Leadership and Sustainability Policy Implementation in Dutch Governmental Organisations

''An Explorative Case Study of Employees' Experiences and Perceptions''

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Job Delhaes
Master Thesis Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE)
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Preface

This master thesis is the result of my study in Corporate Sustainability at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. As my final contribution before graduation, this thesis marks the culmination of my academic journey and the end of my time as a student. From February 2024 to June 2024, I had the opportunity to follow an internship at Capgemini Invent, a consultancy firm in Utrecht. During this internship, I conducted my research and wrote this thesis on employees' experiences and perceptions of leadership styles in the context of implementing sustainability policies in Dutch governmental organisations.

Sustainability has always been a big interest of mine and a topic I have explored extensively throughout my studies. Many of my elective courses focused on various aspects of sustainability, and my passion for the field ultimately led me to choose the master's program in Environment and Society Studies, with a specialization in Corporate Sustainability. During my internship, I joined a team dedicated to assisting and supporting multiple Dutch governmental organisations in their efforts to become more sustainable. This experience, combined with my board year in 2023 within the youth leadership organisation AIESEC, where leadership is a central theme, naturally led me to this research topic.

Balancing an internship with the demands of writing a thesis presented its challenges, but as my research began to take shape, I found ways to overcome these challenges, which made the process more enjoyable. I really enjoyed doing the interviews because I got to find out more about how sustainability initiatives work in the Dutch public sector and what different leaders are like and how employees are experiencing those leadership styles.

I would like to thank a few people who guided me through this journey. Firstly, my thesis supervisor, Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers. Her guidance and constructive feedback were of great value. Our meetings were always insightful and provided me a solid foundation for further developing my thesis. Additionally, I would like to thank my internship supervisor, Luc Baardman, for his support and for encouraging me to maintain a critical perspective throughout my work.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thesis. I hope it offers valuable insights and gets you thinking about leadership and sustainability.

Sincerely,

Job Delhaes

Nijmegen, June 2024

Abstract

In an explorative case study, this thesis investigates how commonly used leadership styles within governmental organisations in the Netherlands influence the implementation of sustainability policies according to employees' experiences and perceptions. Governments have an important role in implementing sustainability policies. How we currently interact with our environment causes environmental challenges which are having a negative impact on food and water security, human health, the economy, and the environment. To fight environmental challenges, governments have drawn up several treaties and agreements. To achieve sustainability targets, governmental organisations should focus on leadership because without leadership, development is unlikely to occur. How employees experience and perceive leadership is important because this influences the priorities of the employees and therefore it will have impact on the implementation of sustainability policies. In this case study, a conceptual framework is created which served as a base for in-depth interviews. By doing a case study and conducting semi-structured interviews, it is possible to gain in-depth understandings. The thesis shows that the respondents believe that the leadership style has a significant influence on the implementation of sustainable policies. A different leadership style leads to different results regarding implementation. The most prevalent style is that of inclusive leadership. This is because respondents experienced that leadership is all about getting everyone on board and having a good, constructive conversation. Also, some traits of altruistic and visionary leaders are present. Altruistic leaders, often more reserved, display strong professional will and focus on serving their team rather than directing it. Traits like charisma from the radical and creative leadership style are least observed. There are no significant differences in the present leadership styles between the different governmental organisations or the different sustainability topics. According to employees' experiences and perceptions a leader must have a strong long-lasting vision but also must focus on creating support and creating a network within and outside of the organisation. Next to that it is experienced that risk-taking and having political-administrative sensitivity positively contributes to policy implementation. Employees perceive the time it takes before follow-up steps can be taken as a hindering factor. Furthermore, employees perceive micromanagement by managers as something that hinders the implementation of sustainability policies. The study also suggests that, in addition to the traits named in the theory, other traits are also important. These are traits such as having substantive knowledge about the topic and context, focus on team composition and diversity and being active within the whole market and engage with the market.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Our world is currently facing unprecedented global environmental challenges. Climate change due to human actions causes various weather extremes and impacts every part of the world. Not only climate change but also other environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss and pollution are causing many problems that directly impact the life of humans and non-humans. For example, our current land use plays a big role in climate change and biodiversity loss (IPCC, 2019). Biodiversity loss is a major problem and if we continue to treat our environment as we do now, the consequences for biodiversity will be devastating. Biodiversity is very important for human and planetary health because it provides essential ecosystem services that are fundamental to the survival and well-being of both humans and non-humans. But biodiversity is also important because it provides resilience to climate change (IPBES, 2019). Those environmental challenges have resulted in several adverse effects on the security of food and water, human health, economics, and the environment, causing losses and damages to both nature and people (IPCC, 2023).

One of the biggest environmental challenges is global warming. Global warming is expected to reach 1.5 °C in 2033 (KNMI, 2023). When global warming exceeds the 1.5 °C mark, there will be an increase in both the intensity and frequency of climate extremes, resulting in potential hazards (IPCC, 2018). Combining measurements from the Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut (KNMI) with projections from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) results in an estimated warming of 1.4°C by 2026. We then exceed the Paris target of staying below 1.5°C warming in 2033 (KNMI, 2023). The most recent studies have revealed that 2023 is the warmest year ever recorded in instrumental measurements. In 2023, the mean temperature was 1.45°C higher than the average temperatures between 1850 and 1990 (World Meteorological Organization, 2024).

In order to minimize the possible adverse impacts and risks of climate change and environmental challenges, several treaties and agreements have been drawn up by governments. As part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris agreement was concluded in 2015. In the Paris Agreement, 195 countries committed to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to keep global warming below 1.5°C, aiming to minimize the adverse impacts and risks of environmental challenges (UNFCCC, 2015). The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international treaty that was set up to promote the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the genetic resources (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992). These objectives demand fast and extensive transitions in the whole society (Huang & Zhai, 2021). Transitions such as decarbonization of energy, an increase in the share of renewables, improved energy efficiency, sustainable land management, decarbonization of transport, a reduction in food loss and waste, as well as changes in behaviour and lifestyle. More and more organisations are recognizing the importance of incorporating sustainability into their operations (Gelderman et al., 2017). The objective of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, as set out in the Paris Agreement, has now been formally adopted or incorporated into national policies by multiple countries.

Similarly, the Dutch government has been working on a national climate agreement to meet the Paris Agreement targets. On the 28th of June 2019, the Dutch government presented the National Climate Agreement. The National Climate Agreement includes more than 600 arrangements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with the eventual aim to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions in the Netherlands in 2030 by 49% compared to 1990 and a reduction of 95% in 2050 (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). In the meanwhile, these targets have now been tightened to comply with current European climate legislation. The target of 49% reduction of greenhouse gasses by 2030 is replaced by a target of at least 55% reduction. Besides, the Netherlands committed to reduce their net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050 instead of a 95% reduction. To achieve the tightened target of a 55% reduction by 2030, the Dutch government focusses its climate policy on a 60% reduction in emissions, so that even if there are setbacks, the 55% target will not be jeopardized (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2022b).

The Dutch National Climate Agreement identifies 5 different sectors. These sectors are built environment, mobility, industry, agriculture & land use, and electricity (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019). Several ministries are responsible for the implementation of the agreement. The ultimate responsibility and coordination for the climate policy is assigned to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. However, the climate policy is not only a matter for the state and the national government. It is commonly at the regional or local level that the national goals outlined in the National Climate Agreement are implemented (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2022a). Climate policy brings together the responsibilities of all levels of government. Ministries and decentralized authorities such as provinces and municipalities must jointly commit to climate mitigation to reach the target of 55% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 100% reduction by 2050.

In addition to the global initiatives like the climate target of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity, also other goals are created to realize a more sustainable future. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also play a big and important role. The SDGs are built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Whereas the MDGs mainly focus on poverty reduction in developing countries, the SDGs are a broad sustainability approach for all United Nations (UN) countries, including the Netherlands. The agreements are not legally binding, but a commitment to effort. This means that countries are not legally obliged to meet the targets at any cost but are required to make a firm commitment to them. Governments are called upon to set national targets that match with the global ambitions of the SDGs and to integrate them into existing or new policies (Lucas et al., 2016). The SDG's consist out of 17 goals that were set up in 2015 by the United Nations for achieving a sustainable world for all in 2030 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

Multiple Dutch governmental organisations have joint responsibility for the achievement of these sustainability targets. For this successful implementation of this vision, various ministries but also decentralized authorities need to align their efforts, monitor the policy coherence, and involve other non-state actors such as businesses and citizens (Lucas et al., 2016).

According to Sifat (2019) and Slimane (2012), lack of leadership is the biggest cause of failure to meet the sustainability targets. Leadership is about setting goals and objectives for other people to inspire and motivate them to act in accordance with the collective objectives. Without leadership, sustainable development will not be possible and there will be a negative relationship between the managers and the employers (Sifat, 2019). Hence, countries should focus on leadership, while it plays a major role in a country's ability to achieve the sustainable goals. It is therefore vital to look at how leadership facilitates or hinders implementation of sustainability policies. Leadership involves engaging alongside others to create new things in a fast and ever-changing world (Sifat, 2019). The current goals for a better and sustainable future call for particular leadership styles. Think for example of, sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership is a leadership type that can contribute to and can enable transformational change, which is needed to reach the targets set in the National Climate Agreement (Visser & Courtice, 2011).

Due to the potential catastrophe the world is facing because of environmental challenges, there is a need to know which leadership styles, traits, behaviours, and skills are accelerating the implementation of sustainability policies. For that reason, this research is a starting point to understand how leadership influences the implementation of sustainability policies according to the experiences and perceptions of employees in the Dutch public sector.

This research was written during an internship at a consultancy firm active in the public sector. In an explorative case study, interviews were be conducted. The case study and the interviews looked at different (public) leadership styles that are adopted in multiple governmental organisations in the Netherlands. Subsequently, it looked at how the employees experience and perceive these styles and their influence on the implementation of sustainability policies. It is important to look at the employees' experiences and perceptions because employees use their observations to draw conclusions about their organisation's priorities. Based on these priorities, they will also set priorities for themselves (Schneider et al., 1994). Thus, the employees' experiences and perceptions on the leadership style in the context of implementing sustainability policies influence what the employees will focus on. As a result, the employees' experiences and perceptions on leadership have impact on the implementation of sustainability policies (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020). Only if the operational employees perform their work efficiently, the results and goals formulated by top management will be realized. The cause of almost all implementation failures is the disconnection between formulation and implementation of policies (Mintzberg, 1979).

The employees that were studied were working at a variety of public sector organisations, ranging from the City of Amsterdam, the Province of Zuid-Holland, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Police. The focus of this study is on employees' experiences and perceptions on the used leadership styles and on which specific aspects within those styles they perceive as hindering and facilitating the successful implementation of sustainability policies. It is therefore about the experience and the perception of employees regarding the elements of the leadership style used in the implementation of sustainability policies. This study is explicitly not about discovering the similarities and differences between the various investigated governmental organisations. The focus is on administrative leadership in sustainable adaptations in the 5 sectors mentioned in the Dutch National Climate Agreement. Instead of looking at policy creation, the study looked at policy implementation.

The study's focus was put on administrative leadership and therefore not political leadership. The study did not include sustainability in the internal operations of governmental organisations in the public sector as an organisation. Consider, for example, better insulation of office buildings and/or abolishing disposable coffee cups.

1.2 Research Aim

The main aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the role of leadership in the implementation of sustainability policies within Dutch governmental organisations. In order to better understand this role of leadership, the experiences and perceptions of employees play an important part. By examining how employees experience and perceive leadership practices, the research aims to contribute to more effective sustainability policies by identifying the role of leadership in implementing sustainability policies. This involves the leader's traits, behaviour and skills which together define the leadership style. Rather than aiming to completely solve the problem, this research tries to provide a deeper understanding of the problem, thereby contributing to its mitigation. When the aim is achieved, it provides valuable insights and recommendations into leadership in de public sector. These insights and recommendations in public leadership aim to enhance the support for Dutch governmental organisations in implementing sustainability policies, thereby addressing the pressing environmental challenges the world is currently facing.

1.3 Research Question(s)

The main research question is:
How do employees within governmental organisations in the Netherlands experience and perceive the influence of commonly used leadership styles on the implementation of sustainability policies?

The sub-questions are:

a) Which leadership styles can be recognized in Dutch governmental organisations?

b) How do employees describe their experiences with these leadership styles in the context of implementing sustainability policies?

c) What specific aspects of leadership styles do employees perceive as facilitating or hindering the successful implementation of sustainability policies?

1.4 Societal & Scientific Relevance

1.4.1 Societal Relevance

It is important to better understand the role that leadership plays, and how employees experience and perceive leadership styles, as this will help to improve the government's efforts to meet the climate targets set out in the National Climate Agreement. Also, in other conventions and targets such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the SDGs progress can be made with more insights in the role of leadership.

According to Sifat (2019) and Slimane (2012) it is crucial to focus on leadership because with a lack of good and effective leadership, no development will be made. Leadership research will become increasingly important in the future. It challenges us to re-examine our assumptions and learn what really makes leadership effective. The findings of the research might show how leadership is being experienced in the implementation of sustainability policies in the Dutch governmental organisations. The research is conducted during an internship at a consultancy firm. The findings of this research may have potential practical applications. By understanding the leadership dynamics in governmental organisations, this consultancy firm can tailor their partnerships and services to better support the Dutch public sector's efforts towards sustainability, thus fostering to facilitate the successful implementation of sustainability policies.

It is of great social importance that the implementation of sustainability policies is done as soon as possible and properly because the environmental challenges are resulting in pressing problems regarding security of food and water, human health, economics, and the environment, causing losses and damages to both nature and people (IPCC, 2023). This importance is also highlighted by the fact that current and proposed policies fail to meet many of the existing targets stated in the Sustainable Developments Goals (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021; Lucas et al., 2016). The Dutch Climate Assessment 2023, in which the Dutch government takes stock of its climate policy over the last few years, states that the climate target of a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 is in sight, provided that the development and implementation of climate policy are proceeding energetically (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2023). To ensure that these targets are met, some changes need to be made to better facilitate policy implementation. Changes to which this research might potentially contribute.

