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Entrepreneurial Skills under the context of Sustainable Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how previously developed traditional entrepreneurial skills is connected with the recently established entrepreneurial activity, called sustainable entrepreneurship as well as to help sustainable entrepreneurs to build the necessary skills that increase the development of projects aiming to balance social, environmental, and economical problems. Therefore, the research question to answer in this study is *“Which entrepreneurial skills (or set of skills) must be acquired and nurtured by entrepreneurs to successfully flourish a sustainable business?”*. The procedure is based on interviews with eight individuals with relevant experience within sustainable entrepreneurship and whom operate in businesses that offer sustainable products and/or services, operate in a sustainable way regarding social, environmental or economic were chosen. The results indicate that there are other skills that do not fit the traditional entrepreneurial skills presented by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) and that a fifth category could be imprinted into the entrepreneurial skills necessary to flourish a successful business.

Keywords: Sustainability, entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, sustainable development, entrepreneurial skills

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1. Introduction

In this introduction chapter the reader gets introduced to the chosen subject, the motivation behind and its relevance as well as to give an understanding regarding the problem discussion and the research question.

1.1 Background

Since the mid 80's, when the former Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Brundtland, chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the word sustainability has become perhaps one of the most widely buzzwords (Scoones, 2007; Purvis, Mao, and Robinson, 2019). Now there is almost nothing that cannot be paired, described, or linked to the expression “sustainable”: sustainable cities, economies, resources, business, and certainly sustainable development. (Scoones, 2007).

And it was precisely in 1987 when the Brundtland's report entitled “*Our Common future*” offered the classic modern definition of sustainable development as follows:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (WCED 1987, p43).

Sustainability as a theme and more concrete sustainable development has generated extensive knowledgeable discussions among several fields, particularly in the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio in 1992 from which a global blowup of academic and policy debate was produced. Thenceforward, the topic has gained a worldwide concern among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (Gast, Gundolf, and Cesinger, 2017; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011).

It is estimated that by 2050 the world will be consuming the equivalent of three planets of natural resources, (United Nations, 2020), likewise, the global use of materials such as biomass, fossil fuels, minerals, and metals will be as twice as big in the next 40 years (OECD, 2018). Whereas the waste generation is calculated to rise more than 70% in the next 30 years (World Bank, 2018). As a consequence, Europe has set the challenge of being the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 (European Commission, 2019).

Furthermore, to tackle not only environmental but also social, and economic affairs, various initiatives have been developed by policymakers and experts to create awareness among governments, institutions, business owners, and citizens. namely:

- *The European Green Deal*, developed by the European Commission (EC) as “a new growth strategy that aims to transform the European Union (EU) into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use” (European Commission, 2019).

- *The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)* that were proposed by the United Nations (UN) under its 2030 agenda that aims to reduce social, economic and environmental issues (United Nations, 2015).
- *The Circular Economy Action Plan*, which intends to develop initiatives throughout the whole life cycle of products that promote and foster sustainable consumption, optimize the use of natural resources, and ensure that materials used are kept in the EU as long as possible (European Commission, 2019).
- *and The B certification*; that aims to recognize “businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose, creating a global culture shift to redefine success in business and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy”. (Certified B Corps, n.d.),

Such agendas or initiatives not only show a great concern on the theme, but also the ambition of setting goals that can only be achieved by drastically shifting the way how most things have been conceived.

Under this context, entrepreneurship plays a fundamental role since it has, in the last decades, been recognized as a solution for environmental degradation rather than a potential source to it (Terán-Yépez, Marín-Carrillo, Pilar Casado-Belmonte, Mercedes Capobianco-Uriarte, 2019). Entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a driver of inclusive and sustained economic growth, decent job creation, creativity, and innovation (United Nations, 2017). Therefore, it has been agreed by scholars and practitioners that entrepreneurs need to take active actions in pursuing the harmony of economic goals with sustainability and environmental goals (Allen and Malin, 2008). This has caused scholars to shift their attention towards the study of entrepreneurship as a relevant contributor to address environmental, societal, and economical issues (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010) and thereby a new kind of entrepreneurial activity, called sustainable entrepreneurship (SE), has been created (Terán-Yépez, et. al., 2019). According to Lüdeke-Freund (2019, p.667), as cited in Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) SE is characterised as contributing “to solving societal and environmental problems through the realization of a successful business” and promoting “sustainable development through entrepreneurial corporate activities”.

1.2 Problem discussion

Although an extensive body of literature on SE has been produced in the last decades, from different perspectives such as drivers and intentions (Vuorio, Puumalainen, and Fellnhöfer, 2018; Kiefer, Del Rio Gonzalez, and Carrillo-Hermosilla, 2019), values and attitudes (Ruiz-Ruano and Puga, 2016), barriers and risks (Hoogendoorn, Van der Zwan, Thurik, 2019; Pinkse and Groot, 2015; Vuorio et al., 2018), innovation and technology adoption (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Gerlach, 2003; Ejemeyovwi, 2019), business models (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2016; Lüdeke-Freund, 2019), and culture (Swanson and DeVereaux, 2017), the present study has identified a new approach that -to the extent of the authors' knowledge- has not been

addressed by previous works, such new approach will consist on *testing entrepreneurial skills under the context of sustainable entrepreneurship*.

In this regard, researchers have asserted that the transition to more sustainable businesses require skills to generate substantial environmental and economic advantages (Veleva and Bodkin, 2018), however, as mentioned above, entrepreneurial skills (ES) studies have had different streams and no evidence has been produced under sustainable contexts. Figure 1 shows the most relevant streams of the two topics in the last decades showing a disconnection between those and creating a research gap worth to deeply study. Therefore, this new approach will contribute to enlarge the theory through an unexplored connection between two major topics (i.e., sustainable entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills).

Various researchers have argued that entrepreneurship (instead of being an intrinsic “gift”) contains a set of skills that can be constantly improved, refined, and evolved. (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001; Kutzhanova, Lyons, and Lichtenstein, 2009; Loué and Baronet, 2012;) or summarized by Drucker (1985) entrepreneurship is a skill that can be learned. Furthermore, entrepreneurs, far from being considered as individuals with certain characteristics or traits, are made and not born (Shefsky, 1996) whilst such characteristics are not equally distributed among the population, the necessary set of skills can still be developed. Entrepreneurs must be competent in many different areas because of the multifaceted work of an entrepreneur (Stuetzer, Obschonka, Davidsson, and Schmitt-Rodermund, 2013). Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) also mention that entrepreneurs perform a series of functions (both technical and behavioral) to identify opportunities and build organizations to capture market needs and it is the entrepreneurs’ skills in delivering those functions that circumscribe their success.

While different studies have proposed theoretical frameworks and empirical models around ES, such contributions have been developed or tested either in communities and regions (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001; Loué, and Baronet, 2012), educational contexts for “*would-be entrepreneurs*”¹ (Ploum, Blok, Lans, and Omta, 2018) or particularly focused on personal/behavioural skills (Hood and Young, 1993; Majed, 2019); such scenarios where the theme of sustainable entrepreneurship is not the central focus or in contexts where the study has been developed made among future sustainable entrepreneurs (students) and not among existing or nascent ones, which denotes once again the pertinence of developing the present study.

One of the best-known models in the field of ES is the one developed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) called the Entrepreneurial Development System (EDS) and that will be the base of this work since it encompasses an holistic set of 17 skills classified into 4 dimensions (technical skills, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills and personal maturity skills) and that have been implemented by the authors for over ten years in the US and South Africa in contexts like high-tech, manufacturing, micro enterprises, and minority entrepreneurs. Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001).

