Task 1: Analysis of a Master thesis

# What is the main problem or research question?

Companies are increasingly being made responsible for sustainability, and discussions around how to incorporate environmental sustainability into strategy are being made. One example is that innovations with less impact on environment are being pursued. One way for companies to incorporate environmental sustainability into strategy is to create a product portfolio specifically aimed to reduce environmental impact, i.e. a portfolio in which every product has a distinctly less impact on the environment. Such a portfolio has been claimed by researchers to be a successful way of integrating environmental sustainability into strategy, still there are only a handful, if any, empirical studies of this phenomenon (Bönninger & Stenberg, 2014).

This master thesis performs an empirical case study on a multinational industrial company with the research question as follows: “How do HQ-subsidiary dynamics shape the integration of environmental sustainability into strategy?”

As can be seen in the research question, the thesis further focus on the dynamics of the HQ and subsidiary relationships, since these dynamics is deemed as important in explaining the success of actually implementing environmental sustainability in the strategy of multinational company being studied.

# What ‘techniques’ or methods have the author(s) used to gather empirical material?

The thesis “is empirically investigating this topic in a single case study” by having interpretivism as the underlying research paradigm (Bönninger & Stenberg, 2014, p. 15). In a qualitative research strategy, the typical form of a case study is an organization, a group of employees, or an individual (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 68).

In line with this, Bönninger and Stenberg (2014) choose to collect primary data through interviews with key personnel in the case company. The authors did 20 interviews with an average length of 45 minutes with HQ managers, subsidiary managers, products owners, environmental specialist and an internal consultant. The particular organization, i.e. the multinational industrial company from which all these respondents work in, was chosen due to their recently launched environmental portfolio.

The interviews were “unstructed interviews conducted in an informal manner where the respondents had the opportunity talk freely about how the environmental portfolio was developed and implemented” (Bönninger & Stenberg, 2014, p. 18), and in addition during these interviews the authors filled in with questions based on what was being discussed. The advantage is stated by the authors to be that an open discovery is important in an empirical study. Also important to note is that two different interview guides were used due to the differences between the respondents’ area of responsibility.

# Is the analysis correctly performed?

The research approach is qualitative and it is using a single case study to infer conclusions. The authors argue that an empirical approach with a single case study based on primary data helps them to discover new phenomenon and to develop new theories as Lervik (2011) suggests.

The analysis is reviewing a complex social context between the HQ and the subsidiaries. It is examining both sides and thus it satisfies the criteria of interpretivism that the research interprets people’s actions in their social world and from their point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 57).

Also, the researchers conducted 20 interviews and drew conclusions from them in an inductive approach, which is an important pillar of qualitative research. They analysed the point of view of different stakeholders in a complex social situation.

Moreover, the authors of the master thesis delimited the scope of their work to an only qualitative study stating that it would be difficult to replicate the work. Due to this the work has a low reliability.

In my opinion, the analysis was performed correctly. The authors could have included interviews from countries outside Europe to have a wider spectrum for their analysis. Focusing only on Europe creates Europe-bias in the research.

# What well does the empirical information and analysis ‘correspond’ or answer, the main problem/research question? Why or why not?

Is what well – how well????

The empirical information from the interviews answers the main problem …. Yadada …

# Do you think the thesis succeeds in answering its questions? Why or why not? (This may be linked to the following question:)

# What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis?

Weakness – only 1 case study

Weakness - No quantitative part to test the findings.

Strenght – primary data of 20 interviews.

# Propose an alternative method to answer its chosen research questions. Argue why this method would likely lead to different results. Argue whether your results would likely be better, worse or equivalent to answer that particular research questions.

Wicked problem?

Bönninger, M., & Stenberg, J. (2014). *Integrating Environment Sustainability into Strategy: How headquarters-subsidiary dynamics shape the integration across locally embedded subsidiaries.* (Master Degree Project), University of Gothenburg School of Business, Economics and Law.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods* (Vol. 3.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.