1.4.2 Scientific Relevance

Leaders have a great influence of the functioning and development of each organisation (Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2023). Leadership is, among other things, a crucial factor in the transition to a sustainable society (Sifat, 2019; Slimane, 2012). Leadership in governmental organisations in the public sector is a developing field in public administration studies, although the topic is still underdeveloped compared to business studies. To improve the performance of public sector organisations, leadership skills are very important (Orazi, Turrini, & Valotti, 2013). The scientific relevance of this research lies in its contribution to the understanding and development of leadership theories and practices, particularly in the context of implementation of sustainability policies within the Dutch public sector. The study

addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by focusing on how employees experience and perceive the role of (sustainable) leadership in facilitating and hindering the implementation of sustainability policies in governmental organisations in the Netherlands. The research of Ebbinge and Nyenrode Business University (2019), which is an important part of the literature review, is built through experiences of leaders who have made a difference. Furthermore, the The Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model (2011) was tested with a sample of senior business leaders. Those studies have provided new insights on the qualities of leaders which are successful. While this shows that research has been done into how senior leaders view leadership and what the effect of it is, no research has been done into how employees experience leadership towards achieving and implementing sustainable objectives. This while employees are key in implementing objectives (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020, Schneider et al., 1994). The question here is whether employees experience the same traits, behaviours, and skills as those identified in the literature. Because almost all implementation failures derive from the disconnection between formulation and implementation of policies, it is important to also take experiences and perceptions form employees into account (Mintzberg, 1979).

The findings of this research increase the understanding of current leadership styles in Dutch governmental organisations. Much has been researched and written about public leadership and sustainable leadership. However, the link between sustainable leadership and public leadership is still limited in the existing academic literature (Groeneveld et al., 2021). This study contributes to a better understanding of which leadership styles are commonly used in Dutch governmental organisations and how the influence of these styles on the implementation of sustainability policies are experienced and perceived by employees. Also, the fact that this research is specifically focused on governmental organisations in the Dutch public sector makes the study unique and, as such, an addition to the existing academic literature.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sustainability

When talking about the implementation of sustainability policies, it is important to operationalize the concept of sustainability. Sustainability is a broad concept. It is therefore useful for the purposes of this research to have a definition of what exactly sustainability is.

The Brundtland Report in 1987 defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987).

A particularly common description of 'sustainability' uses three interrelated pillars. It involves balancing environmental, social, and economic considerations to ensure long-term well-being and prosperity for both current and future generations. This flows out of the Triple bottom line framework from Elkington (1999). In the Triple bottom line framework, Elkington (1999) identifies People, Planet and Profit as three important pillars for sustainability. The three P’s are interconnected and influence each other.

People is about addressing the well-being, equity, and quality of life of individuals and communities. It includes ensuring access to basic needs such as education, healthcare, housing, and food security, and promoting social justice, diversity, inclusion, and human rights.

Planet focuses on the conservation and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity. It includes practices that minimize environmental degradation, reduce pollution, conserve energy and water, and promote the sustainable use of land and natural resources.

Profit refers to the long-term viability and stability of economic systems. It involves promoting economic growth, prosperity and resilience while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society. Economic sustainability includes principles of responsible consumption, fair trade, ethical business practices and financial stability (Elkington, 1999). According to Elkington, in order to achieve sustainability, all of those three pillars have to be included.

A different balance between those three P’s of sustainability can be found in Raworth's (2012) concept of ''doughnut economics''. Raworth (2012) states that sustainable development means that everyone has access to basic resources to fulfil their human rights. Such as food, water, healthcare, and energy. The concept of sustainability thus includes social, economic, and environmental sustainability. It is also important that the way we use these resources does not threaten the vital functions of the Earth system. This brings us to a 'safe space' where we stay above the social foundations of a just and safe space for humanity and below the environmental ceiling, which means we make sure that we stay within planetary boundaries in our use of resources (Raworth, 2012). The planetary boundaries are the nine limits of the earth, which are connected to the biophysical subsystems or processes of the planet, and they specify the safe working area for humans inside the earth system (Rockström et al., 2009). In 2015 the planetary boundaries framework got updated and extended. The planetary boundaries of climate change and biosphere integrity have been identified as boundaries that,

if crossed, could significantly shift the Earth system into a different state. This will also have a major impact on the other boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015). The most recent update of the planetary boundaries framework was in 2023. This update found out that six of the nine boundaries are crossed, which means that the Earth is far beyond the safe operating space for humanity (Richardson et al., 2023).

In order to achieve sustainable development, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Through 17 goals, they aim to achieve a sustainable world for all by 2030, where no one is left behind. The SDGs touch on many of the Dutch government's environmental policy objectives. The Netherlands is not on track to fully achieve the goals in 2030. Work is currently underway within governmental organisations in the Netherlands to strengthen the SDGs in policy. With the aim that policies also contribute to achieving the SDGs (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2023).

A critical point to note in this deepening of sustainability is that although sustainable development is a widely used term and idea, it is used with many different meanings which results in many different responses (Hopwood et al., 2005). Hopwood et al. (2005) identify the differences in the schools of thought on sustainable development. To map the different trends two different axes are used. On the first axis, socio-economic concerns are considered where importance is given to the human well-being and equality of the views where they vary from inequality to equality. The second axis considers differences in environmental views and the concerns for the environment. These range from virtually no environmental concerns to techno-centered views and eco-centered views at the end of the axis. By combining these 2 different axes Hopwood et al. (2005) distinguish between 3 different broad views on the nature of the changes needed in society's political and economic structures and in human-environment relationships to achieve sustainable development:

- *Status Quo*: They see and accept the need for change, but do not believe that major adjustments in the way we structure our society are needed to solve environmental and social challenges. This view focuses on economic growth because they believe that economic growth is necessary to make the transition to sustainable development. The role of government, rules and regulations should be minimized. Sustainable development will come from technological innovation, market thinking and a focus on consumer choice and corporate social responsibility.

- *Reform*: In this view the current state of the government and corporate policies, as well as social trends are criticized. However, this view does not believe that the core of the problem lies in the character of today’s society itself. They see inequality and incompetence as the one that is causing the problems. So, it could be possible to solve the environmental challenges within current social and economic systems when we make changes in lifestyle and policy. The primary goal of reformers is to persuade governments and international organisations to implement meaningful reforms.

- *Transformation*: Transformationalists say that the current social and economic systems and the way how humans interact with their environment are the sources for the growing environmental challenges. In order to prevent a systemic collapse of our environment and society we must radically change our connections with the

environment and our economic and social systems. They also believe that interconnectedness of social justice with environmental crises. Therefore, social justice has a high priority in this view on sustainable development.

All 3 broad views, visualized in the figure below, agree that society needs to change, although there are strong differences of opinion about the definition of sustainable development, the adjustments that need to be made, and the agents and instruments for bringing about such changes (Hopwood et al., 2005).

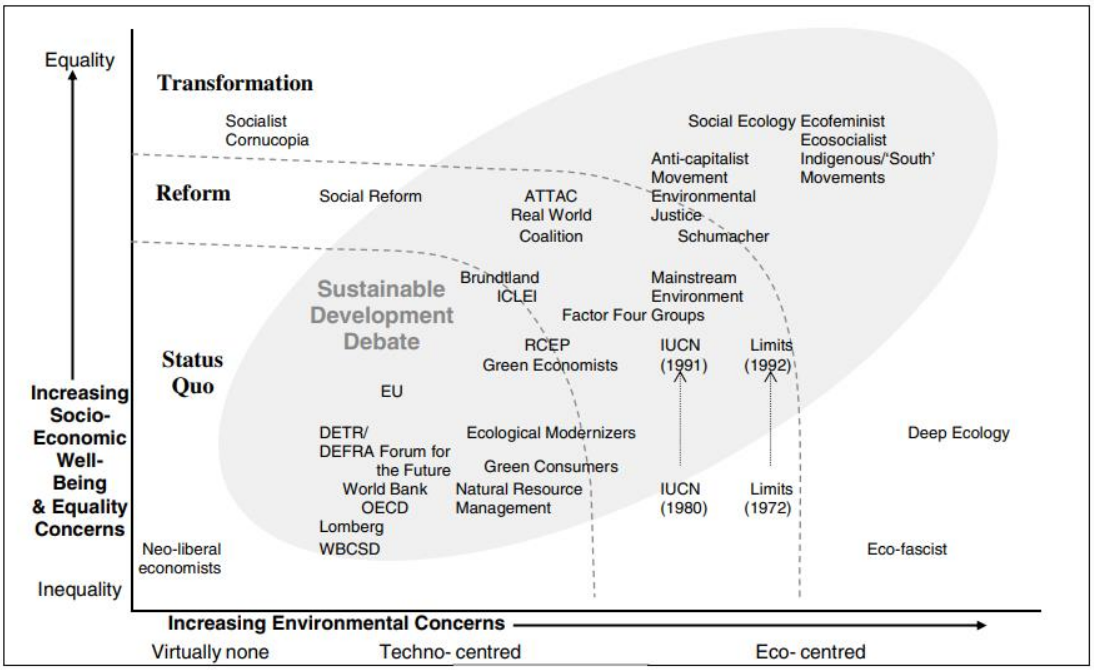

Figure 1: Three broad views on sustainable development (Hopwood et al., 2005, p. 4).

Also, Dobson (1996) recognizes these differences in interpretation of the concept of sustainability. There are four different concepts to be found here. The four different conceptions of environmental sustainability are reviewed on four different components. The first question to be asked is what is to be sustained. The second question to be asked is why this has to be sustained? The third question is about whether objects of concerns are primary, secondary, or even no concern. The final and fourth question focusses on whether human-made capital and natural capital can be substituted by each other.

In the first conception (A) the answer to the first question is total capital. Where the total capital is the combination of human-made and natural capital. The reason why this needs to be sustained is for human (material) welfare. The primary concerns are about present human generation wants and needs. Present human generations are seen as more important but also future human generation wants and needs are objects of concern. This conception also believes in full substitution of human and natural capital.

In de second conception (B), the main thing to sustain is critical natural capital. In the sense of ecological assets of nature that are crucial for human survival, but also in the sense of essential to human well-being. The ‘’Why” in conception B is about human material and aesthetic welfare. The primary objects of concern are the human needs of the present and future

generations, although later the human wants of the present and future generations are also of relevance. Present and future generations non-human needs are secondary concerns. In this conception, substitutability is possible, but not between human capital and critical natural capital.

In conception C, irreversible natural capital is the important object to sustain. This means that, what should be sustained is the natural capital whose loss would be irreversible. The reason for protecting irreversible natural capital is the same as for conception B, so human material and aesthetic welfare. It just adds an extra dimension, the dimension of caring for the natural environment for its own sake. Present human and non-human needs are of primary concerns, as well as future human and non-human needs. Present and future human wants are of secondary concern. In this conception, substitutability is possible, but not between human capital and irreversible natural capital.

In the final conception of environmental sustainability (D) that what must be sustained, can be called "units of significance". This means that something of its original form must be retained and something of its identity must be preserved. The reason why this has to happen is because of the obligations we have to nature. We should recognize that the natural world, with all its events and processes is a historical phenomenon and should be valued as such. Present and future generations human and non-human are of primary concern. Objects of secondary concern are present and future generations human wants. As seen in conception C natural capital is non-substitutable, so 'units of significance' are by definition non-substitutable (Dobson, 1996).

	A	B	C	D
what to sustain?	total capital (human-made and natural)	critical natural capital: e.g. 'ecological processes'	irreversible natural capital	'units of significance'
why?	human welfare (material)	human welfare (material and aesthetic)	human welfare (material and aesthetic) and obligations to nature	obligations to nature
object(s) of concern				
primary	1,3,2,4	1,2,3,4	(1,5),(2,6)	(5,1),(6,2)
secondary		5,6	3,4	3,4
substitutability between human-made and natural capital	considerable	not between human-made capital and critical natural capital	not between human-made capital and irreversible natural capital	eschews the substitutability debate

Key to numbers:

1 = present generation human needs
2 = future generation human needs
3 = present generation human wants
4 = future generation human wants
5 = present generation non-human needs
6 = future generation non-human needs

Implicit questions of justice:

1. What is to be distributed? 2. Among whom?

Figure 2: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability (Dobson, 1996, p. 407).

2.2 Leadership

2.2.1 Concept of leadership and government roles

This literature review offers an overview of key findings from existing research on (public) leadership and leadership styles, with a specific focus on the role of leadership in facilitating implementation of sustainability policies. Leadership is a broadly defined concept that has been studied extensively from different perspectives, yet it remains challenging to comprehend. This has led to a large variety of leadership models, ideas, and explanations of how leadership affects motivation, behaviour, thinking, and performance.

Since leadership is so complicated, there is not a single, widely accepted description (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004). In this thesis the following definition of leadership is used *''The process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives''* (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, p. 51). Yukl and Gardner's (2020) definition of leadership is not only about influencing the current ways of working of an organisation but is also about making sure that an organisation is prepared to meet future challenges. Leadership encompasses a range of behaviours, traits, and skills, including communication, decision-making, empathy, and integrity (Bwalya, 2023; Wajdi, 2017). The behaviours, traits, and skills can differ from one leader to another. The knowledge a leader has also shapes the style of his or her leadership. Consequently, the different composition of the leadership behaviour, traits and skills leads to different leadership styles, each with their different effects on the organisation in which they work and on their performance. Leadership style refers to how a leader chooses to lead and engage with their followers.
A leadership style includes behaviours, attitudes, and actions in influencing and directing others. The way a leader takes choices, sets expectations, encourages followers, and builds a work atmosphere is strongly affected by their style of leadership (Bwalya, 2023).

Apart from definitions, there exist multiple theories about leadership. They provide a framework for leadership. There are three main approaches that help us to better understand leadership (Roe, 2017; Visser & Courtice, 2011):

1. *The Trait/Style approach:* This approach focuses on the characteristics or approaches of individual leaders. It states that leaders and non-leaders are differentiated by individual characteristics such as personality, social, physical, or intellectual traits. It believes that certain leadership traits will decide whether you have the ability to be a good leader.

2. *Situational/Contingency approach:* This approach considers situational context in leadership effectiveness. The ability of a leader is contingent on various factors. It focuses on external factors of the environment that shapes leadership action. The situational/contingency approach is about how the individual leader interacts with their own framing context.

3. *Behavioural approach:* This approach examines the behaviour of leaders to differentiate them from non-leaders. It believes that the ability of a leader to resolve the challenges in organisations is by deploying a set of skills, showing certain

behaviours and act according to a set of competences. Leadership can be made (Roe, 2017).

Public leadership is about interacting with different actors, each of whom brings their own meaning, interests, and values to the task. Being able to move between and connect these actors and their contexts are an integral part of the leadership process (Groeneveld et al., 2022). An essential component of public leadership is to stimulate and facilitate the process of arriving at shared understandings of societal challenges in situations where different interests and public values are at stake. There are 3 different directions in which public leadership moves which are linked to different roles of administrative leadership. These directions are inwards (as a manager), upwards (as a policy advisor) and outwards (as a social partner).

- *Inwards* leadership is about leadership within the Dutch governmental organisation as an organisation. It is leadership towards colleagues and employees lower down the hierarchy. It is about the capacity in the own organisation to perform the tasks and achieve objectives and tasks.