¹ Students with the desire of becoming sustainable entrepreneurs (Ploum, et. al., 2018)

Nevertheless, this study, does not intend to assert that the EDS model cannot be replicated in a sustainable entrepreneurial context; on the contrary, it acknowledges and takes into account the indistinct nature of sustainable entrepreneurship in which the entrepreneur is proactively facilitating latent demands for sustainable development (Lans, Blok, and Wesselink, 2014) and constantly designing, testing, and implementing strategies that generates the less environmental, economic and social negative impact while creating benefits and adding value to customers, employees, and the community (Lüdeke-Freund, 2019) which incorporate a new component to the literature around ES.

Therefore, the new sustainable approach proposed in this study will result in a novel investigation which will allow practitioners, educators and policymakers to better understand how that interaction between the sustainable entrepreneur and their skills functions during a sustainable transition/implementation and thus being able to enhance the decision-making towards the creation of more projects that aim to solve the sustainable problems described before.

Additionally, the present study is aligned with future research suggestions proposed by researchers in both SE and ES fields who have claimed for studies that include distinct contexts, approaches or perspectives. For instance, Ploum, et al. (2018) developed a skills framework among sustainable entrepreneurship students and in which they have suggested a future study focused on nascent or established sustainable entrepreneurs and test their framework in this context to examine whether the framework for sustainable entrepreneurship could also be supported for this kind of entrepreneur. Some of the dimensions proposed by Ploum, et al. (2018) will be employed by the present study since they match with the ones developed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) and their EDS. For the purpose of this study the framework developed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) will serve as a base, Table 2. Which encompasses four skills sets; technical, managerial, entrepreneurial and personal maturity with a total of 17 skills contained in the framework.

Both frameworks (i.e., Ploum, et al., 2018; Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001) will be further explained in the literature review section together with previous studies around the main topics of the present study. However, it is worth mentioning in this section that the authors of the EDS have attributed a list of benefits to their framework which were classified into three sections as such: benefits to entrepreneurs, benefits to service providers², and benefits to the community. This study will focus on the entrepreneur dimension to whom the following benefits have been allocated:

- *Less costly for an entrepreneur to form a business*
- *More likely that they will succeed (or easier to exit, having created some kind of asset, in the event of failure)*
- *Less-time consuming to achieve success (faster time to market)*
- *Less expensive to operate a business by enabling firms to share resources*

² Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001)The authors refer to service providers as those institutions that offer development programs for communities or regions.

- *Easier to use resources more intensively for a greater return on investment.*
Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001, p15)

Those benefits are assigned to the entrepreneurs who have successfully developed the entrepreneurial skills included in the EDS. Hence, the present study will also analyze if that assumption is applicable to the sustainable entrepreneurs studied in this paper.

To develop the present work, the authors start with an introduction where a contextualization of the topic is made and the research gap is supported; subsequently, a literature review regarding SE, ES, and entrepreneurship will be elaborated; moreover, the research methodology will be described. Finally, results will be discussed, and conclusions, limitations, and future research avenues will also be unfolded.

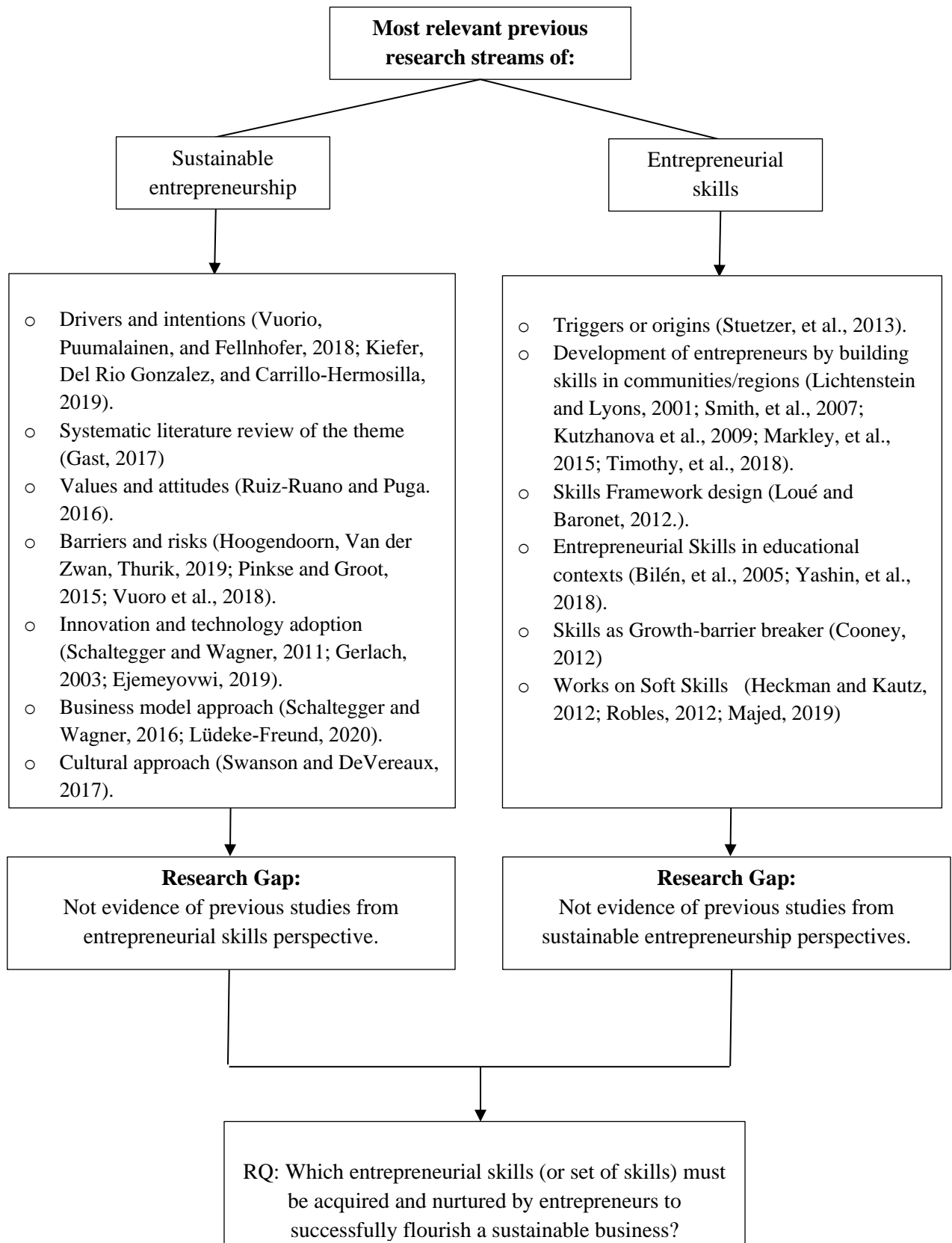


Figure 1. Problem description and research question.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore entrepreneurial skills under the context of sustainable entrepreneurship and thereby contribute to enlarge the theory through an unexplored connection between two major topics (i.e., sustainable entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills).

1.4 Delimitation

Since this study aims to explore which entrepreneurial skills are connected with sustainable entrepreneurship, it is limited to only exploring entrepreneurial skills on an individual perspective. Sweden was selected as a geographical limitation. In other words, the study ignores businesses and individuals who do not work towards sustainable development and industry, age of businesses where the respondents operate.

2. Literature review

This section contains an extensive revision of the most relevant literature that has been produced in the last decades around the main topics of the present thesis in order to better comprehend and define the perspectives that will be addressed. The review starts from the general topics of sustainability and entrepreneurship to later move forward and delimitate sustainable entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills concepts and models.

