping of used bricks) to the AFOL community. By acting as the platform “Orchestrator” for BrickLink, LEGO was able to model value extraction through market data and transaction value without ever touching a used brick.

CBMI also addresses how to transition consumer behavior from ownership to sharing and reuse. As evidenced by the impressive growth and turnover of BrickLink, the secondary market of these same long-lasting bricks is mature. However, from this point forward, CBMI also illustrates LEGO's strategic blindness with its digital circular business model; while protecting profit margins with the digital circular business model, it also experiences significant risk from cannibalization. By creating a large, cost-effective marketplace for used bricks, they have created a new shadow competitor to their own linear business and how they sell new plastic sets.

To summarize, the use of the framework for Circular Business Model Innovation (CBMI) developed by Antikainen and Valkokari allows the case audience to have a 'macro' view of the paradoxes associated with circular innovation. In this regard, circular innovation is not only about material science; it also constitutes a significant transformation of the entire value chain.

Currently, LEGO is at a 'managed deadlock' phase because they have yet to be able to operate in their physical ecosystem, which is necessary to develop initiatives where LEGO Replay is going to be successful. They have also developed their digital ecosystem (BrickLink) and are therefore able to manage their financial risk.

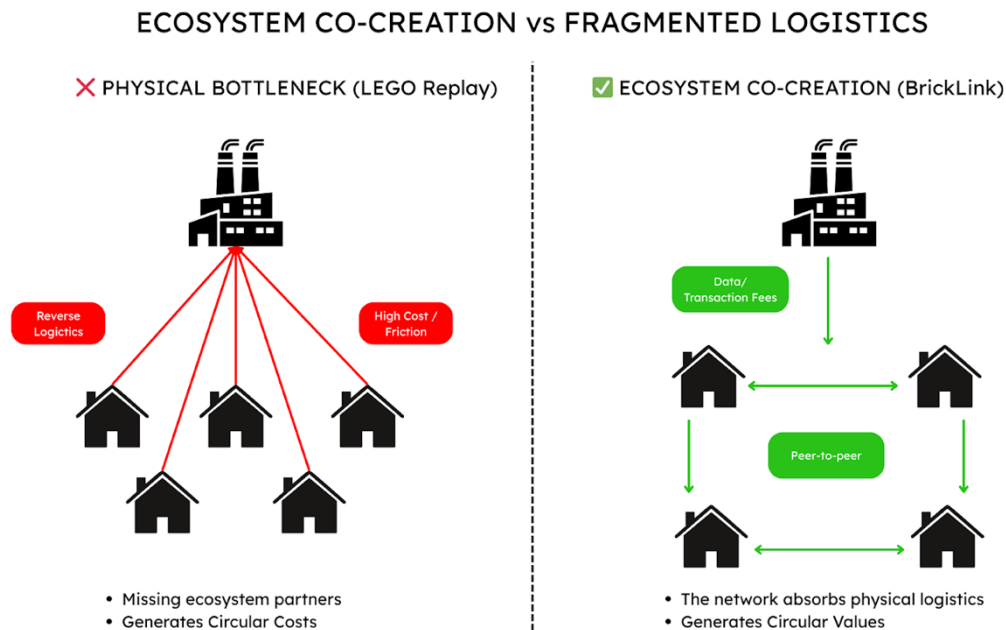


Figure 4: Ecosystem Co-creation versus Fragmented Logistics

Key Learning Objectives

This case builds progressively through Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), taking students from basic comprehension of LEGO's business challenge to higher-order strategic synthesis and evaluation. The following table maps learning objectives to taxonomic levels:

Bloom Level	Learning Objective	Case Application
Remember	Recall core business concepts and LEGO facts	Identify key elements: Durability Paradox (bricks persist 100–1,300 years), 98% Scope 3 emissions from supply chain, shadow inventory from cross-generational compatibility, linear "Make-Sell-Play" vs circular initiatives (Replay take-back, BrickLink resale).
Understand	Explain LEGO's strategic tensions and environmental impact	Articulate why durability was once a parenting virtue but now creates cannibalization risk and environmental persistence; differentiate physical circular challenges (reverse logistics costs) from digital opportunities (secondary market data).
Apply	Use analytical frameworks to structure LEGO's challenges	Populate CBIRM matrices with brand elements, score Replay/BrickLink on TBL dimensions, classify circular initiatives via CBMI ecosystems to diagnose specific tensions.