- *Upwards* leadership is about the relations with politics. For implementation of policies, it is also about the relationship with the ministries and policymakers.

- *Outwards* leadership is about working together with external stakeholders in order to achieve social goals together. This involves connecting to citizens and the wider community as well as social partners (Groeneveld et al., 2022).

When talking about leadership in the public sector, it is important to consider what roles the government is adopting in the public sector. The tasks that a government has, and the corresponding role, have an impact on the degree of freedom a leader has in their leadership and on their leadership in general. The government needs to be aware of what role they are taking on, and therefore what steering role is appropriate. In recent decades, both society and the role of government within it have undergone changes (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2021).

Van der Steen et al. (2014) outline four government roles based on management models. The first role is that of the *legitimate government*, the central focus is on the legitimacy and lawfulness of government actions. This perspective strongly emphasizes the legal basis of government actions and the separation between political primacy and official implementation in loyalty. A clear formulation of political goals and their neutral translation into official action are essential for effective governance. In this perspective, steering primarily involves establishing procedures and anchoring goals and means in laws and rules.

The second role as a *performing government*, the focus is not solely on formulating goals effectively, but also on achieving them in a measurable manner. The emphasis is on the methods, techniques, and processes used to achieve these goals, rather than the procedure for formulating them. Organising in a smart and accountable way begins with goal achievement. Performance measurement is one of the tools used to steer towards this perspective. From an objective standpoint, the government's success should be measured by

the effectiveness and efficiency of its policies (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2021; Schulz et al. 2017; Van der Steen et al., 2014).

The third government role with a *collaborating or networking government* is focused on achieving goals with the assistance of external efforts. The government collaborates with civil society organisations or other partners in the field. This collaboration means that these parties bring their own goals into the process, necessitating negotiation with the government. Moreover, parties in the network sometimes take joint initiatives to generate public value, even without government involvement or with limited government support. However, it is important to note that the government may still play a directing role in the process. To create added value in networks, parties must align their contributions, which requires good communication and collaboration. Therefore, steering as a networking/collaborating government should focus on developing the network itself.

The fourth and final role of the government is based on society's resilience and social energy and is called the *responsive government*. It relies on existing movements and social values, rather than the government promoting its own plans and goals. The government connects with these existing movements, which may already support government goals or may need to be adjusted. The responsive government is primarily concerned with recognizing development and establishing a meaningful connection to it. One approach to achieving this is to maintain a steady flow of social energy, thereby sustaining societal progress (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2021; Schulz et al. 2017; Van der Steen et al., 2014).

2.2.2 Sustainable Leadership

Leadership plays a pivotal role in driving organisational transformation towards more sustainable organisations. Next to that, leadership can enable more resilient solutions in achieving sustainability which is supported by all actors involved (Chaudhry & Noureen, 2023). Being a sustainable leader is therefore a be very important factor in achieving sustainability transitions. But then the question emerges: what is considered as being a sustainable leader? A sustainable leader is an individual who actively engages with others in the process of transformative change towards an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable future (Ferdig, 2009). Sustainable leadership represents a specific combination of leadership traits used in a particular context rather than a distinct school of leadership. The situational/contingency approach to leadership is most consistent with the concept of sustainable leadership, as it requires specific leadership type to address the sustainability challenges in the world and the goal of a more sustainable future (Visser & Courtice, 2011).

There are several studies and models that illustrate the qualities of sustainable leadership. In this thesis three models on sustainable leadership form the basis for the conceptual model. These models are the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model from Visser & Courtice (2011), the Sustainability Leadership Relational Model from Ferdig (2009), and the Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019) model on 7 qualities or traits that a 'true' sustainable leader must have.

One model that highlights the characteristics of a sustainable leader is the Cambridge university's Sustainability Leadership Model which can be seen in figure 1 below. While it is not explicitly tailored to the public sector, its principles can certainly be applied to leadership within administrative contexts. The model describes bringing about profound change. This profound change can be in political, social, and economic systems but also in business models and in a broader social contract with stakeholders and society (Visser and Courtice, 2011). It can therefore also be used in the context of this study, which looks at how leadership shapes the implementation of sustainability policies in the public sector. Several components of this model will recur later in this research, providing a strong foundation for this study.

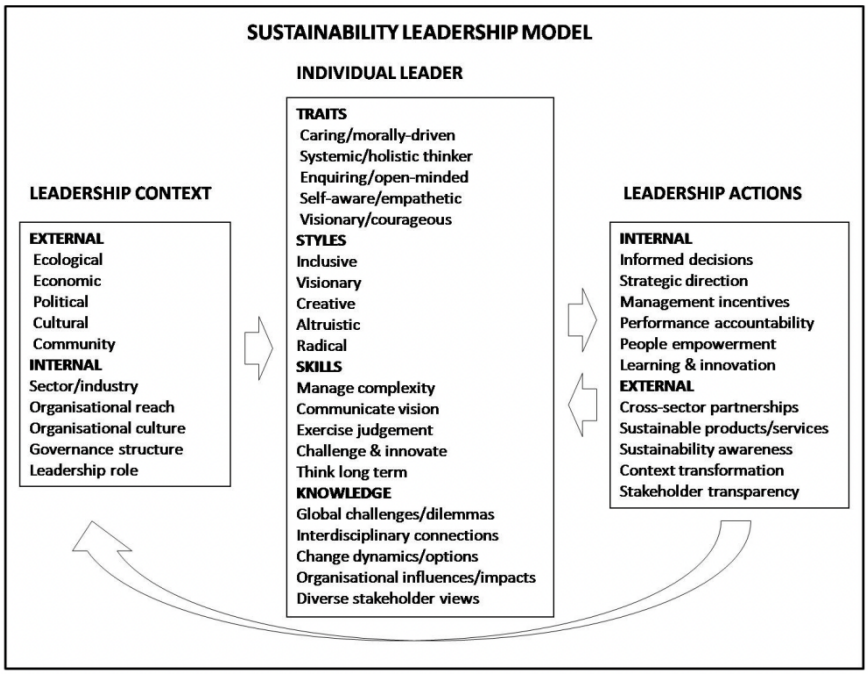

Figure 3: The Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model (Visser & Courtice, 2011, p. 5).

Visser & Courtice (2011) argue that a sustainable leader should have several different traits, qualities or characteristics. These qualities are all put together in the Cambridge University Sustainability Leadership Model:

- *Caring/morally driven:* A sustainable leader must be morally driven and committed to achieve sustainability. It is important for a leader to care about the well-being of humans and all other forms of life. This includes being guided by a moral compass. A sustainable leader should also think about things like environmental justice and fairness between generations.
- *Systemic/holistic thinker:* This means that a leader understands how everything is connected and dependent on each other, and to know that changes to one part of the system can affect the whole. A sustainable leader needs to understand why people behave unsustainably and what drives them to do so.
- *Enquiring/open minded:* Sustainability leaders are always on the lookout for new knowledge, are not afraid to question traditional wisdom, and are open to diverse opinions This also means being open to questioning traditional economic models and exploring new perspectives.
- *Self-Aware/empathetic:* It is also important for a sustainable leader to be self-aware. This means they need to be able to see where they fit in and what impact they have

on a situation. Furthermore, a sustainable leader should have a high emotional intelligence, empathy and should keep a sense of humility.
- *Visionary/courageous:* With being visionary and courageous is meant that leaders should inspire with creativity, optimism, and courage, balancing passion with pragmatism. A leader needs to be driven to get results. They have the belief to succeed even when things are getting difficult. They proactively seize opportunities and take risks in a positive way (Visser & Courtice, 2011).

Next to important traits, Visser & Courtice (2011) also mention necessary skills for sustainable leadership. These required skills correspond to the aforementioned traits:

- *Manage complexity:* A sustainable leader is good at keeping the overview of the complex situation and at analyzing complex challenges. This is about the capacity to anticipate and respond to potential risks and uncertainties by noticing opportunities and solving problems and conflicts quickly.
- *Communicate vision:* This means that a leader can disseminate their vision throughout the organisation. By doing so, a leader can inspire and foster a culture where employees are encouraged to contribute to this vision.
- *Exercise judgement:* Being able to make good and decisive decisions even when the choices and dilemmas are difficult is an important skill for a sustainable leader to have.
- *Challenge and innovate:* Sustainable leaders must be innovative by thinking outside of the box and bringing creativity to the table. Coming up with new creative ideas and solutions are an important skill.
- *Think long term:* The sustainable leader is capable of strategic thinking and planning, with the ability to think about the long-term outcomes of their actions. They can oversee the entire situation while maintaining an awareness of future implications.

According to the Sustainability Leadership Relational Model by Ferdig (2009) there are eight important practices or behaviours that a sustainable leader must envision:

- *Take responsibility*: A sustainable leader must take responsibility and step in the leadership role. This entails making sustainability relevant for others. The leader has to make it clear for all actors why and how sustainable solutions are the best solutions for challenges. It is important that the leader make things happen. A sustainable leader must know how to collaboratively construct and implement initiatives by engaging in the creative thinking and action but also sustain one owns and others energy and momentum.
- *Look for holistic interconnections*: This means that it is important to be aware of interdependencies. This can help to create sustainable solutions that build on each other.
- *Convene constructive conversations*: By convening constructive conversations, you can stimulate each other's thinking, helping to explore perspectives and connections that might otherwise be overlooked. It also helps to build authentic relationships that lead to long-term partnerships and intergenerational engagement.
- *Embrace creative tension*: When different points of view are acknowledged, the network of leaders is broadened. A sustainable leader needs to understand relational power dynamics because it is critical to learning and success.

- *Facilitate emerging outcomes*: A sustainable leader should constantly assess the risks and opportunities associated with sustainability strategies. It is also important to let go of control and the need to predict outcomes. When faced with uncertainty and contradictions, sustainable leaders should collaborate with others to discover answers.
- *Understand social change dynamics*: It is crucial for a sustainable leader to understand what people do and say and to recognize patterns of behaviour. This helps them to intervene when they see things going in the wrong direction. It is also important to understand the difficulties and chaos that can arise in social patterns when new ideas are introduced.
- *Experiment, learn and adjust*: Are willing to learn new ways by taking calculated risks to test new ideas, but also to reflect on and learn from experience. They also share their thinking with others and pass on information as it develops.
- *Expand conscious awareness*: A sustainable leader who is clear about his or her own principles and intentions can engage others in the work and increase personal integrity. This can also ensure shared reflection on the process towards sustainability (Ferdig, 2009).

In 2019, executive search firm Ebbinge, together with Nyenrode Business University, conducted research on what qualities a leader should have to make organisations more sustainable and inclusive. This leads to 7 qualities or traits that a 'true' sustainable leader must have.

- *Self-aware*: Self-awareness has to do with the leader's self-reflection. Does a leader know who he or she is? Awareness of their values, skills, and qualities. Not only good aspects, but a leader should also be aware of their shortcomings. Being open to feedback can be a characteristic of a self-aware leader.
- *Responsible*: A common characteristic of sustainable leaders is taking responsibility for change. This includes taking responsibility at a personal level and for the organisation, but also social responsibility and responsibility to the people in the organisation are important. It is about more than personal gain and making a positive contribution to society.
- *Forward-thinking*: A forward-thinking leader has a strong vision and a clear image or dream for the present and the future. This must be accompanied by a long-term vision of how this image of the future can be realized. This quality also has to do with the confidence to dare to make decisions that can achieve that vision.
- *Innovative*: When we talk about an innovative leader, we are talking about someone who is willing to take risks and accept the consequences. There must be a drive to innovate in order to constantly improve. (Technological) innovation and renewal play an important role in disrupting the current system and moving towards a more sustainable future.
- *Connecting*: The ability to connect is an important aspect of being a sustainable leader. Connecting with people inside and outside the organisation. This can be achieved when leaders dare to be vulnerable and when a leader has empathy. This allows leaders to really touch and inspire people. This empowers people and brings them into their power. It is important to include social inclusion here. This ensures that everyone is included and that successes are felt and shared together.

- *Directional*: The quality of a course-setting leader is linked to the quality of forward-thinking mentioned earlier. Both qualities involve a long-term vision for the future. A well-thought-out plan fits in with this vision. For a directional leader, this means sticking to the plan. There are often factors that tempt you to deviate from this path. This is where it is important to stick to the plan and be convincing. Sometimes a leader has to be compelling, although the empathic side needs to be considered.
- *Impactful*: The final important quality is being impactful. A leader must have the drive to make a difference and be able to do so by bringing about change. Being able to make a difference is of very important (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019).

As mentioned before, there is a lot of different literature on sustainable leadership. However, the literature reviewed above shows that there are many similarities between these models. For example, from Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit's (2019) study on the qualities or traits of a sustainable leader, 5 out of 7 qualities or traits are also found in Visser & Courtice's (2011) Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model. In addition, the other 2 qualities are also fully consistent with the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model. The two studies also overlap in that they both argue that sustainable leadership should ensure economic, social, and environmental success. This is in line with Elkington's (1999) triple bottom line discussed earlier. Sustainable leadership must ensure a balance between all 3 dimensions. There are also strong similarities with Ferdig's (2009) Sustainability Relational Leadership model. The Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit's (2019) study was conducted in the Dutch context, both in the private and public sector, and shows many similarities with the other models discussed. Therefore, these studies together will be used as a solid basis to explore leadership styles in Dutch public organisations. It will help to better interpret and identify leadership styles in the public sector.

2.2.3 Leadership styles

A leader's behaviour in leading, inspiring, and guiding others can be summarized as their leadership style. A leader's behaviour, and therefore their leadership style, also influences the behaviour of their followers (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2023).
In this study the focus will be on the administrative leadership. Therefore, political leadership will not be included to limit the scope.

Many different leadership styles have been described in academic literature. In this study, we distinguish the 5 leadership styles described by Visser and Courtice (2011) because their connection to sustainable leadership and because several of the components of the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model have been used as the basis for this study. Visser and Courtice (2011) identify 5 different leadership styles in their sustainability leadership model. These 5 styles of leadership will be discussed in more detail below.

- *Inclusive Leadership Style*

Inclusive leadership is a style in which collaboration and mutual participation are very important. It is about dialogue and building consensus. Conflicts are resolved quickly, and people should feel more connected. As a result, it can also be seen as a democratic approach.

A inclusive leader creates a culture where peer support and encouragement is important and where successes are acknowledged.

- *Visionary Leadership Style*

The visionary leadership style is all about passion and charisma. It is about challenging and transforming the perceptions and expectations of followers to motivate them to act beyond self-interest. A visionary leader tries to create a common inspirational vision.

- *Creative Leadership Style*

A creative leader is someone who brings renewal and innovation and can therefore bring about transformational change. This is why they are also called transformational leaders. A creative or transformational leader can be seen as an architect or a game changer.