2.1 Sustainability within entrepreneurship

2.1.1 Sustainability

Johnston, Everard, Santillo, and Robèrt, (2007) claim that approximately three hundred definitions of sustainability and sustainable development have been elaborated, thus general consensus around the topic is still to be achieved (Redclift, 2005; Sneddon, Howarth, and Norgaard, 2006). However, comprehending the outcomes of today's human actions and behaviors in the future of ecosystems is the nascent trigger of sustainable development (Robert, Parris, and Leiserowitz, 2005). Likewise, aligned with the Brundtland report's explanation (already included in the background section of the present thesis) is the one developed by Sauve, Bernard, and Sloan (2016) who defined sustainable development as the harmony of today's efforts with the environmental goals of tomorrow in order to achieve prosperity for both present and future generations.

To better unfold this, various approaches have broken down sustainability and sustainable development into three characteristics that should be considered during sustainable transitions or implementations; The three pillars (environment, social, economic) (WCED 1987); the 3 Ps (People, Planet, and Profit) (Crals and Vereck, 2005), and the 3 Rs (Reducing, Reusing, and Recycling) (Lewandowski, 2016). Furthermore, (Lans, et al., 2014) mention that accomplishing economic, social and environmental goals is a shared challenge rather than a singular posture, while Purvis, et al., (2019) pinpointed that the three pillars should be balanced as evenly as possible and priority to one of those should not be given. Sustainability should be built from the bottom up with the help of local initiatives by local governments, communities, and citizens (Selman, 1998) and with the guidance of agreed objectives in a global dimension including climate change, biodiversity, and desertification (Young, 1999). Sustainability signifies staying within the planetary boundaries (Horton, P., and Horton, B., 2019), it entails modes of living, working and, being that allow all people on the planet to reach healthy, fulfilling, and economically safe lives without damaging the ecosystem and without risking the future well-being of humans and the hearth (WCED, 1987).

Figure 2. shows the conceptual representation around the three dimensions (or pillars) that sustainability has commonly been referred to, such illustrations has been conceived in the form of concentric approach (upper right in the figure), the triple bottom line (lower right in the figure) and three intersecting circles (left side in the figure) which have emerged over time from the literature around economics in both social and environmental perspectives (Purvis, et

al., 2019); Although the visual concept has received criticism for its simplicity in a highly complex problem, it has been a way to portray the interaction of the three aspects that sustainable development should embrace and that have even been embedded in the formulation of the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2012).

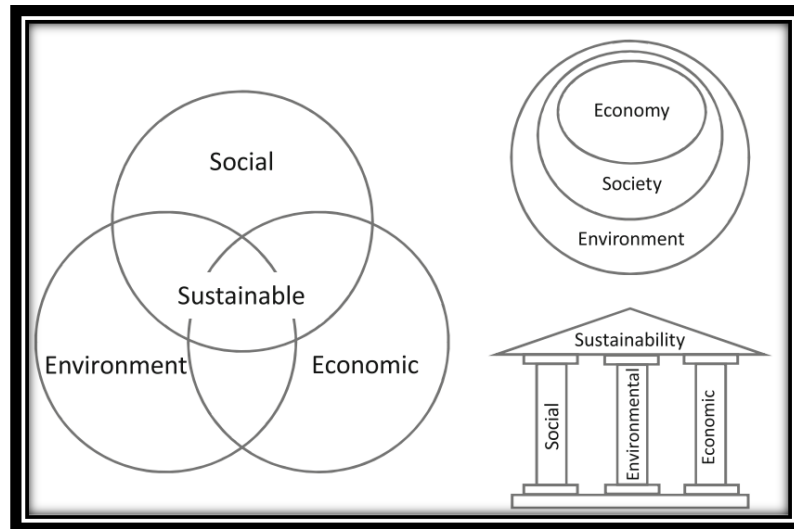


Figure 2. Three pillars of sustainability, conceptual representation. Taken from: Purvis, et al., (2019; p 682)

The Circular Economy (CE), on the other hand, has become a new vision of the use of resources, energy, value creation and entrepreneurship (Joustra, De Jong, and Engelaer, 2013), CE was explained and conceived in the Ellen MacArthur Foundation reports as: “*an industrial system that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design*” Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013; p8) and has received greater attention as one of the most influential and novel action in relation to sustainability (Scott, 2017) (Particularly to the environmental pillar). CE aims to have a positive environmental impact by prolonging the useful life of natural resources and by reducing the linear-single-use consumption (Heshmati, 2017). CE rethink waste as economic opportunity (Millette, Hull, and Williams, 2020), and according to the European Commission (2019), it intends to develop initiatives throughout the whole life cycle of products that promote and foster sustainable consumption, optimize the use of natural resources, and ensure that materials used are optimized as long as possible. Hence, Sustainability is a long-term concept that is contradictory to the fast-consuming practices and short-term policies, it goes beyond the classical view of the firms of solely maximizing profit on behalf of the shareholders' interests. (Crals and Vereck, 2005; Phillips, Freeman, and Wicks, 2003).

Thus, concerning businesses, sustainable development has produced a shift of managers' postures from a shareholder-view to stakeholder view (Elkington, 1994) Constructing and maintaining a successful stakeholders-firm relationship is a fundamental piece of an organization's strategy, neglecting such relationship will produce a failure from companies to seize the advantages of stakeholders. (Zambon and Bello, 2005; Hess, 2008). Furthermore,

considering the scarcity of natural resources is another reason why sustainability should be fundamental for firms (Lieder & Rashid, 2016). Aras & Growther (2009) explain sustainability from the capacity of the earth and suggest that resources that are unable to be regenerated cannot be utilized by enterprises. Consequently, the relevance of the companies and their role in achieving sustainable milestones has been addressed by numerous researchers (Joseph, 2013; Lenssen and Wassenhove, 2012). Therefore, in the next section, a review of relevant literature around the topics of entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship will be provided to better comprehend the importance that sustainability has had in entrepreneurship field, to later expose literature around entrepreneurial skills that will contained the framework to be used in the present thesis work.

2.1.2 Entrepreneurship

As a field of study, entrepreneurship is relatively young (Rocha, 2004) and the research on it has grown dramatically over the years (Frederick, Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2007). Entrepreneurship can be defined as creating something different or new which contributes to value to the society and brings wealth to the entrepreneur (Kao, 1993). An entrepreneur is an individual who conceive new business opportunities and risks what is required in order to transform those ideas into reality (Schaper, 2010). It has been stated that entrepreneurs' risk-taking propensity is important for the understanding of entrepreneurship (Zhao, Seibert & Lumpkin, 2010). It is a multifaceted reality, which is why it has been addressed from several perspectives (Rocha and Birkinshaw, 2007). Entrepreneurship, according to Pyysiainen et al. (2006), means to pursuit opportunities without any thoughts given to the resources that are under control. Eisenmann, (2013) offers a similar definition as the chase of opportunity, no matter resources. Both approaches denote a distinctive characteristic of the entrepreneur of being resourceful and ingenious.

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. Essential ingredients include the willingness to take calculated risks—in terms of time, equity, or career; the ability to formulate an effective venture team; the creative skill to marshall needed resources; and fundamental skill of building solid business plan; and finally, the vision to recognize opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction, and confusion. (Frederick, Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 29).

Furthermore, Gartner (1990) made one of the most relevant studies of the theme and argues that it is a complex idea and as Rocha and Birkinshaw (2007) recognized it as a multidimensional characteristic that should have into account eight themes. The debate about what constitutes the nature of entrepreneurship can, according to Gartner (1990, 18) be characterized by the following eight themes.

The Entrepreneur. The entrepreneur theme is the idea that entrepreneurship involves individuals with unique personality characteristics and abilities.

Innovation. The innovation theme is characterized as doing something new as an idea, product, service, market. or technology in a new or established organization.