Analyze	Diagnose root causes of LEGO's strategic paradox	Break down identity-reputation gaps (CBIRM), TBL trade-offs (rPET emissions vs performance), CBMI barriers (logistics vs platform orchestration), and cannibalization risks from durable products.
Evaluate	Critique competing strategic paths for LEGO	Judge "new brick growth" vs "circular acceleration": assess brand coherence (CBIRM), sustainability balance (TBL), ecosystem viability (CBMI), and long-term viability despite short-term trade-offs.
Create	Propose forward-looking strategic alternatives to solve the ongoing impasse.	Final decision making on whether to keep the circular business model and the return schemes.

Table 1: Key Learning Objectives

Discussion Questions

To steer the discussion's direction toward the conclusion phase effectively, a protocol for asking questions should follow a structured process and follow through with question techniques from a polarizing primary dilemma into a theory and research-driven series of responses.

Main questions:

- *Should the LEGO Group continue its current circular efforts, as well as the return schemes?*

Follow-up questions:

- If yes, how can the company restructure these initiatives to resolve the significant logistical barriers to continued operations (LEGO Replay) and minimize the risk of cannibalizing core sales channels (BrickLink)?
- If no, what other strategy should the board select to solve the “Durability Paradox”?
- What measurement processes or mathematical tools can be used by corporate decision-makers?
- How can we eliminate the potential that an expanding digital secondary market will undermine the sales potential of newly manufactured linear sets?
- If the class votes to disband these circular programs, what would the immediate impact be on the corporate brand identity matrix (where “Inspire and Develop the Builders of Tomorrow” is the corporate brand promise)?

- Who are some of the external ecosystem partners (e.g., global retailers, major logistics companies) that we can work with to help develop more cost-effective physical networks, as opposed to continuing to burden our own reverse logistics costs?

Pre-Presentation Phase:

Target audience: Master's students in Strategy, Marketing, Sustainability, or Corporate Branding courses.

Pre-reading assignment (3-5 hours total):

Students receive the written case "The Durability Paradox: LEGO's Billion-Brick Dilemma" alongside three mandatory supplementary readings:

- Urde & Greyser (2016) on the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM)
- Elkington (1994) introducing the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)
- Antikainen & Valkokari (2016) on Circular Business Model Innovation (CBMI).

These readings provide the analytical foundation for dissecting LEGO's strategic tensions.

Pre-class preparation (submit 24 hours before class):

- **Individual task:** Write a 1-page executive summary answering: "Should LEGO prioritize new brick growth or accelerate circular initiatives? Why?" This activates students' initial strategic thinking and surfaces common misconceptions.
- **Team task (3-4 students per team):** Populate CBIRM **Figure 1** (Corporate Brand Identity Matrix) with LEGO elements and identify 2-3 most vulnerable reputation elements from **Figure 2**. Submit via Canvas for teacher review.

Pre-class video (10 minutes):

Students watch LEGO's official sustainability video showcasing BrickLink, LEGO Replay take-back and material experiments, noting one tension between the messaging and case facts (e.g., rPET prototype failure despite green promises).

Instructor preparation:

Print CBIRM worksheets (**Figures 1 & 2**), prepare TBL and CBMI blank templates, test video clips (LEGO Replay logistics demo, BrickLink marketplace walkthrough), and review submitted pre-work to identify common themes and misconceptions for class discussion.

Introduction Phase:

When introducing the 45-minute session to students, begin with a 60-second icebreaker. The teacher can, for example, ask the students to raise their hand if they have ever built a LEGO set or still have their childhood bricks stored at home. This is done to break any possible tension or nervousness that might exist in the room and introduces the topic of product longevity in a smooth way by creating a relaxed conversation with the audience. When almost all hands go up, then say: “That is exactly the strategic problem we are discussing today”.

After that, the teacher can transition within 45 seconds by posing the paradox-revealing question: “Did anyone realize those same indestructible bricks can persist in ocean environments for 100 to 1,300 years?” This diagnostic inquiry quickly reveals varying baseline knowledge levels across the room, informs the real-time pacing decisions within the compressed timeframe, and generates immediate cognitive tension between LEGO's beloved nostalgic brand image and its environmental reality that sets up the core discussion. With these insights gathered, advance to the prepared slides about the case study. The introduction should clearly position the session as a board-level strategic discussion. Students should be told that they are now acting as executive decision-makers who must determine whether LEGO should scale, restructure, or rethink its circular strategy.

Discussion Phase:

The facilitator should remind participants to play the role of board members for this discussion phase. This illustrates that the phase should be starting and that participants should be getting into execution mode. The next step is to repeat the major question of the case. The facilitator should again ask if everyone understands the durability paradox and the constraints associated with it, offering clarification to participants if needed.

The facilitator should be the mediator in the discussion among the participants of the case and be impartial, open, and accepting of each strategic opinion offered by the participants. In order to facilitate free-flowing discussion among the participants, the facilitator can use the providing question from above to provoke discussion, especially if the participants seem skewed toward one side of the circularity dilemma.