- *Altruistic Leadership Style*

An altruistic leader is in some ways very similar to a visionary leader. This is because they both focus on the collective rather than on self-interest. The greater common good takes precedence over individual interests. This leadership style is also sometimes called the servant leadership style. Altruistic leaders contrast with highly visible leaders. In fact, altruistic leaders are somewhat quieter and more withdrawn, despite their strong professional will.

- *Radical Leadership Style*

The opposite of the more reserved altruistic style is radical leadership. Radical leadership is about being much more outspoken and present. It is appropriate to take risks, to act in a revolutionary way and to challenge the status quo. Radical leaders are big thinkers and are seen as crusaders or activists (Visser and Courtice, 2011).

2.3 Internal & external factors

Besides leadership, there are other factors that influence the implementation of sustainability policies. These factors relate to the overall context in which the policy takes place. In the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model from Visser & Courtice (2011), a distinction is made between internal and external factors. On the external factors a leader will have a very low or even no degree of influence, think of ecological, economic, political, cultural and community factors. On the internal factor, the leader has a much higher degree of influence, these are factors such as the organisational reach, organisational culture, governance structure, and the leadership role. Next to that, the sector and industry where the leader is working in is part of the internal factors that influence the implementation of sustainable policies.

3. Conceptual Framework

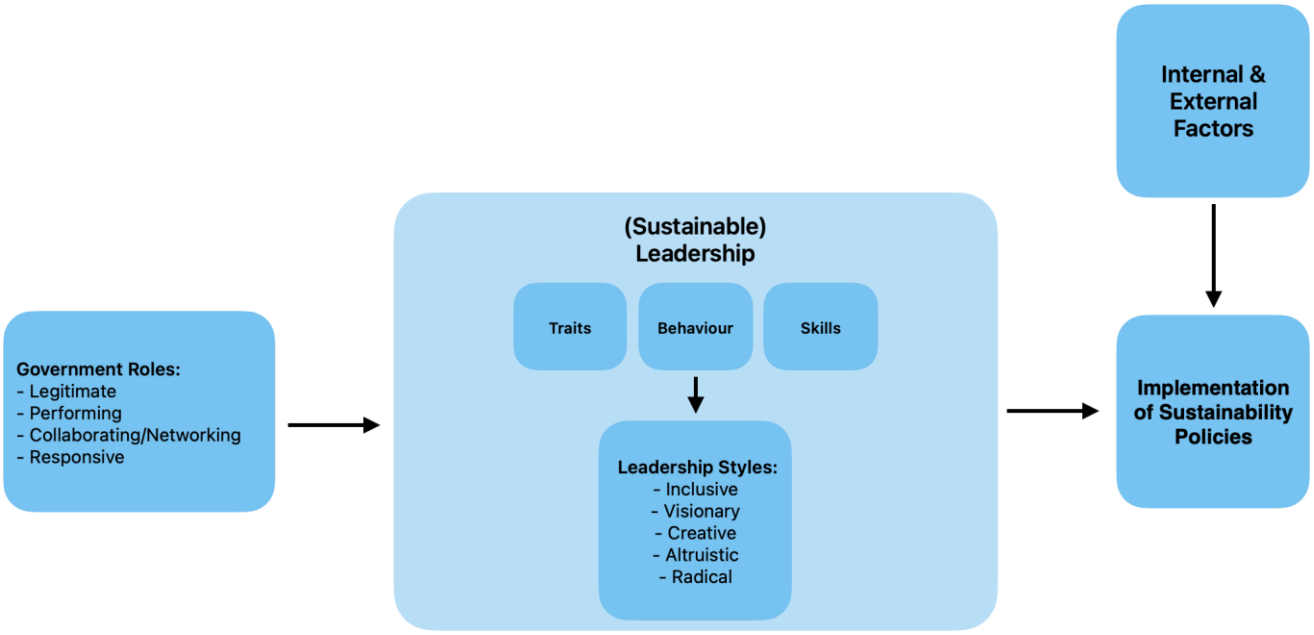

Figure 4: Influence of leadership styles in Dutch governmental organisations on implementation of sustainability policies

This conceptual framework is a visual representation of all the concepts in this study. On the left-hand side, you can find the roles the government has. This represents the legitimate, performing, collaborating, or networking and responsive government. As described by Van der Steen et al. (2014) in these four government roles, the government needs to be aware of which role it has in order to align its leadership role accordingly. It therefore has an impact on the broad concept of (sustainable) leadership. This includes three different aspects that together define a leader's leadership style. Those three different aspects are the traits, behaviours, and skills of a certain leader. The traits, behaviours and skills resolve from the literature review of the papers of Ferdig (2009), Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019) and from Visser & Courtice (2011). The traits and skills here include self-aware, responsible, forward-thinking, innovative, connecting, directional and impactful (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). The behaviours are connected to those skills and traits but are also reflected in the Sustainability Leadership Relational Model from Ferdig (2009). Those behaviours are:

- Take responsibility
- Look for holistic interconnections
- Convene constructive conversations
- Embrace creative tension
- Facilitate emerging outcomes
- Understand social change dynamics
- Experiment, learn and adjust
- Expand conscious awareness

The different composition of those three different aspects leads to different leadership styles. These different styles all have different effects on the organisation in which leaders work and

on their performance (Bwalya, 2023; Wajdi, 2017). The leadership styles included in this conceptual framework are inclusive, visionary, creative, altruistic and the radical leadership style mentioned in Visser & Courtice (2011). The overall concept of leadership, which includes the aspects just mentioned, influences the way in which sustainability policies are implemented. Leadership is crucial in this implementation of sustainability policies (Sifat, 2019; Slimane, 2012). Finally, in addition to leadership, the state of progress of implementation of sustainability policies is also influenced by internal and external factors. A leader has more control over internal factors than over external factors. Internal factors are factors such as the organisational reach, organisational culture, governance structure, and the leadership role. The external factors have to do with the surrounding context. Examples of such external factors can be ecological, economic, political, cultural and community factors (Visser & Courtice, 2011).

This overall framework is in the context of employees' perceptions and experiences. It is about how employees perceive and experience the traits, behaviours and skills of leaders in the context of sustainability policy implementation. The employees' experiences and perceptions on leadership are important because they have impact on the implementation of sustainability policies (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020). The framework is also about the aspects that employees perceive as facilitating or hindering the implementation of sustainability policies. This model is therefore needed to understand and position the employees' perceptions and experiences. By using this conceptual framework and first identify the traits, behaviours, and skills of a leader it will become easier to identify the commonly used leadership styles in Dutch governmental organisations. It is the basis for designing and formulating the interview guide to keep the focus on answering the research questions posed. The answers to the interview questions are the perceptions and experiences of the employees, which can be understood using this framework. The conceptual framework also helps to visualise the overall context of leadership and sustainability policy implementation. Namely, that government roles influence leadership styles and that there are other internal and external factors besides (sustainable) leadership that influence the implementation of sustainable policies. This visual representation therefore helps to answer the research questions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Philosophy

In the social sciences, research philosophy paradigms provide the basic framework for understanding and conducting research. There are four main research philosophy paradigms that are commonly recognized in the social sciences: positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Based on the research methodology and the structure of this research, this research aligns most closely with the constructivist paradigm.

The idea of constructivism is that knowledge is built up through social interactions and is affected by the context. This research recognizes the role of leadership in the implementation of sustainability policies, while acknowledging the subjective nature of reality. In this research it is all about understanding how employees experience and perceive leadership styles and how they affect implementation of sustainability policies according to them. This perspective aligns with constructivism's emphasis on understanding how individuals and groups interpret and make sense of their experiences and contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The idea of constructivism is that knowledge is built up through social interactions and is affected by the context, this is in line with this research. Constructivist research usually uses qualitative methods like interviews, to investigate the individual interpretations and experiences that people attach to social phenomena. In-depth interviews, which also will be used in this research, contribute to the rich, in-depth insights into human experiences and perspectives in line with constructivist approaches (Cobern, 1993). The use of qualitative methods, particularly with a case study and in-depth semi-structured interviews, is a key aspect of constructivist research (Harrison et al., 2017). This approach is namely all about gathering lots of detailed data to understand complex social phenomena. The research acknowledges the complexity of the context surrounding implementation of sustainability policies. It also recognizes that leadership can both facilitate and hinder progress towards sustainability goals. There are multiple different perspectives and realities regarding leadership. A constructivist approach encourages to consider these multiple perspectives and interpretations of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism says reality is constructed by individuals. This aligns with the study's focus on exploring in-depth experiences and perceptions of individual employees within governmental organisations. Because there is no one reality in the influence of leadership on implementation of sustainability policies (according to employees' experiences and perceptions), it is possible to obtain important insights by considering the constructivist approach.

Positivism is all about objective measurements and quantitative analysis. It is about testing hypotheses by using empirical data. With positivism it is assumed that a reality exists which is driven my natural laws and mechanisms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It does not emphasize that people can experience and perceive the impact of leadership styles differently and therefore is less in line with this research. While post-positivism is about acknowledging biases and aiming for objective knowledge. It still leans towards quantitative methods and hypothesis testing. This research is more about exploring things in a qualitative way, which does not really fit with post-positivism. While critical theory offers valuable tools for understanding how social structures influence individual and collective experiences, its focus on revealing and transforming these structures does not align with the primary objectives of this research.

Concluding the constructivist paradigm fits this research best, as it aligns with the focus on subjective interpretations, social interactions, qualitative methods, and recognition of multiple perspectives inherent in the study of leadership and implementation of sustainability policies in governmental organisations.

4.2 Research Methods

Qualitative research with interviews is a valuable methodological approach for exploring complex social phenomena, understanding individuals' perspectives, and uncovering nuanced insights (Vennix, 2019). This research is going to be an explorative case study that will investigate how the commonly used leadership styles within governmental organisations in the Netherlands influence the implementation of sustainability policies according to employees' experiences and perceptions. A case study was chosen because through a case study it is possible to obtain comprehensive in-depth understanding of the respondent's experiences and perceptions (Harrison et al., 2017). It is necessary to gain these profound insights because this allows the researcher to get the knowledge which is needed to answer to research questions. Additionally, a case study is highly effective for discovering and describing specific situations. Consequently, research that begins with a "how" question often benefits from employing a case study approach (Yin, 2017). Focus of the study is on administrative leadership and therefore not political leadership. It looks at policy implementation rather than policy making. By using interviews, it will be possible to explore in depth the experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of respondents in the context of governmental organisations and the implementation of sustainability policies. Therefore, a qualitative research method is chosen in this thesis.

4.2.1 Data Collection

Two different data collection methods are used in this explorative case study. The first method of data collection is desk research or literature review. Desk research is of great importance as it helped to construct a clear definition of sustainability. It clarified different concepts of sustainability and showed that there are many different views on the concept of sustainability. This also contributed to assessing where exactly the focus in sustainability is on and what is exactly meant with sustainability. Then the desk research provided a solid foundation for the concept of leadership. Several different academic papers about (administrative) leadership have been studied and combined to create a good understanding of (sustainable leadership) and its context in governmental organisations in the public sector. Scientific literature on political leadership have not been included in this study.

Additionally, the desk research clarified various leadership styles and the behaviours, traits and skills that fit the different leadership styles. The desk research provided a solid foundation of scientific knowledge, serving as the theoretical framework for the entire study. The theoretical framework helped to set up the second method of data collection: in-depth semi-structured interviews.

To make it easier to convert the data from the interviews into useful information, semi-structured interviews were chosen. By conducting in-depth interviews, personal experiences and perceptions of the respondents were obtained. Semi-structured interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to go deeper into some answers. Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide was made. This meant that all interviews were structured in the same way, so that the same points and questions were covered in all interviews but made sure that the respondent was free to speak. Using an interview guide also increased the reliability of the research (Vennix, 2019). The interview guide can be found in the appendix. With the semi-structured interviews current forms of leadership in the public sector will be identified. To make coding easier, respondents were shown leadership cards that were made prior to the interview. The leadership card showed the respondents all different skills, traits and behaviours that match the different leadership styles. This is done without the respondents being shown the different leadership styles. When they were shown these leadership cards, they were asked which of the traits were most applicable to the leadership style of their manager (or their own). Following this, the respondents were also asked what in their perception and experience were the elements of leadership style that had a facilitating or hindering impact on the implementation of sustainable policies. All respondents were shown the same leadership cards. The leadership cards did not include the typology of the leadership styles used in this research. In this way, respondents were not steered towards a particular type, and the researcher could later link the named aspects to the leadership styles. The decision to present leadership cards in this way was taken because it allows the identification of specific characteristics that can be linked to the leadership styles. If respondents are given complete freedom to answer, the answers will be so far apart that it will be very difficult to code them and draw conclusions. As a result, respondents were not influenced in their answers, but use similar vocabulary, making it easier to draw conclusions from different interviews.

To get a good overview of public leadership, interviews were conducted in several public organisations. Interviews were conducted in the larger public organisations because these are the organisations that have the greatest impact and because leadership often plays a greater role. It was therefore decided to conduct interviews in ministries, municipalities, provinces, and the police. The reason to investigate the City of Amsterdam, the Province of Zuid-Holland, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Police is practical on the one hand because contact could be made with these organisations through the researcher's internship organisation. On the other hand, it is a deliberate choice to look from different perspectives and different levels of governance to avoid the biases that can arise when staying in one organisation. Creswell (2014) highlights the importance of qualitative research in exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems. By selecting a diverse range of governmental organisations, this study makes use of the strengths of qualitative research to investigate the experiences and perceptions of employees concerning leadership styles and implementation of sustainability policies. The inclusion of various administrative contexts—municipal, provincial, national, and an operational organisation—ensures a comprehensive examination.

The three police respondents all work in the same team. They work on a central sustainability programme to make the police more sustainable in three different areas. These three themes are people, environment and society. For people, they focus on the health, (social) safety,

equality, development, and well-being of their own employees. On the environment, they focus on minimising their impact on the environment, thereby reducing their carbon footprint. With society, they try to create movement among suppliers, cooperation partners and citizens to encourage more sustainable thinking and action. The respondents from the police work on different projects across these themes. In the city of Amsterdam, two respondents work in the same team, which deals with the electricity supply in Amsterdam and the sustainable development and expansion of the electricity grid. One respondent from the City of Amsterdam works on emission-free mobility and charging infrastructure for electric mobility. Within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality both respondents worked in different teams. One respondent works on animal welfare issues and the other respondent is a HR advisor covering the whole organisation with a focus on improving social security in the workplace and sustainable employability. The three respondents from the Province of Zuid-Holland all work in the same team that focusses on facilitating the transition to a circular economy and circular society.