Organization Creation. The organization creation theme described the behaviors involved in creating organizations.

Creating Value. This theme articulated the idea that entrepreneurship creates value.

Profit or Nonprofit. The profit/nonprofit theme is concerned with whether entrepreneurship involves profit-making organizations only.

Growth. At issue in this theme is the importance of growth as a characteristic of entrepreneurship.

Uniqueness. This theme suggested that entrepreneurship must involve uniqueness.

The Owner-Manager. This theme suggested that entrepreneurship involves individuals who are owners and managers of their businesses.

2.1.3 Sustainable entrepreneurship

Sustainable entrepreneurship (SE) is a combination of both sustainability and entrepreneurship (İyigün, 2015; Crals and Vereeck, 2005). The intention of the developed concept is developed aiming to relate sustainable development and entrepreneurship literature (Raudeliūnienė, Tvaronavičienė and Dzemyda, 2014).

“Sustainable entrepreneurship is a spin-off concept from sustainable development that can be defined as the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their families, local communities, society and the world at large, as well as future generations”. (Crals and Vereeck, 2005, p175)

The concept focuses on the maintenance of nature, life support, and community in the pursuit of perceived opportunities to lead into future processes, products, and services for both economic and non-economic gain to the economy, society, and individuals (Shephard and Patzelt, 2010) Businesses can open up additional opportunities for entrepreneurs if it is environmentally responsible. The transition to a sustainable business provides several niches which entrepreneurs can take advantage of by identify and then service. Schaper (2010)

Sustainable entrepreneurship is a concept related to ability to find new opportunities, ability to realize and create economic, ecological and social value. Entrepreneurship is related with human personal motivation to find and use possibilities to create new added value, successfully developed business that could be understood as conventional entrepreneurship, more focused to the meeting minimum socio-ecological conditions defined by policy and law. Entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural, or social (FFE-YE, 2012).

Before an entrepreneurial activity can be labelled as sustainable, all three aspects of the 3 Ps need to be satisfied. The 3 Ps is a well-known marketing principle which is said to deal with sustainable development and stands for People, Planet, Profit. (Crals and Vereeck, 2005). The

first aspect of the 3 Ps, 'people', is about companies' behavior in the matter of social and ethical issues and how they treat their employees. Crals and Vereeck (2005, p175) mention several issues that need to be adequately dealt with and are following: *'protection of human rights, the nonindulgence towards fraud and corruption, the use of child labour, the gender relationships and discrimination on the work floor, labour participation in management and profits, behavioural codes and so on''*. Secondly, the 'planet' aspect raises the question of the remedy and effect of the influence of a company on natural resources and the landscape. Concrete examples of these issues are such as sustainable industry fields, environmental care, eco-efficiency, sustainable technology development, chain management, clean products and eco-design are concrete. Lastly, the third and final aspect 'profit', which is not exclusively related to the financial results of an enterprise. It is about the use and allocation of value added from investments in machines, distribution (e.g., labour participation), employment, and infrastructure and sponsoring. (Crals and Vereeck, 2005)

Sustainability can, according to Lans (2014) be seen as a major source of opportunities. Opportunities related to sustainability are more complex and have more of a "wicked" character problem than opportunities which address a linear problem, a significant need or want, or even remove a serious pain point. It is suggested that sustainability is an important addition for "new" entrepreneurship, as it is recognizing "old" entrepreneurship. In comparison to tamed problems, wicked problems are difficult to pin down and do not have a conclusive solution. (Lans, 2014)

The so-called sustainable entrepreneurs try, through their entrepreneurial behavior, to manage economic health, social equity, and environmental resilience, and in that way result in more than economic success regarding sustainable development. To contribute to sustainability and profitability, sustainable entrepreneurs pledge to activities and processes which lead to evaluate, exploit, and identify those business opportunities. Therefore, sustainable entrepreneurship is viewed as a way of making competitive advantage by identifying new business opportunities evolving in new products, approaches to production, original markets or ways of systematizing business processes more sustainable. (Ploum, et. al., 2018)

"Actors and companies making environmental progress to their core business can be called sustainable entrepreneurs. They generate new products, services, techniques and organizational modes that substantially reduce environmental impacts and increase the quality of life" (Schaltegger and Wagner (2011, p 223)

According to Doole and Lowe (2012), sustainability, in the context of international marketing, is about considering the environmental impact of every carrying out. This means to support a holistic point of view in the way responding to the global marketing challenges that are identified and assessing the impact of our global marketing strategies – socially, economically and environmentally in the approach of ensuring sustainability. Doole and Lowe (2012) argue that global marketing strategies need to be innovative and build global competitiveness, and at the same time make sure that developed strategies are grounded in socially and environmentally sustainable business practices.

2.2 Entrepreneurial skills

Skill is an ability to perform in an established manner within a particular context (Fischer and Bidell, 2005), skills grow gradually as they are continuously applied in real-life circumstances instead of initially appearing at their complete potential (Kutzhanova et al., 2009). Skills, as described by Boyatzis and Kolb (1995), are a combined interaction between the person and the environment linking the knowledge and the ability with an area of application. Mascolo and Fischer (1999) indicated that a skill is not only an individual trait, but it lies in a social context, therefore it is extensively determined by such context. Further, a skill is the conversion of people's experiences or knowledge into behaviors. Concerning business, the skills describe specific abilities of an entrepreneur regarding their particular corporate setting, hence since the individual entrepreneurial experiences differ among one and another, entrepreneurs develop a different set of skills and they evolve through a recurrent practice in business (Kutzhanova et al., 2009).

Starting up and managing a firm demands grasping a wide and balanced set of skills (Hood & Young, 1993; Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2010; Stuetzer, Obschonka, & Rodermund, 2013). Nevertheless, there is no consensus concerning such balanced set of skills (Timothy, Dahlstrom and Talmage, 2018). In the literature it is possible to find that specific dimensions are regularly included, such as management and marketing skills (Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2010; Man et al., 2002). Notwithstanding a partial agreement on these dimensions, the literature on entrepreneurial skills is still lacking a commonly acknowledged and holistic skillset associated with a sustainable business success. (Timothy, et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Wals and Jickling (2002) claimed that Sustainable development claims for a concentration on skills, so does sustainable entrepreneurship (Ploum, et. al., 2018). In response to this call, different studies in the field of entrepreneurial skills have been developed from diverse perspectives. Timothy, et al., (2018) in their study made a holistic and comprehensive literature revision around the topic of entrepreneurial skills and classified their finding in two general categories: **Meta Level skills** and **functional-level skills**. The earlier referring to those studies in which the skills appear to be more abstract and ambiguous and the latter to those authors that have found more concrete skills directly related to the functions or necessary tasks to run a business. For the purpose of the present study, the categorization made by Timothy et. al., (2018) will serve as a base to be complemented with works that they authors might dismissed and that, under the context of this thesis, are worth including. Hence, a more holistic context around the topic of entrepreneurial skill will be exposed.

On the other hand, for the matter of the present thesis the definition given by Pyysiainen, Anderson, McElwee, and Vesala, (2006) on entrepreneurial skills will be used. The authors described them as those activities or practical *know-how* that are needed to establish and successfully run a business.

Meta Level skills / competencies

In regards to the so-called Meta Level skills, Timothy, et al., (2018) found characteristics like adapting, helping, delegating, information gathering, analysis, and taking action, (Boyatzis and Kolb, 1995); leading, communicating, listening, negotiating, (Smilor, 1997); risk-taking, being executive manager, and innovator (Chen, Greene, and Crick, 1998); opportunity recognition, designing, risk management, resilience, and effectuating (Duening, 2010).