The whiteboard should be used by the facilitator during discussion in order to organize the responses given and to visually categorize the logistical issues of physical circularity and the risks of cannibalization that would arise due to digital circularity. The facilitator must ensure that each participant has a chance to comment. This may mean agreeing that participants will raise their hands before speaking or creating several separate advisory committees that each present their alternatives one after the other. Diversity in opinions is critical to creating an audience that feels engaged. At the conclusion of the discussion, the facilitator will summarize what has been discussed by highlighting the key strategic talking points and the most viable operational restructurings the participants offered.

Conclusion Phase:

In the conclusion phase, the facilitator presented the actual management decisions taken by the executive board of directors of the corporation. The facilitator indicated to the class that the corporate executive board of directors decided to implement a “managed deadlock” approach.

The facilitator explained that the Executive Board did not try to find a perfect environmental solution but funded existing programs. The corporation treats all physical take-back programs as highly regulated, controlled “cost centers”, incurring financial losses to preserve the company's brand equity without jeopardizing its core business operations. Additionally, the corporation has successfully created a monopoly on the digital secondary market (to manipulate information to monetize its value).

The facilitator concluded the session by contrasting each real-world corporate decision with the alternatives developed by the class. The facilitator placed great emphasis on the final conclusion: that implementing circular business model innovation in a large-scale linear corporation is almost never about finding the perfect solution but rather about continuing to manage ongoing, strategic, contradictory situations while protecting the public's perception of the corporation's brand identity over the long term.

Time Plan

The Time Plan for this session is strictly allocated to ensure all learning objectives are met within thirty minutes. The first 4 minutes are dedicated to the introduction and icebreaker to create engagement, followed by a 3-minute presentation on the background and history of the LEGO “System of Play”. The facilitator then spends 4 minutes detailing the specific incident of the Durability Paradox and the failed material experiments. The core of the session is the 12-minute Action Mode, where participants engage in a facilitated discussion to evaluate strategic alternatives. The final 8 minutes are split between a 5-minute presentation of the actual management decisions and a 3-minute conclusion phase for final reflections and key learning summaries.

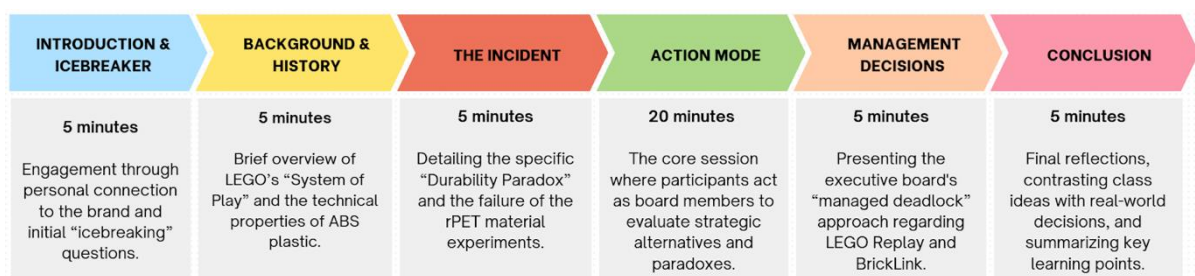


Figure 5: Time Plan

Board Plan

The facilitator will create an outline of the class discussion (called a Board Plan) to be appropriately reflected (visually) in terms of the format of the discussion and the classes' content. The Board Plan should be created on either a whiteboard or presentation slide that is split into three vertical sections: key tasks and challenges, alternatives, and actions.

In the class session, the facilitator will fill in the first two columns as information is discussed within the case facts and students are working on their ideas and listing/sharing. At the end of the class, students and their proposals will then be compared to actual corporate decisions that were made during the conclusion phase of the implementation of proposals put forward by students based upon the decisions made by corporations.

Key Tasks & Challenges	Alternatives	Actions
1. The Material Deadlock The rPET prototype failed, yielding a higher carbon footprint than virgin ABS. Mass Balance alternative resins incur a massive 70% cost premium. Linear production generates severe Scope 3 emissions.	<i>Shift the entire sustainability budget to acquire external biotech startups.</i> <i>Accept the premium and pass the cost directly to consumers.</i>	Strategic Subsidy Tripled the sustainability investment to \$1.4 billion (LEGO, 2023b). Absorbed the financial premium of Mass Balance materials to buy time for ongoing R&D.
2. Physical Circularity (LEGO Replay) The Durability Paradox makes official physical recycling unscalable. Fragmented reverse logistics create exorbitant operational costs. Individual parcel shipping generates additional transportation-related Scope 3 emissions.	<i>Partner with global logistics giants (e.g., Amazon) to utilize existing reverse networks.</i> <i>Shut down Replay completely to prevent further carbon emissions.</i>	Managed Cost Center Outsourced physical handling to third-party charities (e.g., Give Back Box). Kept the program intentionally limited in scale. Treated it as a capped CSR expense to protect brand identity rather than a profitable operational pivot.