In addition, the choice of specifically these 4 organisations also has to do with their distribution across the 5 different sectors in Dutch National Climate Agreement. These 5 sectors are built environment, mobility, industry, agriculture & land use, and electricity. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality affects the agriculture & land use sector. The electricity and the industry sector are affected by the team of the respondents from the Province of Zuid-Holland. The respondents from the City of Amsterdam have influence on the mobility, electricity, built environment and industry sector. The interviewed sustainability team from the Police relates to the mobility and electricity sector. Through this division of the respondents, each of the 5 sectors of the National Climate Agreement of the Netherlands is covered. This selection aligns with the principles of purposeful sampling in qualitative research, where the investigated organisations are chosen for their potential to provide in-depth and relevant insights (Patton, 2002).

The decision to interview an operational organisation such as the police, in addition to governmental organisations, was taken for a number of reasons. First, because the police is also part of the public sector and therefore public leadership, where this research is focusing on, is also involved. That makes it valuable to interview respondents in this organisation. Second, conversations with colleagues from the internship of the researcher indicated that it is common for executives in this type of organisations to move more frequently between roles in the public sector. As a result, the leaders are more or less the same as in the ministries, provinces and municipalities.

In order to find respondents for this study, no exclusion criteria were used. As the focus of the research is on the implementation of sustainability policies, respondents had to work on sustainability projects. These sustainability topics can vary from people, planet or profit focused as describes by Elkington (1999) and explained in the literature review. It was chosen to interview employees as well as managers because employees are also in a position to describe their manager's leadership style. To get respondents more easily, it was chosen to use the network of colleagues from the internship of the researcher to approach respondents. An overview of all the conducted interviews can be found in the table below.

The interviews were conducted in Dutch because the research is focused on Dutch governmental organisations. In the public sector within the Netherlands, Dutch is the primary language of communication. Conducting the interviews in Dutch ensured that the respondents could express their experiences and perceptions accurately and comfortably. Because the results of this research are written in English, the researcher translated the used quote's carefully to make sure the original responses were accurately and properly represented.

Table 1: Overview of the conducted interviews

Respondent working for:	Date of interview:	Interview code:
Police	06-05-2024	Interview 1
City of Amsterdam	07-05-2024	Interview 2
Police	13-05-2024	Interview 3
City of Amsterdam	14-05-2024	Interview 4
City of Amsterdam	16-05-2024	Interview 5
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality	23-05-2024	Interview 6
Province of Zuid-Holland	23-05-2024	Interview 7
Province of Zuid-Holland	23-05-2024	Interview 8
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality	03-06-2024	Interview 9
Police	07-06-2024	Interview 10
Province of Zuid-Holland	13-06-2024	Interview 11

Combining literature review and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods, linked scientific theories to the actual practice in Dutch governmental organisations and it helped to answer the research questions posed.

4.2.2 Analysis of Semi-structured interviews

The interviews all took place online via Microsoft Teams. Online interviews were chosen because the main advantage of face-to-face interviews, namely the ability to see and experience body language, is less important to the research question. Also, it was difficult to schedule face-to-face interviews with some respondents because of their busy schedules and the geographical distribution of interviews ranging from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and to The Hague. By conducting the interviews online, it made it easier to schedule interviews with the most suitable respondents. In addition, online interviews are a more environmentally friendly option as the researcher and respondents did not have to travel, which reduces the carbon footprint. The researcher chose to conduct all interviews in the same way.

In the Microsoft teams, all the interviews were recorded so that they could be listened to later. The automatic transcribe function of Microsoft Teams was used to form the transcripts. All transcripts were later checked and corrected for errors made by the automatic transcription function. The interview transcripts are cleaned of text that does not relate to the interview questions, such as beginnings and endings. The interviews were conducted in Dutch because all respondents were native Dutch speakers. Conducting the interviews in Dutch made it easier for the respondents to give answers, which increased the validity of the answers. The transcripts are therefore also in Dutch. As the study is in English, the quotations in the analysis

and results are translated using online translation tools. In order to get a clear impression of the overall data, the transcripts were first reread for analysis.

As a first step, open coding was used to highlight the most important parts of the interviews. The important text was coded according to the concepts that emerged from the literature review. An overview of the codes used can be found in the code scheme in the appendix. After using open coding, matching codes were merged with axial coding. From this, overarching codes eventually emerged. The last and final step of coding was selective coding. This form of coding involved comparing the responses of different respondents to look for differences and similarities between for example the ministries, provinces, municipalities, and the police. Eventually the all the codes were elaborated and examined, and conclusions were drawn from them.

4.3 Validity & Reliability

The validity of a research indicates the extent to which the results accurately measure the intended variables (Vennix, 2019). You can divide this into internal and external validity. In order to improve the internal validity different sources are used for data collection. This methodological approach, combined with in-depth interviews, improves internal validity. Furthermore, the research questions are closely aligned with the problem statement and theoretical framework. Specifically having the focus on understanding the role of leadership in shaping sustainable policies within governmental organisations in the Netherlands. This alignment strengthens internal validity by ensuring that the research questions address the core objectives of the study.
However, achieving external validity in qualitative research can be challenging, making it difficult to generalize findings beyond the research context. It is crucial to carefully select individuals and organisations to participate in the research (Bell et al., 2019). The generalizability of the research findings may be limited due to the focus on specific governmental organisations in the Netherlands. However, the study's insights remain valuable for understanding leadership dynamics in other similar contexts, particularly within the public sector and sustainability domains.

Reliability refers to the consistency with which a method measures a given phenomenon. Research is considered reliable when it produces the same result multiple times using the same methods and circumstances (Vennix, 2019; Bell et al., 2019) Simply put, are the research results repeatable? The combination of semi-structured interviews and desk research offers a systematic approach to data collection, which enhances the reliability of the research process. Clear guidelines for conducting interviews and analyzing data contribute to consistency in data collection procedures. The use of both desk research and interviews enables data triangulation, which improves the reliability of the findings by verifying information from multiple sources. By doing so triangulation helps to reduce potential biases and it improves the overall validity of the research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015).

5. Results and data analysis

The following paragraphs present the findings from the conducted interviews with employees in the Dutch governmental organisations. Paragraph 5.1 will illustrate which leadership styles the interviewed employees experienced and will therefore help to answer sub-question a. It will highlight the specific traits, skills, and behaviours that were present in the leadership styles. The combination of the described results in paragraph 5.1 and 5.2 will be used to formulate an answer to sub-question b. In paragraph 5.2 the factors within the leadership style that facilitate, or hinder implementation will be identified. These insights will help to answer research question c. Relevant quotes from the interviews will be included to provide clear examples of how these leadership styles are applied and experienced in practice. The respondents believe that the leadership style has an important influence on the implementation of sustainable policies. According to the respondents a different style would have led to different results. The importance and influence of leadership styles, traits, behaviours, and skills are reflected in all upcoming results.

5.1 Leadership

5.1.1 Leadership styles

During this research 11 interviews have been conducted in multiple governmental organisations in the Netherlands. All respondents work in teams addressing sustainability challenges. Table 2 shows an overview of the number of respondents that mentioned aspects of the five leadership styles. The numbers in the table refer to the number of respondents per organisation who mentioned the aspects of leadership style in their interview. The numbers in the *'total'* column are the number of respondents out of the total of 11 respondents who mentioned the aspects of leadership style in their interview. As can be seen in the table, the inclusive leadership style can be recognized the most in the investigated Dutch governmental organisations. The inclusive leadership style is complemented by several characteristics of the altruistic and visionary leadership styles. The creative and radical leadership style are experienced the least. The radical leadership style also seems to be present at the different organisations, but this is mainly because risks are taken by multiple leaders and partly due to leaders being upfront and present. However, the important aspect of being very outspoken is missing.

The interviews showed that within the studied governmental organisations, leaders do not use a single leadership style. The interviews reveal that in most situations a combination of styles is used. There is a preference for one style, and it is complemented by a second style. In the inclusive leadership style collaboration, participation, dialogue, and consensus are of great importance. An inclusive leadership style is a democratic style where successes are acknowledged (Visser & Courtice, 2011). The following paragraph will show some responses that show how the present leadership styles emerge.

Table 2: Overview of the number of respondents who mentioned aspects of the leadership styles per governmental organisation

Leadership style	Aspects of leadership style	Police	City of Amsterdam	Province of Zuid-Holland	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality	Total
Inclusive	Collaboration	3	3	3	1	**10**
	Consensus	3	3	3	2	**11**
	Connecting	3	3	3	1	**10**
Visionary	Charisma	1	3	0	2	**6**
	Collective interest	3	2	3	2	**10**
	Common inspirational vision	1	1	2	1	**5**
Creative	Innovative	2	1	0	0	**3**
	Renewal	0	0	0	0	**0**
	Transformational change	0	1	0	1	**2**
Altruistic	Collective interest	3	2	3	2	**10**
	Serving	2	2	3	2	**9**
	More withdrawn	2	0	0	1	**3**
Radical	Outspoken	0	1	0	0	**1**
	Taking risks	3	2	2	0	**7**
	Present	0	3	1	1	**5**

Within the police, the researcher conducted three interviews with staff members of the central sustainability program of the national police. This central team works with a variety of other departments, to create sustainability policies, to develop a strategy and to provide support for the implementation of these sustainability policies.
The interviews show that consensus plays an important role in the leadership style within the police. The style focuses on cooperation and dialogue, as indicated by the following responses in both interviews:

> *''It is always done together with the team and with the police, you have to make sure everyone is behind it anyway. We have always coordinated everything with all kinds of decision-making bodies.''* (Interview 1)

> *''How can we make it possible? How can we make sure everyone is behind this and that you can really get it done that way? … The vision is there, but it also needs support from the entire organisation… We visit the various units, so we try to visit them and tell the story of what we are doing, so that as many people as possible know what we are doing and get them on board.''* (Interview 3)

It is not only within the police that consensus plays an important role in the style of leadership, but also in the other organisations, consensus emerges as an important aspect when talking about leadership styles. Furthermore, interviews in the other governmental organisations highlighted the importance of knowing the interests of everyone involved and creating support:

''Indeed, I sometimes see him moving a bit more towards consensus if that is favorable to what we are working towards, say for example a grid expansion in cooperation with the grid operator and where you also need to have a satisfied environment. So, then you will look much more for that consensus.'' (Interview 4)

''I would say consensus because you are just balancing a lot of interests. But that is also the way forward, you need to be able to build consensus, because you also want to get a movement going, so you want to get a lot of people to be engaged. You do need a good story and some charisma for that, but the ability to build consensus is also important.'' (Interview 8)

These sections from the interviews emphasize that collaboration and engaging all the actors that are involved is a frequently recurring aspect in the leadership styles in the investigated organisations. In order to achieve this consensus, you can see the efforts of leaders to keep the conversation going and to build support:

''Consensus, because he is very much focused on mutual games. We have to involve more people. We all have to come to some kind of compromise. I often use the example of the orange. We both want the orange. There is only one orange. And yes, if you do not interact and you just fight over the orange, you will not find out that I want the orange because I want the peel because I want to make something out of it. And you want the orange because you want to make juice out of it. So if we start talking to each other, you will find that we can just share it.'' (Interview 7)

''If you impose a government-wide rule on the population, you have to make sure that there is support for it, that it is feasible, so you can not make something up from your ivory tower in The Hague. Despite a decision being made by a minister, you have to be able to get through a door with the entire sector and the public in order to write and implement good and maintainable policy.'' (Interview 6)

This focus on inclusivity, consensus, engaging in dialogue and focusing on consensus to build support for the sustainability policies is in line with the inclusive leadership style. An inclusive leader creates a culture in which successes are acknowledged. This aspect of celebrating successes emerges in the interviews:

''*But we also celebrate our successes, but we do not celebrate them enough because they are always small steps. For the team it feels like there are no step when there are a lot of small steps.''* (Interview 1)

''For example, if we have achieved a goal. For example, a long-term goal, then we pay attention to that. This is where we were 5 years ago, then we started on this path and achieved this. We can go further by doing this and that in the next few years. So, the achievements are always put in the context of the bigger picture.'' (Interview 6)

Next to acknowledging successes it is also important that people feel connected and are encouraged within an inclusive leadership style. This is done in a number of ways, as the following fragments from the interviews show:

''In the role of program manager, it is important to make sure that everyone can do their job as well as possible. So, you have to be supportive and try to remove all the bumps and obstacles so that the rest of the team can work as well as possible and that also what happens in this team'' (Interview 2)

''A core element of the leadership style is people-oriented and results-oriented. If you are a good people-oriented leader and that is not pampering. Then the results come almost naturally and very often the leadership and responsibility lies at the level where it belongs.'' (Interview 9)

The altruistic leadership style is also fitting the leadership that are commonly used in the investigated governmental organisations. An altruistic leader is often a bit quieter, less visible, and more withdrawn despite their strong professional will. Next to that an altruistic leader is often more about serving the team than steering it. Besides, in the altruistic style the individual interests are outweighed by the greater common good. (Visser and Courtice, 2011). For example, the following statements were made in the interviews:

''Yes, she is just very involved. She is very much part of the team. She works very much with you. And just defines the big picture and is the linking pin to the command staff and to the boards … But she is also very much looking at what the proposal is from the team. What do we think? She also asks that a lot. What would you do or what do you think we should do and goes along with that.'' (Interview 1)

''So, he is serving rather than directing for those people. I do not think he is telling them what to do. But that he just thinks along and keeps the overview. He makes sure that the right amount of energy and attention goes to all those subjects to make sure that enough is happening.'' (Interview 8)

''So she is not someone who is very much in the foreground, but much more of a behind-the-scenes kind of person who gets things done.'' (Interview 3)

The altruistic style emerges in several interviews as the leadership styles in de organisations are often described as servant-like. In the interviews, there is less concrete mentioning of why the employees believe the leadership style is servant. Although, it is being mentioned that leaders act in a serving way towards the team, but the explanation and rational is not always clear. In addition to the inclusive and altruistic leadership styles, the visionary leadership style is also common. This style has its focus on charisma and tries to challenge and transform the perceptions and expectations of followers. A visionary leader is trying to create a shared, inspiring vision (Visser & Courtice, 2011). The following quotes from the interviews fit this style:

''If he really wants to get things done, or if he wants to act quickly, I can see him using the charismatic style a bit more. I think his preferred style is more the charismatic side though.'' (Interview 4)

''Yes, she does make the final call, even if a project leader suggests doing something else, she just says yes, I do not really care that much right now. I hear what you are saying, but we are going to do it that way. Yes, she does take it into account, so that bit of consensus is there. But I do notice that in the end she decides.'' (Interview 5)