Similar to the Meta Level skills are the competencies, Barth, Godemann, Rieckman, and Stoltenberg (2007) and Dale & Newman (2005) defined competencies as enabling successful task performance and problem solving to real-world problems, challenges, and opportunities on an individual level. While Mulder (2014) and Wesselink, De Jong, and Biemans, (2010) mentioned that competencies include knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Plumly, Marshall, Eastman, Iyer, Stanley, and Boatwright, (2008); Mitchelmore and Rowley, (2013); and Morris, Webb, Fu, and Singhal, (2013) identified competences such as communication, creative thinking, leadership, strategic planning, and teamwork necessary to be developed by entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, Theories regarding competencies have gained attention in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship. Ploum, et. al., (2018) developed an integrated competencies framework to be tested among future sustainable entrepreneurs including the following competencies:

System thinking: The ability to pinpoint and investigate all influential (sub)systems within several areas (people, planet, profit) and fields, including their limits (Wiek, Withycombe, and Redman, 2011).

Embracing diversity and interdisciplinary: The ability to build relationships, identify problems, and value other viewpoints in business decision-making processes; be it about environmental, social, and/or economic issues (de Haan, 2006; Ellis & Weekes, 2008).

Foresighted thinking: The ability to cooperatively examine, assess, and form images of the future in which the impact of local-short-term decisions on environmental, social, and economic issues is viewed on a global-long-term scale (Wiek et al., 2011).

Normative: The ability to map, employ, and merge sustainability values, principles, and targets with internal and external stakeholders, without embracing any given norm but based on the good character of the one who is involved in sustainability (Blok, Gremmen, and Wesselink 2015; Wiek et al., 2011).

Action: The ability to proactively participate in responsible actions for the development of the sustainability of social–ecological systems (de Haan, 2006; Mogensen and Schnack, 2010; Schnack, 1996).

Interpersonal: The ability to motivate, empower, and ease collective and participatory sustainability activities and research (Schlange, 2009; Wiek et al., 2011).

Strategic management: The ability to jointly design plans, implement interventions, transitions, and strategies for sustainable development practices (de Haan, 2006; Wiek et al., 2011).

Moreover, the role of leadership has been widely studied by the literature on entrepreneurship as being considered as an fundamental characteristic of entrepreneurs (Cogliser and Brigham, 2004; Prabhu, 1999; Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud, and Brännback, 2015; Eyal and Kark, 2004; Vecchio, 2003; Fernald, Solomon, and Tarabishy, 2005; and Antonakis and Autio, 2007). According to Marques (2013) Leadership skills are those focused on empathy and personal aspects in motivating and convincing others. leadership is an interactive ability of the leader with subordinates to encourage the best performance to achieve common goals (Al-Mahmada (2015). Leadership encompasses a set of leader's personal and behavioral skills that support the influence on the employees (Rao, 2015). Majed (2019) claimed that besides the disparity presented by researchers of different types of leadership skills in entrepreneurship, many studies have agreed to include communication skills, initiative skills, training skills, and team building skills as relevant abilities among leaders.

As mentioned above, skills can be learned and they can grow gradually (Kutzhanova et al., 2009)., under this premise, some authors have investigated the importance for entrepreneurs to gain diverse work experience prior to start-up a business to nurture the necessary entrepreneurial skills. For instance, Stuetzer, Obschonka, Davidsson, and Schmitt (2013) detected that having “varied work experiences” increases the confidence and the tendency to not only engage and persist in entrepreneurial ventures but also to have a better performance at them (Stuetzer, et. al., 2013). This is aligned with Wagner (2003) who also showed that individuals with a varied set of work experience are more likely to be entrepreneurs. Moreover, the well-cited Lazear's theory emphasizes on the relevance of diverse experiences, arguing that entrepreneurs must be competent in many different areas since the distinctive nature of an entrepreneurial work is multifaceted, therefore, although entrepreneurs are not endowed with a full set of skills to start a business, they can acquire them (Lazear, 2004).

Although these meta-level skills or competencies can be considered conceptually abstract and ambiguous in their implementation, they should be conceived as important as the functional level skills for the operation of a company, since such skills have even been related to indicators of satisfaction in the workplace and in the performance of new ventures (Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008) and are exposed here as a summary to acknowledge the scope of the skills literature.

Functional-level skills

The other category of skills presented in the literature is more straightforward and offers skills or abilities that aim to enhance the multidimensional tasks or functions that an entrepreneur must be able to perform. The reason why this thesis adopts the term Functional-level skills is because, as defined by Timothy, et al., (2018), they relate to the major functions of a business.

Further, as explained earlier, the operation of a business demands a mastery of a set of skills, and even though the literature around the topic is broad, a consensus around what are the dimensions that contain those skills is still to be achieved. Nevertheless, according certain dimensions appears with regularity such as marketing and management to (Timothy et. al., 2018). Other studies highlight financial skills Diochon et al. (2008) while another group of researchers found four frequent dimensions: management, marketing, financial, and organizational development (Gartner, Starr, & Bhat, 1999; Lerner & Haber, 2001; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013; Reuber & Fischer, 1994). Organizational development skills comprehend activities involved in developing the organization capital of the business and overcoming barriers to the growth of the business (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013). Conclusively, (Kutzhanova et al., 2009; Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2010) finds the previous four dimensions and adds a fifth dimension, personal maturity, explained as self-awareness, willingness and ability to accept responsibility, emotional development, and creative ability.

Table 1. details the list of relevant studies and their findings summarizing the skills dimensions and literature coverage for both Meta-level and functional skills. For the earlier the skills were grouped in five dimensions (Communication, initiative, training, team building, and leadership) as those are commonly exposed by studies in the field. While for the Functional-level skills the five dimensions are Management, marketing, financial, organizational development, and personal maturity.

Category 1.	Author (s) and Year	Dimensions				
		Communication	Initiative	Training	Team building	Leadership
Meta-Level skills Competencies	Boyatzis and Kolb, (1995)		X	X		X
	Smilor (1997)	X			X	X
	Chen, et. al., (1998)	X			X	X
	Duening (2010)		X		X	
	Plumly et. al., (2008)	X	X		X	X
	Mitchelmore and Rowley, (2013)	X	X		X	X
	Morris et. al., (2013)	X	X		X	X
	Ploum, et. al., (2018)	X		X	X	X
	Cogliser and Brigham (2004)					X
	Marques (2013)					X
	(Rao, 2015).					X
	Majed (2019)	X	X	X	X	X
Category 2.	Author (s) and Year	Management	Marketing	Financial	Organizational development	Maturity

Functional level-skills	Hisrich and Brush (1984)	X	X	X		
	Chandler and Hanks (1994)	X	X			
	Reuber and Fischer (1994)	X	X	X		
	Lussier (1995)				X	
	Chandler (1996)	X				
	Lerner, Brush, and Hisrich (1997)	X	X	X	X	
	Gartner et al. (1999)	X	X	X	X	
	Lerner and Haber (2001)	X	X	X	X	
	Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001)	X	X	X	X	X
	Lerner and Almor (2002)	X	X	X	X	
	Haber and Reichel (2007)	X	X		X	
	Diochon et al. (2008)			X		
	Kutzhanova et al. (2009)	X	X	X	X	X
	Brinckmann, Salomo, and Gemuenden (2011)			X		
	Stuetzer et al. (2013)	X	X	X		

Table 1. Skills dimensions and literature coverage. Taken and adapted from: Timothy, et al. (2018)

For the purpose of this study the framework developed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) will serve as a base, Table 2. It breaks down the dimensions and describes in more detail the set of skills it entails. The authors named the model as the Entrepreneurial Development System (EDS) which have been accepted and used by researchers such as Smith (2005), Kutzhanova et al., (2009), and Timothy et al., (2018). The EDS results in the most suitable framework since it has been broadly tested in several settings and includes a wide-ranging set of skills.