3. Digital Circularity (BrickLink) Cannibalization Risk: The booming secondary market competes directly with new linear sales. Digital resale fails to reduce the corporate reliance on manufacturing new virgin plastic.	<i>Implement a strict transaction tax on vintage sets.</i> <i>Transition LEGO entirely into a digital platform orchestrator, abandoning physical manufacturing.</i>	Data Monopoly & Co-creation Acquired BrickLink to control shadow inventory and extract market data. Launched the BrickLink Designer Program (BDP) to crowdfund AFOL designs with zero R&D cost, executing a strategy of managed cannibalization (LEGO, 2019).
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Table 2: Board Plan

Reflection

Creating this case study was an absolutely amazing learning experience for us academically because it forced us to change from being passive analysts of LEGO's operations to being active authors of this case (as well as facilitators) of this case.

The initial conceptualization began during the preparation for supervision in the Corporate Brand Management course at Lund University. The supervision session, led by Professor Mats Urde, was instrumental in narrowing down our options and providing a structured path forward. Early in the process, the decision was made to focus on LEGO's strategic struggle with its own product's longevity - the "Durability Paradox". One of the more demanding aspects was determining the exact angle of the case and formulating a question that would serve as a robust foundation for the entire narrative. Another difficulty involved the necessity of shifting between multiple perspectives during the development of the teaching note. We had to adopt the teacher's perspective to ensure the material was suitable for a class setting, providing clear theoretical linkages and a structured presentation plan. Simultaneously, the student perspective had to be considered to ensure the case was an effective learning opportunity that remained engaging and relevant.

The greatest challenge in writing the case study was not just identifying operational bottlenecks at LEGO, but developing a pedagogical narrative that allowed the readers to discover those very same complexities through their own thought processes. This, in itself, was a great learning experience too because it illustrated the significant differences between academic comprehension of international marketing theoretical frameworks and using those theoretical frameworks to create a balanced, well-written case that accurately portrays a corporation's ongoing, ever-changing, strategic responses to systemic problems.

Another major challenge in developing the teaching notes was maintaining complete objectivity. Because the real-world management decisions regarding LEGO Replay and the BrickLink acquisition had already occurred, it was vital not to be biased by

personal opinions or inadvertently direct the case toward a specific outcome. Our goal was to provide enough detail for others to solve the case without solving it for them. Given the global significance of plastic pollution and sustainability, it is common for the case authors to have a desire to guide the reader to a “green” solution or severely criticize the corporation, thereby affecting the outcome of the case. However, as a case author, it is imperative that you remain completely objective, which is why the case development team went to such careful lengths in developing the discussion questions and board plans so that they would not give away the “Managed Deadlock” status of the case before the readers were able to complete their own analysis and determine their own conclusions about how to resolve the issue. It proved to be very difficult for us to fight this urge to just fix the “Durability Paradox,” but it is just as hard to create a platform so that the audience could deal with profit, planet, and people all competing with each other. This experience also illustrated that when working in brand management, there is not often an executive decision to make between two alternative choices that are clearly right and wrong; rather, executives make decisions based on multiple imperfect trade-offs, and they pursue an opportunity to improve.

Furthermore, we found that actually integrating the triple bottom line (TBL) and circular business model innovation (CBMI) frameworks required an in-depth level of theoretical understanding. Initially, these frameworks can seem like simple academic tools to use. However, they provide a new level of diagnostic ability when creating LEGO’s dual-track circularity when the constraints of Replay are compared to the efficiencies of BrickLink. The actual result was that corporate innovation is not simply about material science; it really is about creating an ecosystem with the goal of managing long-term strategic paradoxes.

Ultimately, writing this case study has created an unprecedented link between the theoretical concepts learned in school versus the actual, real-world issues associated with developing a company's corporate strategy on an international level. As a team, we learned that creating a business case at this level involves creating an environment for structured debates, stimulating appropriate questions in order to stimulate our colleagues' awareness that there is no simple answer to the question of what is corporate sustainability; rather, corporate sustainability involves a lifelong commitment to organizational improvement and development. The authors' analytical skills enhanced tremendously as a result of this project and provided an excellent glimpse into the strategic complexities involved in managing international brands.

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