As the quotes show, some elements of the visionary and the altruistic leadership style are being experienced by the respondents. But less emphatically than the elements that are being mentioned in the context of the inclusive leadership style. The creative and radical leadership style are the least recognizable styles according to the respondents' experiences. Elements of these styles are hardly found in the interviews. Being very outspoken aligns with the radical leadership style. It is thought that this style is no longer appropriate and accepted for the current time and situation:

''It seems that being outspoken is no longer as acceptable as it once was. I think this has a lot to do with the political reckoning culture.'' (Interview 9)

The creative leadership style is more about bringing transformational change. A creative leader can be seen as a game changer (Visser & Courtice, 2011). It seems that respondents think it is really tough for leaders to actually bring about transformational change and therefore a creative leadership style is difficult to adopt. For example, most of the respondents indicated that they work towards their goals from intrinsic motivation. This intrinsic motivation stems from their higher ideals and moral values. However, it appears that this intrinsic motivation is not directly linked to the leadership style but is mostly already alive in the minds of the employees:

''I think a lot of people at the municipality, and in our team too, are working on this task (implementing sustainable policies) because they are driven by higher ideals and moral values. That is basically what we are working on together.'' (Interview 5)

To bring about transformational change as a leader, leaders also depend on actors outside the organisation. This makes it difficult to adapt the creative leadership style:

''We cannot become circular as the province of Zuid-Holland on our own. We need all the entrepreneurs for that. We need the residents for that and the municipalities. So, we need to take small steps to drive big transitions.'' (Interview 7)

An analysis of the leadership styles across all interviews is presented in Table 3. In this table, the leadership style(s) most frequently mentioned is/are shown in bold and put on the first line. The leadership styles in the second line are also very common, but less so than the bold leadership styles. This ranking is based on how many of the leadership style aspects of these styles were mentioned in the interviews. Table 2 was also constructed using this type of analysis. To ensure the anonymity of the respondents, the respondents are listed in a random order in the table. As can be seen in 10 of the 11 interviews, the inclusive leadership style is the most used or one of the most used leadership styles. After the inclusive leadership style, the altruistic and visionary leadership style are most common. It is only in an interview with the City of Amsterdam that the radical style emerges as strongly present. It is notable that another respondent from the same team does not mention the aspects of radical leadership

style. The creative leadership style does not come across as being present in any of the interviews. The table also shows that there are no significant differences in the present leadership styles between the different governmental organisations or the different sustainability topics. The leadership styles are very similar across the different governmental organisations and sustainability topics.

Table 3: The governmental organisation, leadership styles and sustainability topics per respondent

Respondent working for	Leadership style	Sustainability topic
Police	**Inclusive** Altruistic	Central sustainability program
Police	**Inclusive**, **Altruistic**	Central sustainability program
Police	**Inclusive** Visionary, Altruistic	Central sustainability program
City of Amsterdam	**Inclusive**, **Radical**	Electricity supply
City of Amsterdam	**Inclusive** Visionary, Altruistic	Electricity supply
City of Amsterdam	**Inclusive**, **Visionary**	Emission-free mobility
Province of Zuid-Holland	**Inclusive** Visionary, Altruistic	Circular Economy
Province of Zuid-Holland	**Inclusive** Altruistic	Circular Economy
Province of Zuid-Holland	**Inclusive** Visionary, Altruistic	Circular Economy
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality	**Visionary, Altruistic**	Animal Welfare
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality	**Inclusive** Visionary, Altruistic	Social security & Sustainable employability

5.1.2 Leadership traits, behaviours, and skills

Multiple leadership traits, behaviours and skills that are mentioned in the literature review as important for sustainable leaders are also experienced by the interviewed employees. An important quality in the respondents' experience is that leaders should be forward thinkers with a strong long-term vision to ensure that sustainability goals are met. When it comes to risk-taking, respondents have different experiences and perceptions. On the one hand, respondents say that taking risks is necessary to make progress in sustainability, but on the other hand, other respondents prefer leaders to be more risk averse. Respondents agreed that it is important for leaders to focus on connecting and collaborating with each other. Both internally in the governmental organisation and externally with other involved actors. In this way leaders can also encourage other actors to join in the sustainability transitions that are taking place. Respondents also experience some other characteristics, behaviours and skills that are not mentioned in the literature review of this thesis. These new insights will be

elaborated in Chapter 7. The following parts of this paragraph look in more detail at how employees perceive the traits, behaviours, and skills of their leaders.

Some important qualities or traits for a ''true'' sustainable leader are being forward-thinking and being directional (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). This means that a leader should have a strong and long-term vision which is also known for the employees. In most cases, a vision is present. those visions and goals are mainly determined top down. The vision and goals are often in line with The Dutch National Climate Agreement. So that means a 60% reduction in emissions in 2030 and a net-zero emission of greenhouse gasses in 2050 (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2022b). As shown in the phrases below the visions and goals often stem from national laws and regulations:

> *''The idea is that we align our targets to the National Climate Agreement. We commit to a carbon dioxide reduction of 60% by 2030 compared to 1990.''* (Interview 10)

> *''The thing is the municipality is aiming to cut CO_2 emissions by 60% by 2030. And by 2050, I think we want to be completely carbon neutral.''* (Interview 4)

There is a difference in the extent to which employees are aware of the leader's vision regarding sustainability and how the mission and goals in the context of sustainability policies are highlighted. This can be seen in the following phrases of the interviews.

This phrase shows that the long-term vision is clear for everyone:

> *''Our goal is to have emissions-free mobility within the A10 Amsterdam ring road by 2030. That means all mobility must be emissions-free. That is what we are aiming for. That is our goal, and it is up to us to make it happen.''* (Interview 5)

Other interviews show that next to knowing the vision it is also important that there is support for the long-term vision:

> *''OK, so the vision is there, but it needs backing from the whole organisation, especially from the top.''* (Interview 3)

It is also reflected in the interviews that teams are still searching for the right direction:

> *''We are all searching together in the fog. He does not have answers either. It is about exploring together and doing it together.''* (Interview 11)

There is a difference between the interviews where the vision and mission come from. Environmental sustainability is not always the motivation for the vision and mission of leaders:

> *''I do not necessarily feel that his mission and vision come from a sustainability perspective, but mainly from the social added value of the power grid.''* (Interview 4)

A leader who is a forward-thinker, has a clear image or dream for the present and the future (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). Respondents also recognize this in their manager's leadership style:

> *''He is really good at strategic foresight. He is almost like a future predictor.''* (Interview 7)

''She is a forward thinker. She is already considered the possibilities. She often has an idea about things already.'' (Interview 1)

Another quality of a sustainable leader is being innovative. An innovative leader is someone who dares to takes risks and accepts the consequences. Trying new things is also part of being innovative (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). Being innovative is only named by three employees as a recognizable quality. From interview 2, being innovative did emerge as a quality present in the leadership style:

''Innovative because I feel that this task requires new glasses or a new way of thinking. Instead of approaching it from the existing frameworks and processes, because that has shown that we do not make it.'' (Interview 2)

According to the respondents there is a big difference in how leaders approach risks. On the one hand, interviews show that it is necessary to take risks to achieve sustainability policy objectives. On the other hand, four respondents mention that risk-taking is not desirable in connection with their role as a representative of the people. This risk aversion has to do with the government role. Their reasoning is in line with the legitimate government. Here the focus is on the legitimacy and lawfulness of government actions (Van der Steen et al., 2014). The following quotes reveal the aversion to risk-taking:

''As a representative of the people, you need to be careful not to take big risks, as that could be seen as reckless and that it lacks integrity.'' (Interview 4)

''But I tend towards being risk-averse because if you take a risk and it turns out wrong, you immediately have political consequences so generally risk-averse.'' (Interview 6)

''You do not want to want to do something against the wishes of the administrators, the Provincial Councils in this case. In the strategy, the kind of risk he can take is bounded.'' (Interview 8)

In the context of taking risks, there clearly are different views among the different leadership styles. Seven of the eleven respondents say risk-taking is necessary to take steps towards sustainability. For example, the following phrases endorse the importance of risk-taking and show that this is reflected in the way leaders act:

''She dares to walk off the beaten track. because of that, a lot of success has been achieved.'' (Interview 1)

''The energy transition needs to move so fast that by taking the standard paths and being risk averse, we are not achieving the pace we need to achieve. So we are sometimes asked to take a little more risk.'' (Interview 2)

''I guess you could say we do take risks. Otherwise, you will not get very far, talking about this topic.'' (Interview 3)

''We are not afraid to take risks. We are always trying new things.'' (Interview 5)

''If we just avoid everything, we are not going to get anywhere, so we have to be brave and take risks. But it is important to be able to deal with the consequences and mitigate if things go wrong.'' (Interview 7)

''If you keep playing it safe, you will not get anywhere. We have to run into those system barriers to know what those barriers are. Because of that, you have to start doing and trying things and sometimes bump your head.'' (Interview 11)

Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019) also describe connecting and being responsible as important traits for a sustainable leader. Those two traits are most common when respondents describe their experiences and perceptions regarding the present leadership styles. Connecting and being responsible are the most recognizable for the respondents. This role of connecter can link up with content:

''As a person, she can connect very well, especially in terms of the content, so she can look at it like, okay, what interests are there? And how are we going to link them together to ensure that sustainability keeps coming back?'' (Interview 3)

This connecting role is also used to get external organisations on board and involved. Employees perceive that this is also necessary to achieve goals and therefore see this as a positive leadership trait:

''As a connector, he is a real asset to our partners, giving them someone to bounce ideas off who speaks their language and understands their interests.'' (Interview 2)

''He knows that we can not do this transition alone. So he is looking to connect with other organisations and other tasks.'' (Interview 7)

In addition to external connection, connection internally in the team is also something respondents experienced. This is mostly about ensuring that everyone in the team is seen and included. This ability to connect allows leaders to touch and and inspire people (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). The following quotes highlight this role as an internal connector:

''I do think he is quite proactive so looking for that connection with people who are needed or who he thinks should participate.'' (Interview 8)

''I think a connecting leadership style, not even necessarily focused on consensus, but focused on keeping everyone involved and make sure everyone feels seen.''
(Interview 9)

''She looks for consensus, especially within our team. So that is why she connects with people. I also think she is always looking for support, even outside the team.'' (Interview 10)

This internal connection within a team as shown above also matches with the earlier mentioned important leadership trait responsibility. With responsibility Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019) mean taking responsibility for yourself and for the organisation, as well as social responsibility and responsibility to the people in the organisation. Taking responsibility also shows up in other areas. One respondent said that they feel responsible for doing the task as a team, and that the manager's leadership style also makes the team feel this responsibility:

> *''We've been given the trust, we've been given the people, and now we've got to do it together. She really does feel that, and you can see that responsibility in her leadership style. By always bringing it up.''* (interview 5)

Similarly, another respondent described that despite things being new, the manager does take on her responsibility as a leader:

> *''That does require a certain level of maturity and responsibility, which you have to be willing and able to take on. Even though some things are still new to her, she takes on that responsibility every time.''* (Interview 10)

The last two traits self-aware and impactful were the least forthcoming in the interviews. When talking about being impactful we talk about a leader who is driven to make a difference and who is able to do so by bringing about change. This drive to make an impact among executives is in many cases less experienced by respondents. This is not to say that this drive is not present, but it does indicate that respondents experience other traits more and are more aware of them. One respondent did name impactful as a present trait:

> *''Being impactful is what I see reflected in the leadership style. The impact you have in what you do matters. So, I think that is important If you are a leader or a human being, it matters what impact you have.''* (Interview 9)

There are different opinions whether being impactful has to do with taking big steps or small steps. The bureaucracy within an organisation and the decision-making process to be gone through determine how big the steps can be. When small steps are taken it often has to do with the type of organisation you are working with. The following quotes highlight the importance of taking small steps:

> *''Everything takes time and requires a lot of attention and a lot of iterations, so I think she is great at taking those small steps.*'' (Interview 1)

> *''I believe in taking small steps. Yes, I think it fits with the subject of sustainability. It is not realistic to expect to make big changes all at once. It is just not going to work. I truly believe that when we all take small steps in a big organisation like the police, we will make a big impact.''* (Interview 3)

> *''We cannot become circular as the province of Zuid-Holland on our own. We need all the entrepreneurs for that. We need the residents for that and the municipalities. So,*

we need to take small steps to drive big transitions. So it might be possible to speed up the process, but then you will probably run into problems later on.'' (Interview 7)

''Because we are also navigating in the unknown, you cannot take big steps, so these are small steps.'' (Interview 11)

Other respondents believe that it is necessary to take big steps to make an impact. They believe that taking big steps is required to make an impact because the task of implementing sustainable policies demands it:

''She takes big steps.It has to be given the task. We've got a very short deadline. 2030 is a very short time, so we really have to take big steps now. Fortunately, she is doing that.'' (Interview 5)

''I do not think that we can keep up with the required speed with small steps, so that means that we have to take more rigorous bigger step.'' (Interview 2)

Self-awareness is about the leader thinking about themselves. Does the leader know who he or she is? Knowing what they stand for, what they are good at, and what they are not so good at. It means that a leader should also be aware of their shortcomings. Being open to feedback is another thing a self-aware leader will do (Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit, 2019). This trait only emerges in the three interviews at the province of Zuid-Holland:

''I think self-conscious is also a good fit because he is very aware of his role in the bigger picture. So he also knows his own role and position very well.'' (Interview 7)

''Self-awareness fits his leadership style because I think he is quite a realistic man. He is also realistic about his own strengths and weaknesses.'' (Interview 8)

''He does a lot of self-reflection. He knows very well who he is and what he can do and what he is good at and what he likes. He also knows what he has to offer others. Yes, he is very self-aware.'' (Interview 11)

In addition to the traits of sustainable leaders mentioned in the literature, employees also mention other traits. Five interviews mentioned that having substantive knowledge is an important trait in sustainable leadership. Also, behaviours that complement the used literature within leadership are mentioned. Think for example on having a kind of natural enthusiasm, which is mentioned in three interviews:

''I also see a kind of natural enthusiasm. And, That also works very connectively, so that is nice.'' (Interview 8)

''She can very easily link up with others, so project leaders can very easily spar with her on matters they cannot resolve themselves. She always knows someone, whether it is someone inside or outside the company, who can help make things happen. Because she has all these lines of communication, we can get on with each other very quickly, because we know who we need to contact.'' (Interview 5)

It is also worth mentioning that being a leader who empowers others to contribute to a more sustainable society is perceived as a good quality. By doing so, you are not only encouraging sustainable policies within the organisation, but also in the organisations outside which allows you to make a bigger impact:

> *''We want to facilitate the sustainable transition as a municipality. You would actually much rather want that organisations start doing it themselves. So, we do that in addition, so we realize it ourselves and we are working on getting others to organise it as well, because we cannot just do it ourselves.''* (Interview 5)

> *''She is really considerate of other stakeholders. She always thinks about how things will affect the market and how things will be perceived by the market. She is very engaged with the outside world. She does a lot for the municipality of Amsterdam, but she is also well-known in the zero-emission mobility market.''* (Interview 5)

> *''We want to drive the circular transition. We feel like a team that stimulates and helps others. How can we help the outside world? How can you learn from each other? We also try to connect and to share experiences. We work with networks to connect and take the circular transition further.''* (Interview 11)

Four interviews also show that you should not be afraid to make mistakes. They actually see mistakes as part of the learning process, which means they help you take steps forward:

> *''His approach is that we learn from our mistakes, so he appreciates it when we make mistakes because you learn from them.''* (Interview 11)

> *''We do not know how to get there, so we will have to try new things and that means we will also make mistakes.''* (Interview 7)

Two interviews have highlighted another important aspect that is not discussed in the literature: leaders should not be afraid of political repercussions. It seems that because of this fear of political repercussions, leaders are less outspoken and are less willing to take risks. This is despite the fact that respondents actually name these as important aspects of leadership. These elements are important aspects within the radical leadership style. So it is possible that the radical leadership style is less present because of fear of political repercussions.