Furthermore, another reason why the EDS framework has been chosen to be explored in the study is due to its prominent and holistic classification within a business operation context, the four skill dimensions are broad and entails the skills that are commonly found in the mainstream entrepreneurship literature, and although the model does not certainly offer simplicity regarding the kind of activities or knowledge that constitute each dimension, it has still been referenced for its ability to strengthen entrepreneurial efforts (Fortunato and Alter, 2015; Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2012; Lyons, 2015; Markley et al., 2015; Schulman and Lyons, 2013).

Categories	Description	Skills Set	Description
Technical skills	Ability to perform the key operations of that business	Operational	The skills necessary to produce the product or service
		Suppliers / raw materials	The skills to obtain them, as necessary
		Office or production space	The skills to match needs and availability
		Equipment/plant/technology	The skills to identify and obtain them
Managerial skills	Ability to organize and efficiently manage the operations	Management	Planning, organizing, supervising, directing, networking
		Marketing/sales	Identifying customers, distribution channels, supply chain
		Financial	Managing financial resources, accounting, budgeting
		Legal	Organization form, risk management, privacy and security
		Administrative	People relations, advisory board relations
		High-order	Learning, problem-solving
Entrepreneurial skills	Ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities.	Business concept	Business plan, presentation skills
		Environmental scanning	Recognize market gap, exploit market opportunity
		Advisory board and networking	Balance independence with seeking assistance
Personal maturity skills	Self-awareness, willingness, and ability to accept responsibility, emotional	Self-awareness	Ability to reflect and be introspective
		Accountability	Ability to take responsibility for resolving a problem
		Emotional coping	Emotional ability to cope with a problem

	development, and creative ability	Creativity	Ability to produce a creative solution to a problem
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Table 2. Set of skills proposed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001). Adapted from: Smith, et al., (2007).

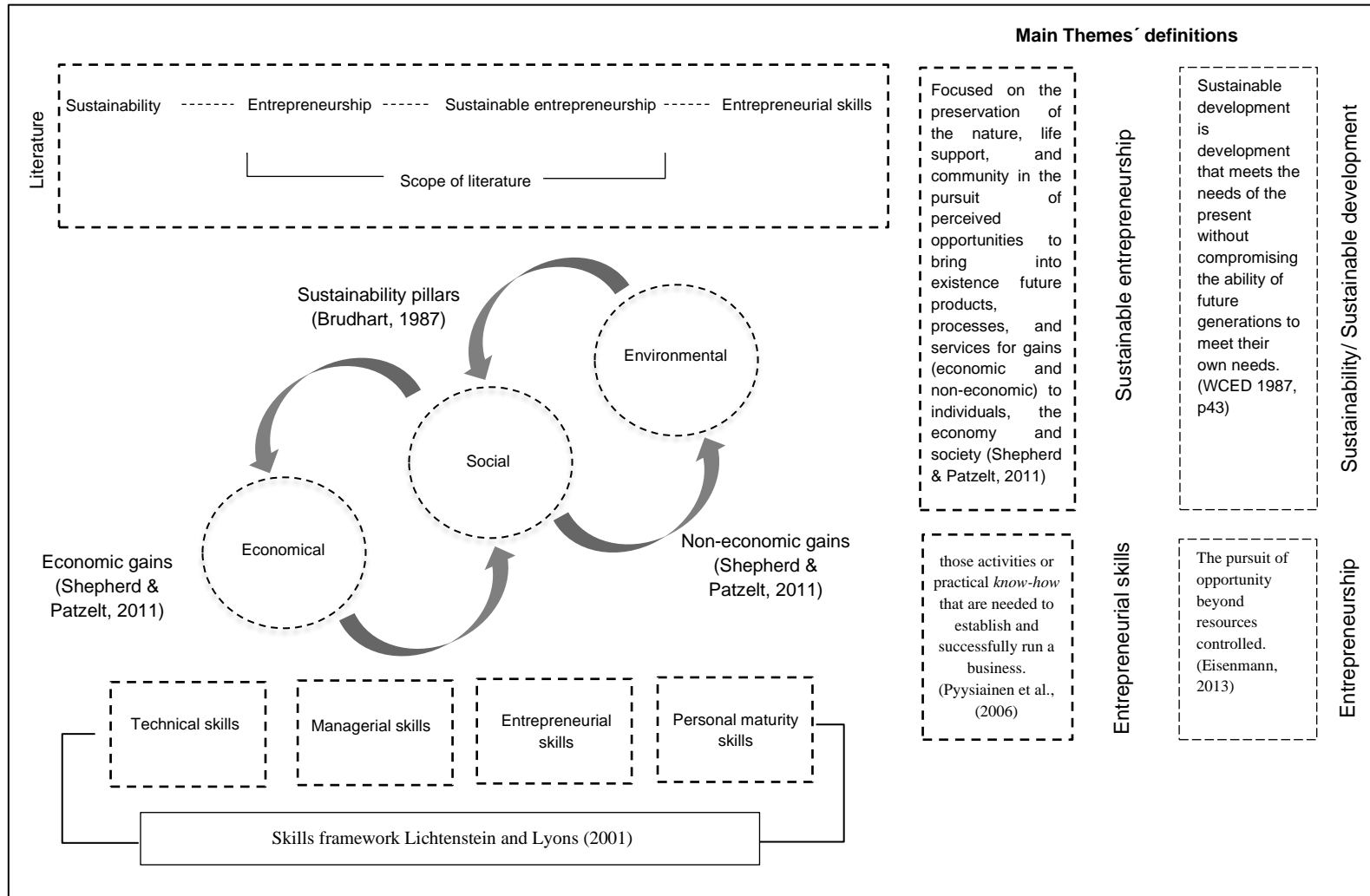


Figure 3: Conceptual framework.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the approaches used to conduct the study. It describes the choice of approach and process of the collection of primary and secondary data. Argumentation about the chosen strategy is done, description of data collection and method used by analysis.

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this study was to explore how previously developed traditional entrepreneurial skills is connected with the recently established entrepreneurial activity, called sustainable entrepreneurship as well as to help sustainable entrepreneurs to build the necessary skills that increase the development of projects aiming to balance social, environmental, and economical problems. Therefore, the research question to answer in this study is “Which entrepreneurial skills (or set of skills) must be acquired and nurtured by entrepreneurs to successfully flourish a sustainable business?”

As illustrated in Figure 4., the procedure of the research can be followed.