Having a good composition of a team is identified as an important factor for sustainable leadership and successful implementation of sustainability policies. By this is meant that you create a diverse team with different characters and backgrounds that complement each other. For example, interview 6 mentioned that the team consists of biologists, veterinarians, psychologists, and behavioural experts. The following phrases highlight this importance:

> *''He looks at what kind of person our team needs, so it is not so much about a very rigid job description. You just have to be able to do this. It is more about who you are as a person. What kind of character do you bring to the table? This is how he puts his team together, and it just works really well.''* (Interview 11)

''It also shows what the company's hiring policy is like, which is also about leadership. looks at a diverse team composition. We are looking for a diverse team, so we will consider all kinds of people.'' (Interview 6)

5.2 Facilitating and hindering impact of leadership style

The previous sections of the results have outlined the leadership styles present in Dutch governmental organisations, detailing the traits, behaviours, and skills commonly associated with these styles. This section will delve into how respondents experience and perceive these leadership styles in the context of implementing sustainability policies and therefore helps to answer sub-questions b and c. The following sections will explore employees' perceptions of the factors that facilitated or hindered the implementation of these sustainability policies. Through the interviews, a clear picture emerges of how leadership traits and behaviours impact the implementation of sustainability policy, as perceived by the employees.

5.2.1 Facilitating impact of leadership style

Employees experience and perceive it as facilitating the implementation of sustainability policies when leaders build support for their policies by networking and involving all stakeholders. The existence of a network also facilitates implementation. Political administrative sensitivity is also something that is seen by respondents as something positive. Employees also feel that giving them a lot of freedom and responsibility in carrying out their tasks has a facilitating effect. In the following section, the facilitating effect of leadership style is further explored.

A line organisation is a structure where authority and responsibility flow from the top down, while accountability flows from the bottom up. Also, in the examined Dutch governmental organisations this is a very common organisational structure. When leadership regarding the implementation of sustainability policies is placed outside this line structure, it can have many advantages. This is because it lets you skip over existing decision-making lines, which can speed up policymaking and implementation processes. This is shown in the following phrases from the interviews:

''But the implementation of the plans therefore takes place in the line, the executive line. The command force gives the assignments to the teams. The program manager does stimulate and tries to facilitate but ultimately others in the line really have to implement it. So, the program manager is there more for managing the sustainability team to arrive at visions and plans.'' (Interview 1)

''Sometimes you have to work outside those decision-making lines. Most departments are just in that line, so you always have to report to someone who is then above you. We are not in that line. We do have to report, though. But there are actually quite a few steps you can skip.'' (Interview 3)

As the phrases show, not having decision-making authority as a leader can make implementation difficult. This also applies to not having decision authority over resources and people. Leadership focused on lobbying, creating support, good networking has a positive effect on the implementation of sustainable policies, according to the perception of employees. The facilitating impact of this can be seen in the following quotes:

> *''We all set up networks of entrepreneurs, municipalities, and knowledge institutions. And we very much try to seek that connection there, so not saying that we have the answer. No, we always want to enter the conversation. What is on your minds? So, joining and telling everyone how to do it and say that we have all the answers. So, we focus a lot on that connection.''* (Interview 11)

> *''We have a lot of competing interests in external cooperation and with those internal stakeholders. So, we try to get others on board with our task.''* (Interview 2)

> *''We work with the grid operator to extend the grid. It is important to have a happy, healthy environment and an environmental service that can do its job well. So, you will be looking for that consensus a lot more.''* (Interview 4)

The importance of being a connecting leader with a network also recur in the literature review. Connecting is namely one of the important traits for an impactful leader according to Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019). Also, the important practices or behaviours that a sustainable leader must envision, according to the Sustainability Leadership Relational Model from Ferdig (2009), have similarities with these aspects of leadership. Being a connecting leader with a network recurs in looking for holistic interconnections, understanding social change dynamics and convening constructive conversations. Interview 4 further emphasizes how important it can be to be a connecting leader with a network:

> *''Really a spider in the web role. He has a huge network and a certain level of likeability that helps him get things done. He is a networker who really knows how to make connections.''* (Interview 4)

Three respondents mentioned that political-administrative sensitivity within the leadership style contributes positively to policy implementation. Policy implementation is also positively affected by a high level of organisational knowledge and an awareness of the various interests at play. The following fragments shows this:

> *''I also think that political-administrative sensitivity, just that she has a good understanding of how the organisation works, what the different interests are and how to translate that into what is needed in terms of sustainability. And also getting the team on board. Well, making useful decisions and doing useful things. It just works very well.''* (Interview 1)

> *''Being very political and administrative sensitive. That you have feeling, sense things and know how the game works. That you also know the strategic dynamics and can respond to them. I think those are his core qualities.''* (Interview 7)

The aspects of a leadership style that involve how a manager manages employees' tasks is perceived as important. It is good for employees if the leader's leadership style is not too controlling or overbearing. It is good to let employees come up with ideas and to rely on their knowledge:

> *''Let people do their own work and let them come up with their own ideas. And giving them the space to implement those ideas. Rely on their own knowledge. So do not micromanage people. Yes, that are things that make his leadership style successful''* (Interview 8)

> *''A core element of the leadership style is people-oriented and results-oriented. If you are a good people-oriented leader and that is not pampering. Then the results come almost naturally and very often the leadership and responsibility lies at the level where it belongs.''* (Interview 9)

5.2.2 Hindering impact of leadership style

Employees also mentioned characteristics of a leadership style that they experience and perceive to be hindering the implementation of sustainable policies. One important characteristic that is being mentioned is the busy schedule of leaders. The way in which a leadership style leaves little room for bottom-up initiatives is perceived as a barrier. Respondents also mention the role of external factors as a barrier. The following section delves deeper into how leadership style can hinder progress in sustainability policy implementation.

In the paragraph on the facilitating impact of a leadership style, micromanaging came up as a bad case practice. Indeed, the following phrase shows that when a manager micromanages it is perceived as a something that can hinder the implementation of sustainability policies:

> *''Something that gets in the way is definitely a bit of micromanagement. Sometimes she wants to know a bit too much, to understand everything too well and then sometimes she wants to push her points through. Sometimes this works well, but it can also backfire.''* (Interview 5)

> *''There is also a risk that the manager will start to micro-manage everything. And that employees in a team are given only a few responsibilities.''* (Interview 10)

What is also seen as a hindering factor is if the leader has too much on his plate or if it is difficult to schedule an appointment. Sometimes scheduling an appointment is possible after 2 months or more. Respondents experience that it sometimes takes too long before follow-up steps can be taken:

> *''And he is not so aware that it is difficult to approach because of his busy schedule.''* (Interview 4)

''With many managers, accessibility does pose a problem. With some managers, you really have to plan a 15-minute slot somewhere in calendar two months ahead, so to speak. But that also says something about the workload that some of those people experience.'' (Interview 6)

The leadership style of the police is less responsive to bottom-up initiatives. If this is addressed, it could benefit the implementation of sustainable policies. Connected within the leadership style is the importance of focus:

''But sometimes I think you have to be much more focused on your bigger vision and the bigger impact you want to make.'' (Interview 1)

It is also mentioned that if the approach to implementing sustainable policies is too idealistic, that it can be hindering the implementation. By being too idealistic you can repel people and lose the connection and the needed support with the involved actors:

''Yes, the danger is being to idealistic, too much moralizing. I think that this is not a problem within the team, but more for outside the team.'' (Interview 8)

As a leader, it is also important to take a step back and really think about what is going on before you act:

''Sometimes, you can handle to quick or be a bit too assertive. Sometimes it is best to wait and see what is going on and to understand what is going on.'' (Interview 2)

Leaders are also faced with external factors, over which it has no control, but which affect the implementation of sustainable policies. One example is that different stakeholders often have conflicting interests, which makes implementation more difficult. But it is also about the power that teams have to make decisions on sustainability topics, but also budgets and priorities at the organisational level play a role:

''T*he sustainability team is currently not in a steering position. That has to do with how the team is positioned in the organisation and how the organisation is structured. Because of this it is very difficult to ensure that people arrange capacity to implement policies.''* (Interview 1)

''Whereas the municipality looks wider than just the power grids and also looks at social interest. So that can sometimes clash.'' (Interview 4)

''We have to deal with external factors. Well, a right-wing cabinet could impact us a lot, especially with money flows. If we do not get the money anymore, it willl have an immediate impact on us. So, we do have some major external factors that could make it difficult for us to meet our targets. But we do not always have the power to control those things.'' (Interview 5)

''We have to think about the political context, including at our provincial level. We do not have a huge budget to work with. As a province, we would love to do more, but the

budget just does not allow it. These are just the things that make it difficult for us to do more than we would like. Because there is a lot more on our plate than we can realistically respond to. We just do not have the manpower.'' (Interview 11)

Respondents mention that the extent of priority for implementing sustainability policies and the fact that the organisations have to take multiple interests into account are experienced as hindering external factors:

''Sustainability is not always a top priority for The Police. After all, the police is first and foremost about security. So that is something that collides sometimes.'' (Interview 1)

''It is a huge balancing act. As a municipality, you are responsible for 40 interests. So sometimes it is complicated and a challenge to get everybody together and move towards the same direction.'' (Interview 4)

The external factors that arise from the interviews correspond to a large extent with the external factors of influence mentioned in the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model from Visser & Courtice (2011).

6. Conclusion

This chapter answers the main research question and the sub-questions through the analysis of the collected data and the insights gained from the interviews. The main research question is: *How do employees within governmental organisations in the Netherlands experience and perceive the influence of commonly used leadership styles on the implementation of sustainability policies?* The interviews have provided valuable perspectives on employees' experiences and perceptions of leadership styles in relation to the implementation of sustainability policies. Employees believe that the leadership style has a significant influence on the implementation of sustainable policies. A different leadership style leads to different results regarding implementation.

The first sub-question focused on the leadership styles that can be recognized in the Dutch governmental organisations. In the interview emerges that most employees experience that managers have a preference for one style of leadership, which is complemented by a second style. The most prevalent style is that of inclusive leadership. Respondents experience that sustainable leadership is all about consensus and dialogue. It is pretty common for a leader to look for ways to connect with others in order to achieve their goals. This democratic approach that many respondents have experienced is completely in line with the inclusive leadership style. Furthermore, some of the traits of an altruistic and visionary leader can be observed. These two leadership styles are also quite similar to one another. The altruistic style is characterized by leaders who are somewhat withdrawn and who exhibit a strong professional will. These leaders are primarily serving their team, rather than directing or steering it. The radical leadership style appears to be common in the various organisations as well, although this is mostly because leaders take risks. Other important aspects for radical leadership like being very outspoken and being upfront are missing. Because important aspects of this style are missing, the radical leadership style hardly occurs. Respondents mention that leaders are afraid of political repercussions and that this could be a reason why leaders are less outspoken and are less willing to take risks. Elements like being very innovative and having a focus on transformational change from the creative leadership style emerge the least. There are no significant differences in the present leadership styles between the different governmental organisations or the different sustainability topics. The leadership styles are very similar across the different governmental organisations and sustainability topics that they are working on.

The second and third sub-questions explored how employees experience the present leadership styles, traits, behaviours, and skills in the context of implementing sustainability policies and which aspects where perceived as hindering or facilitating this process of policy implementation. Respondents perceive that a leader needs to have a strong and long-lasting vision that their employees can get behind. In most cases, there is a vision in place. These visions and goals are usually set from the top down. The findings indicated that leadership focused on lobbying, creating support, and good networking has a positive effect on the implementation of sustainable policies. Additionally, political-administrative sensitivity is perceived as contributing positively to policy implementation. Furthermore, respondents indicate that taking risks and learn from mistakes is necessary to take steps towards sustainability. The respondents indicated it hindering that it frequently takes an excessive amount of time before follow-up steps can be taken. It has been said that big steps are needed to achieve the goals, but it is also important to get people on board and create support with

small steps. Additionally, a manager who exercises excessive control is also perceived as hindering the implementation of sustainability policies. The fact that different stakeholders often have conflicting interests makes the implementation of sustainability policies more challenging. However, it is also important to consider the power that teams have to make decisions on sustainability topics, as well as the budgets and the priorities at the organisational level. Furthermore, the study showed that, in addition to the traits named in the theory, other traits are also important. These are traits such as, having substantive knowledge about the topic and context, focus on team composition and diversity and being active within the whole market and engage with the market.

7. Discussion

This discussion looks back at the whole study, delving into the process and its limitations. It reflects on the results from, and the methodology used in this study. It then describes how this research adds to existing scientific literature and to the scientific debate. Finally, this research is discussed in the context of other relevant literature. It will look at what the insights of this research could be when other literature was used for the literature review.

7.1 Limitations & Recommendations

Semi-structured interviews were chosen where an interview guide in combination with leadership cards served as a base for conducting the interviews. Those clear guidelines for conducting interviews contributed to consistency in the data collection procedures. This increased the reliability of the study. This also made it possible to keep the focus on the right research topic. It is therefore more likely that any subjective interpretation by the researcher will be ruled out. Any other limitations were the result of a lack of a balanced distribution of leadership styles in the leadership cards. This may have led to some bias in the interviews and may have steered the respondents towards certain leadership styles.