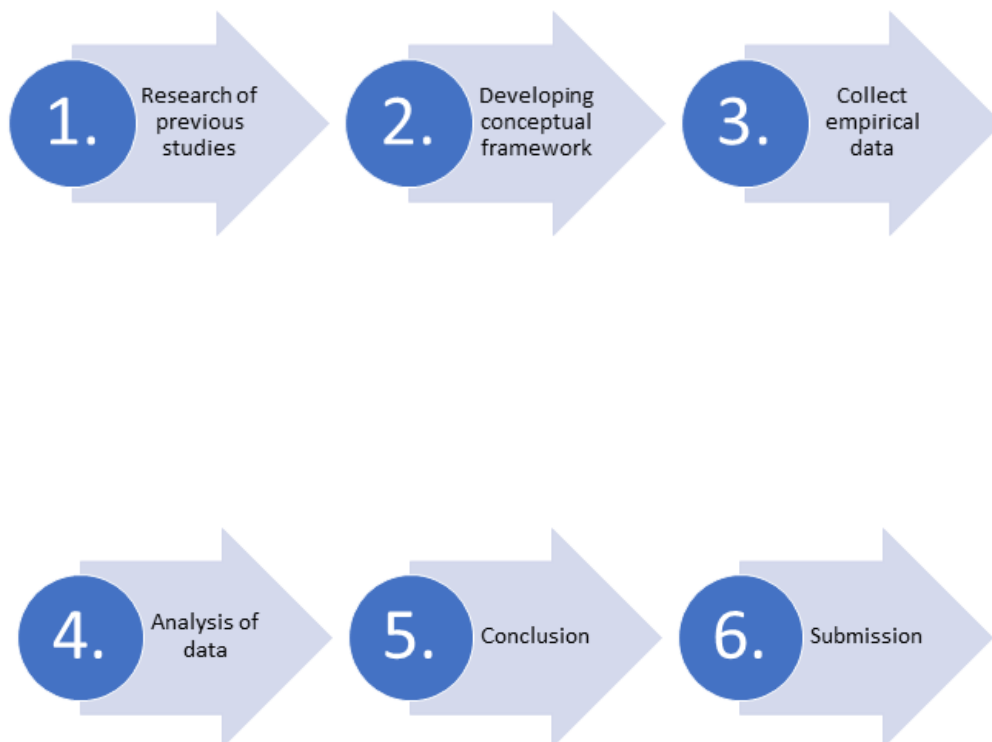


Figure 4. Illustration of research procedure

3.2 Research approach

There are three different kinds of research methods used to reach a conclusion, deductive-, inductive-, and abductive approach. The deductive approach is based on a theoretical framework and then tested against empirical collected material. The inductive approach has its starting point in the empirical data, the collected material. Thereafter, often at the same time, build hypothesis or theories from that. (Backman, 2016) The abductive approach consists of a combination of deductive and inductive research approach, where a shift between empirical and theoretical reflection is made (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). This study is based on an abductive research approach since it is based on a combination of deductive and inductive research approach, a shift between theoretical and empirical reflection. The approach allows the study to develop with the help of the empirical data (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

To investigate which entrepreneurial skills (or set of skills) must be acquired and nurtured by entrepreneurs to successfully flourish a sustainable business, this study has used a qualitative methodological approach employing a multiple exploratory case study. This, since the qualitative approach directs interest more towards the individual and emphasizes of how the individual interprets and shapes a (his/her) reality. It also studies with a qualitative research approach can contribute to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. A qualitative research approach results into verbal formulations, either written or spoken, and is characterized by the fact that it does not use numbers. Backman (2017)

According to Backman (2017) the qualitative research approach has a certain preference for the use of case studies when it comes to scientific work. This study is no exception, here a multiple exploratory case study has been used since the intention is to investigate (explorative) (Backman, 2017). This multiple exploratory case study was conducted with the help in eight independent interviews.

Some criticism has been pointed out about the qualitative research method. The criticism is based on the fact that the method usually uses a small number of participants and therefore, the consequence is that is not possible to generalize the final results. (Backman, 2017)

3.3 Research overview

It was decided that it was necessary to first gain an improved understanding within the chosen subject area, and then be able to collect and interpret relevant empirical data. This activity is according to Backman (2017) done with the purpose to summarize and integrate empirical research and to get an overview of previous research. Therefore, the study began with an exploratory research of previous studies and literature where part of earlier documentation in the selected area was calculated. This was done for the research process and all its activities could get started, likewise because the previous studies help to frame a scientific problem statement, which, according to Backman (2016), possibly is the most important phase in the entire research process. Henceforth, Backman (2016) argues that it is impossible to skip the literature review

as a step in the process. A literature review reveals previous limitations and gaps in the body of knowledge and indicates the relevance of an imaginary problem (Backman, 2016).

Secondary data is empirical material that originally has been created and collected for another study, by someone else than the user (Bryman and Bell, 2017). Different types of secondary data have been used in this study, the majority has been collected from previous studies and additionally information about the companies where the respondents operate was taken from each webpage. This study's frame of reference is based on secondary data taken from previous studies within the chosen subject (The set of skills proposed by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) presented in Table 2.). This was done in order to ensure that the information was qualified for this essay. In addition, books, e-books and reports have been used as supplementary sources. Further, information about the companies was taken from each company's homepage and from the respondents themselves.

Search tools and Databases	Google Scholar Emerald Science Direct Scopus Libguide (Halmstad University's' search engine)
Search word	Sustainability, entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills
Type of literature	Scientific articles, books, e-books
Year of publication	2002 – 2020
Language	English

Table 3. Visualization of research overview

3.4 Sampling

The selection of respondents for this study was made with the help of goal-directed and step-by-step selection process sampling, which is most common in qualitative studies (Backman, 2017). The purpose with goal-directed sampling is to strategically select respondents to the extent that the respondents are suitable for the study in question (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The first step of the selection was to identify businesses based on the criteria that they work with sustainability. In this case, businesses that offer sustainable products and/or services, operate in a sustainable way regarding social, environmental or economic were chosen. Secondly, individuals with the most relevant experience were selected. In this case, it was individuals such as entrepreneurs, founders and CEOs of sustainable businesses, since it was our belief that individuals with such a position would have a great insight into entrepreneurial skills. The study was limited to Sweden, simply as a convenience for the authors regarding the time interval and due to the ongoing pandemic situation.

In addition to the goal-directed selection process, a snowball sampling was used as well. With the help of personal connections to a business incubator, information about several sustainable businesses was received. Due to Covid-19 and lack of time, among others, entrepreneurs' opportunity to conduct an interview was limited. All respondents met the requirements based on the criteria of working with a sustainable business. For this study, the final selection based on the criteria became relatively narrow. Thereafter, approximately 30 companies were contacted via e-mail and in the end eight individuals were interviewed. Six out of eight were both founders and CEO, one CEO and one advisor/business developer in the entrepreneurship sector, whom was also an entrepreneur. Furthermore, the selection of the respondents was also based on the possibility of accessing contact information, i.e., e-mail, to the respondents in a resource-efficient way. Factors such as financial aspects, size of company, industry, age, gender or years of experience were not in focus and has therefore not been significant in the selection of respondents for this study.

3.5 Data collection process

In this study, the primary data has been collected using a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. Eight individuals from selected companies. Before the data collection, an interview guide was created (see Appendix 1) with the help of an operationalization (see Table 4.) which is a translation made from the theoretical frame of reference into interview questions. The interview guide was developed based on the theories, the themes and topics in the theoretical frame of reference. A so-called pilot interview was conducted on an entrepreneur before the eight respondents were interviewed. A pilot interview was done to find out which part of the interview guide was important and how it should be formulated in order to get the people concerned to talk about what concerns them. (Backman, 2017; Bell, 2000)

Theoretical reference frame	Question number
-----------------------------	-----------------

Sustainability	1, 2 & 5
Entrepreneurship	1, 2 & 3
Sustainable entrepreneurship	1, 2, 3 & 5
Entrepreneurial skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical skills - Managerial skills - Entrepreneurial skills - Personal maturity skills 	3, 4, 5 & 6

Table 4. Link of the interview guide to the theoretical frame of reference.

All interviews were conducted digitally using various communication tools. The interviews were recorded with either a computer or a mobile phone to ensure that all published information was perceived correctly by the interviewers. The data collection was then carried out digitally via Zoom or phone calls due to the current coronavirus crisis. This in order to comply with the restrictions regarding the importance to limit the number of meetings and to keep distance from others (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes.