By focusing the research on multiple organisations within the public sector, the generalizability of the findings significantly increased. This method made it possible to investigate how different leadership philosophies affect implementation of sustainability policies in a variety of organisational settings. It captured variations in experiences and perceptions, leading to more reliable and widely applicable findings. In contrast, focusing on a single organisation could have limited the applicability of the results, as they would be influenced by the specific characteristics and culture of that one organisation. Therefore, a multi-organisational approach provided a more comprehensive understanding and strengthens the validity of the study's conclusions. The research was conducted at different levels of government and at the operational level, including the police, which provided insights into how public sector employees view leadership in the context of implementing sustainable policies. The answers of respondents spread across the different investigated organisations correspond to each other. In the final interviews, the amount of new information that emerged from the interviews decreased progressively. It was therefore assumed that theoretical saturation has been reached and further interviews would not have yield new insights.

Notwithstanding that this research was conducted in several levels of the public sector and several respondents were interviewed, it remains a limitation to generalize the findings to all Dutch governmental organisations. The Dutch public sector is a huge sector with lots of different organisations and teams, all working on different topics with different contexts. As a result, there are many different government roles and external factors that can influence the leadership style or implementation of sustainability policies. The size of the sample may be too small to generalize the findings across the entire public sector. Despite having investigated different contexts, the sample still does not capture the complexity and diversity of the whole Dutch public sector. This presented a limitation for the external validity of the

research because these research findings might not be applicable in different contexts or settings.

The way the researcher obtained respondents could also be a limitation for this study. The majority of respondents came from the network of the internship organisation of the researcher. This organisation is a consultancy firm which is assisting and supporting Dutch governmental organisations in becoming more sustainable. Thus, it can be assumed that all these studied organisations are to some extent already implementing and improving their sustainable policies. It is therefore to be assumed that the topic of sustainability is not equally prevalent in other public sector organisations. In the end, this may affect the present leadership style. It is therefore possible that the investigated sample, where sustainability is already included in the policies, is not a good reflection of all Dutch governmental organisations where sustainability may not yet be on the agenda.

Despite the fact that employees' experiences and perceptions regarding leadership are very important when talking about implementing policies, researching experiences and perceptions can have some limitations. The reliance on employees' experiences and perceptions may introduce subjective biases. It is important to know how employees experience leadership and how they see leadership as facilitating and hindering implementation, because employees are key in implementing objectives (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020, Schneider et al., 1994). This is mainly because almost all implementation failures derive from the disconnection between formulation and implementation of policies (Mintzberg, 1979). But the design of this study makes it difficult to estimate what the actual outcome of leadership styles is on how successful the implementation of sustainable policy is going. This study examines how employees experience the impact of leadership on the implementation of policies. It does not investigate the objective effects of leadership styles on the implementation process. Therefore, follow-up research could also investigate the actual impact of leadership styles on the success of sustainable policy implementation by incorporating objective measures. For instance, one might consider complementing employees' experiences and perceptions by taking a look at the organisations policy documents and annual reports. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership styles.

Because this research has only one researcher it is possible that the researcher's expectations, perspectives, and preconceptions have influenced the study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This researcher bias could affect the results and reduce the objectivity. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher sat down with his internship supervisor every week to discuss progress in the study. Through these conversations, the researcher's expectations, perspectives, and preconceptions were also reviewed by others and biases were limited.

Based on this thesis, several recommendations can be made for enhancing the implementation of sustainability policies in governmental organisations in the Netherlands. For example, emphasising an inclusive leadership style that focuses on involving all team members and encouraging constructive conversations. This helps to ensure support and cooperation that are critical to the successful implementation of sustainability policies. Leaders should focus on building networks within and outside their organisation. This network can help to facilitate the implementation of sustainability policies but by engaging with

external stakeholders you also encourage the implementation of sustainable policies within other organisations. Another recommendation is to integrate substantive knowledge for leaders. When leaders have substantive knowledge about the sustainability topics they work in, they will be able to make informed decisions and guide policy implementation efficiently. Also minimizing micromanagement and giving employees freedom and responsibility in doing their tasks can lead to better policy implementation. Implementing these recommendations can help governmental organisations in the Netherlands to improve their leadership approaches. This will improve the implementation of sustainability policies and make them more effective in achieving their environmental goals, with a positive impact on people and nature.

7.2 Contribution to scientific debate

This study gathered lots of information about how employees experience and perceive leadership styles when it comes to implementing sustainability policies. It offers a peek into how employees experience the impact of different leadership styles on the implementation of sustainability policies. It also looks at which traits, behaviours and skills facilitated or hindered the process to put these policies into practice. These new insights are an addition to the existing literature. The theories in the literature from Ferdig (2009), Ebbinge & Nyenrode Business Universiteit (2019) and Visser & Courtice (2011), that serve as a basis for this research, are created by investigating and interviewing senior leaders. The theories are therefore created from the perspective of senior leaders. This research looked at whether these theories from these studies are also perceived and experienced as such by employees. The study therefore offers some new insights into whether employees in the Dutch governmental organisations experience the theories described in the just mentioned literature in the same way. These new perceptions really matter because employees are key in implementing objectives (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020, Schneider et al., 1994).

Not much research has been done on how employees experience and perceive leadership styles in the context of implementation of sustainability policies. In addition to testing the existing theories with employees' experiences and perceptions it also created new insights that contribute to the scientific debate on leadership. By also including perceptions and experiences of employees in the influence of leadership on implementing sustainability policies, this research contributed to the further development of theories on the influence of leadership styles, traits, behaviours, and skills on policy implementation. Besides the traits, behaviours, and skills of sustainable leaders mentioned in the literature, the respondents also mentioned different aspects within leadership that influence policy implementation. These new aspects add to what we already know from existing literature. Therefore, this research has an added scientific value. Some new traits, skills, and behaviours that positively effect policy implementation that emerge during the interviews with employees of Dutch governmental organisations are:

- Not being afraid of political consequences
- Being willing to make mistakes and learn from them through trial and error
- Being active within the whole market and engage with the market
- Having natural enthusiasm

- Having substantive knowledge about the topic and context
- Focus on team composition and diversity

Besides introducing new insights and leads that were previously underexposed, the research contributes to strengthening existing sources within academic literature on sustainable leadership. Certain elements and theories found in the literature are confirmed by the results of this research. Namely, leadership styles from the literature are identified in the real-world and certain skills, behaviours, and traits, said to be part of successful sustainable leadership, are also reflected in respondents' answers. In addition, this research encounters new concepts that are not reflected in the literature. These new insights show that there are still gaps in the current literature and that theories on sustainable leadership could be further developed. The discovery of new aspects within leadership styles that influence implementation of sustainability policies suggests that there is room for further theoretical development.

7.3 Reflections from other literature on leadership

In addition to the scientific relevance discussed above, this research also serves a societal relevance with practical implications. While conducting this study, the researcher was engaged in an internship at a consultancy firm that operates within the Dutch public sector. This firm plays a role in supporting and assisting Dutch governmental organisations in tailoring their sustainability efforts. The outcomes of this research contribute to this consultancy firm's existing proposition on sustainable leadership. Therefore, this research contributes to a better proposition for the consultancy firm which helps this firm in better supporting and assisting Dutch governmental organisations. The results of this study will therefore help the consultancy firm to develop its existing proposition on sustainable leadership. By providing empirical insights into how the different leadership styles impact the implementation, as perceived and experienced by employees, the research improves the firm's ability to develop more effective strategies and interventions This link between academic research and real-world applications shows the societal relevance of this study. The study contributes to more sustainable governance practices and better environmental outcomes in the Dutch public sector.

As the conceptual model of this research is based on several scientific models, it would also be valuable to look at this research from another point of view. If different literature was used for the literature review, some different insights might be found. For example, the book ''Getting all the Motives Right'' from Van Tulder (2018) shows a framework that helps to understand how organisations are moving towards higher levels of corporate sustainability. This framework identifies the most effective leadership styles, which depend on where, and in which phase an organisation is in the context of becoming more sustainable. In this framework it is very important which motives businesses have for sustainability, but also their intention, and their business models are taken into account. The application of this framework to this research may yield different insights.

To provide further clarification of those insights, the framework will be explained in more detail. Van Tulder (2018) describes that becoming more sustainable starts with intention. Intention is about the motivations that an organisation has, to become more sustainable.

There are two types of motivation: primary and secondary. Primary motivations are about where the origin of the motivation, while secondary motivations are about what you want to achieve. These motivations could be down to intrinsic motivation or because there are laws and regulations in place that requires an organisation to be more sustainable (Van Tulder, 2018). Based on these intentions and motivations, companies are placed in different transition routes and different phases. These transition routes and phases show where an organisation stands in the context of becoming more sustainable. The most effective leadership style for implementing sustainability policies depends on what phase an organisation is in (Van Tulder, 2018).

Including Van Tulder's (2018) framework creates a very interesting angle. According to this theory the phase in which an organisation is, can also influence employees' experiences and perceptions on leadership in the context of implementation of sustainability policies. More concrete: employees can experience and perceive the facilitating or hindering impact of leadership differently according to which phase an organisation is in the context of sustainability. With this framework added, the current insights from this research will remain much the same. The leadership styles emerging from the interviews can also be recognized in the book from Van Tulder. But if Van Tulder's book is included, it would be interesting to see if experiences and perceptions from respondents also depend on which phase an organisation is in implementation of sustainability policies. It would be interesting to investigate whether leadership styles are experienced differently in those different phases.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Interview guide

The interview guide in Dutch presents the conducted questions and process within the interviews. The researcher introduced himself and invited the participants to introduce themselves as well. The researcher then asked questions related to the existing sustainability strategies and policies. Questions were asked regarding the organisation's mission, vision, and sustainability objectives. Subsequently, the leadership cards were used to examine the traits, skills and behaviours as experienced by the respondents, thereby identifying the present leadership style. Clarification questions were asked to support the responses to the leadership cards. Following this, questions were asked about the current status of the sustainability policies. This included questions about the facilitating and hindering impact of leadership on the implementation process. Finally, respondents were thanked for their participation and invited to share any additional insights before concluding the interview.

Interviewer: Job Delhaes
Type interview: Semi-gestructureerde interviews
Onderwerp: Leiderschap en implementatie van duurzaamheidsbeleid in Nederlandse overheidsinstellingen

Introductie (5 min)

- Mijn naam is Job Delhaes ik schrijf momenteel mijn scriptie voor de master Corporate Sustainability. In mijn scriptie onderzoek welke leiderschapsstijlen spelen in de publieke sector in Nederland en wat hiervan de uitwerking is op de implementatie van duurzaam beleid. Hierbij probeer ik verschillende leiderschapsstijlen te identificeren en te kijken wat dan de uitwerking van de leiderschapsstijlen is op de implementatie van beleid volgens de percepties en ervaringen van de medewerkers. Hier kijk ik ook naar welke aspecten van de leiderschapsstijlen de implementatie van duurzaam beleid faciliteren en belemmeren.

- Met duurzaam beleid focus ik mij vooral op externe beïnvloeding van duurzaamheid, dus denk hierbij aan het creëren van een duurzamere samenleving als geheel en bijvoorbeeld het stimuleren van duurzaam gedrag en tegengaan van niet duurzaam gedrag. Hierbij focus ik mij dus minder op de interne bedrijfsvoering en de overheidsinstanties als ‘’duurzame organisatie’’, denk aan minder of dubbelzijdig printen, wegwerpbekers verbannen en isoleren van kantoor panden.

- Met Implementatie bedoel ik het daadwerkelijk uit- en doorvoeren van het beleid.

- Het interview zal maximaal een uur duren. Als u geen bezwaar heeft neem ik het interview graag op om het terug te kunnen luisteren. U kan altijd het interview onderbreken voor vragen of verduidelijking. Anonimiteit zal worden gewaarborgd.

- Heeft u nog vragen?

- Zou u zichzelf kunnen introduceren?

Strategie en beleid / missie, visie & doelstellingen (5 min)
- Wat is de missie en visie van uw organisatie? - Wat is de missie en visie wat betreft duurzaamheid van uw organisatie? - Welke doelstellingen zijn er wat betreft duurzaamheid?
- Leidinggevende: Wat is uw visie wat betreft duurzaamheid? - Medewerker: Op welke manier draagt uw leidinggevende de visie van duurzaamheid uit?
Identificeren van leiderschapsstijlen -eigenschappen, -kwaliteiten (15 min) **Leiderschapskaarten**
- Voorgrond ← → Achtergrond - Consensus ← → Charisma - Collectief belang ← → Individueel belang - Risico's nemen ← → Risico avers - Dienend ← → Sturend - Kleine stappen ← → Grote stappen - Doelen behalen door belonen en straffen door leider ← → Doelen behalen door hogere idealen en morele waarden - Inactief ← → Reactief ← → Actief ← → Proactief - Sturend ← → Coachend ← → Ondersteunend ← → Delegerend - Impactvol, verantwoordelijk, koersvast, vernieuwend, zelfbewust, verbindend, voordenkend
Vragen voor verduidelijking (5 min)
- Kunt u leiderschapsstijl binnen uw organisatie (en die van u zelf) omschrijven? - Waarom kiest u voor dit kaartje - Waaraan merk je dit? - Waaruit blijkt dit? Kan je hier voorbeelden van noemen? - Op welke manier draagt u uw visie op duurzaamheid uit in de organisatie? (Leidinggevende)

Beleidsstatus duurzaamheid (5 min)
- Hoe verloopt de implementatie van duurzaam beleid? - Is het duurzaam beleid succesvol?; Waaraan ligt dat? - Draagt het leiderschap binnen de organisatie hieraan bij? - Had een andere leiderschapsstijl voor een ander resultaat gezorgd?
Invloed op de implementatie van duurzaamheidsbeleid (5 min)
- In hoeverre draagt dit bij aan de implementatie van het beleid? - Welke onderdelen van leiderschap hebben een positieve uitwerking gehad? - Welke punten van leiderschap hebben een negatieve uitwerking gehad?
Afsluiting (5 min)
- Dit waren alle vragen die ik had voorbereid voor dit interview. Heeft u zelf nog vragen en/of opmerkingen? - Bedankt dat u de tijd heeft genomen voor dit interview, hiermee helpt u mij enorm bij het verder schrijven van mijn master scriptie!

9.2 Coding scheme

Code Group	Codes
Leadership style	Foreground
	Background
	Consensus
	Charisma
	Collective interest
	Individual interest
	Risk taking
	Risk averse
	Serving
	Directing
	Small steps
	Big Steps
	Reward and punish
	Higher ideals and moral values
	Responsive
	Active
	Proactive
	Supporting
	Coaching
	Delegating
Leadership characteristics & traits	Self-aware
	Responsible
	Forward-thinking
	Innovative
	Connecting
	Directional
	Impactful
Impact of leadership style	Hindering
	Facilitating