Case Number	Name	Company	Role	Date	Interview platform
1	Ninnie Sjösten Wikström	Organic Inspirations AB	Founder & CEO	2021-04-15 10:30	Telephone
2	Lisa Perby	MonthlyCup AB	Founder & CEO	2021-04-16 10:00	Zoom
3	Lova Brodin	MiljöMatematik AB	Founder & CEO	2021-04-20 15:45	Zoom
4	Lina Borghardt	Coompanion	Advisor / Business Developer – Sustainable entrepreneur	2021-04-23 13:00	Zoom
5	Jonas Larsson	B-Light Organic	Founder & CEO	2021-04-23 14:30	Zoom

6	Alexander Neumann	OmiOpi AB	Founder & CEO	2021-05-04 13:00	Telephone
7	Priscilla Hendrik Hessle	Dooek	Founder & CEO	2021-05-06 07:45	Telephone
8	Jorunn Wallton-Haaland	Great Earth	CEO	2021-05-06 10:00	Zoom

Table 5. Visualization of the respondents.

3.5.1 Data analysis

After the interviews, the audio material was carefully listened to, a transcription was made from the recording in order to ensure that everything has been included and that no misunderstandings have occurred. Transcribing interviews also facilitates the analysis work by being able to easily orient in the texts by structuring it (e.g., Respondent 1 or Respondent A). (Backman, 2017) The data was then analyzed through a thematic analysis and was done seeking for both similarities and differences in the responses of the respondents.

Firstly, the analysis has its starting point in a separate analysis in which all interviews were analyzed individually with the theoretical frame of reference. The results would be compiled and then compared in a cross-case analysis in order to find patterns, similarities, differences in the respondents' answers. Thereafter, a conceptual model would be created in order to simplify the possibility to see similarities and differences, which then will be used in the analysis and conclusion. According to Backman (2016) it facilitates the analysis to have a subject-centered approach, therefore a theme and subject has been in focus throughout the analysis.

3.6 Reliability & Validity

Validity is a concept which is often used to describe the quality of a research. The concept refers to the extent to which the research is carried out and the methods used actually examine what is supposed to be examined (Backman, 2017). Companies have carefully been selected based on specific requirements, as well as respondents who are well acquainted with entrepreneurship have been selected. Two interviewers, both authors, were present during the interviews in order to avoid misunderstandings or getting on the wrong track. Additionally, a pilot interview was conducted which showed whether the wording of the questions was reliable and valid. This contributed to a higher validity since requirements were fulfilled and two interviewers present makes it possible to control if the collected data was perceived in the same way. (Bell, 2000)

Reliability is about the ability to repeat the study at a different time and get similar results. According to Bell (2000) a totally different answer in a different situation with the same concrete question is not reliable. The data collection procedure and the analysis of the data has carefully been presented and explained throughout the thesis, which according to Backman (2017) is of importance for a thesis credibility. Hence, the issue with qualitative research approach is that the respondents can be affected by a number of different factors in their everyday life, which the interviewers cannot help. (Bell, 2000) Additionally, the researchers are the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data in a qualitative study and this places special demands on the researcher (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015). It is difficult to determine whether if the result would have looked different with other circumstances.

3.7 Ethical considerations

It is of importance to always think through how to guaranty integrity, confidentiality and voluntariness according to Bell (2000). Therefore, this study takes ethical principles into account presented by Vetenskapsrådet (2002). The principles can be made concrete in four general requirements, the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement, and the use requirement. The first requirement, the information requirement, refers to the obligation to inform the participants about the purpose of the research, since it can affect their willingness to participate. The second requirement, the consent requirement, is about obtaining the respondent's consent and overs the participants right to independently decide about their participation. Requirement number three, the confidentiality requirement, includes on what terms he or she wants to participate and providing the respondents with the greatest confidentiality and the handling of personal data (e.g., being anonymous). The fourth requirement, the use requirement, means that data collected only will be used for the purpose of the research. (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002)

4. Empirical collected data

The primary collected data is presented in this chapter. The chapter consists of the interviews with the selected respondents including a short presentation of each company.

4.1 Case 1: Organic Inspirations AB

Organic Inspirations is a Swedish company that makes digital platforms that inspire people to choose natural health, ecological, non-toxic products, and sustainable lifestyles. One of the most important digital solutions that the company has created is called Eco-App, a guide and search engine that help users to get relevant information and inspiration on the themes of natural health and sustainable lifestyles. The aim of the firm is to spread knowledge and influence people to choose a more responsible and healthier way of living while taking care of the environment by raising awareness among its users.

Environmental awareness and health have been an interest of the respondent for many years. Hence, she is constantly thinking about innovative solutions that can help to reduce people's environmental impact and footprint, and at the same time, making it easier and more accessible for her users to adopt a more sustainable consumption.

Another project that the company is developing is called Naturalclub.se and together with Eco-App are technical platforms that gather health-conscious people and make it easier for them to find knowledge and choose natural, organic and sustainable products.

Interview with Ninnie Sjösten Wikström – Founder and CEO of Organic Inspirations AB

The respondent, Ninnie Sjösten Wikström, explains that the core philosophy of the firm center around sustainability both internally and externally. For instance, she mentioned that, she does not use printed paper since they have created a digital magazine, reducing the use and waste of this material, as well as she tries to avoid using airplanes as much as possible and she rather use trains to reduce her footprint. *“These are the kinds of choices you can make in everyday life”*, she says and continues: *“if I do not do this kind of small actions myself, then I can’t communicate to my users to adopt sustainable practices”*.

Wikström started her business without any skills that were of importance or mattered during that process. However, her background of being health coach has given them the knowledge to build the business from, she mentioned that she did it *“from the heart”* and that all she wanted was to make a change and then she got to learn things along the way. Now she is successfully running the company and gaining tools and skills every day. For instance, nowadays she developed technical skills that has allowed her to become a web editor which is a skill she did not have when the firm first started.

Furthermore, during her time creating her business she has learnt and recognised what she cannot do and take in people who can do that for them. She argues that she found a good partner with whom she works closely and complement each other's knowledge and expertise. Hence,

she has also developed leadership skills, now she recognizes that she has become a good leader and she is now able to visualize the future of the firm and plan accordingly. Likewise, she acknowledges the importance of creating good relationships with partners and make valuable collaboration. She says: *“Characteristics like discipline you must have it, but also. it is very important to be a relationship builder”*

Additionally, it is also about being open and listening, and considering what both our partners and readers want, say, and see. Therefore, she tries to listen to their feedback and insights and be open enough to implement changes accordingly, since she explains that her company has a greater purpose and the only way, she believes she can achieve a bigger impact is by being flexible, emphatic and respond to the user’s needs. *“You must show that you are genuinely interested in what you create and not just think business but actually value creation”*.

She concludes the interview saying that, her experience as sustainable entrepreneurs have given her the ability to become a problem solver and to see the things from different perspectives as well as being open to cope with difficulties and lead the company towards the creation of more solutions that contribute to a sustainable development. Networking is as well one of the biggest strategies she has implemented by identifying how the companies can get mutual benefits from the alliances or partnerships as well as build long-term relationship with other actors.

Finally, she highlights the importance of implementing solutions, testing them, receiving feedback, and improving them based on the gathered information from users as well as the relevance of making research before implementing a project. She explained: *“I have the determination to do the things I want to do, every time I have something in mind I say to myself: I am going to this, and then I figure out the most optimal solution and learn the skills along the way”* That determination has been key for her and she argues that every entrepreneur should have the same learning-by-doing posture.

4.2 Case 2: MonthlyCup AB

MonthlyCup was founded in 2014 by Lisa and Martin Perby. Together they run the company and produce menstrual cups in Sweden and try to help women and other menstruators with menstrual cups. The purpose was to give millions of menstruators the chance for a better life and the opportunity to build on a truly sustainable business. *“We offer better economy, care for the environment and health through a product that is so superior that it is unstoppable”*. Menstrual cups offer the market's most environmentally conscious alternatives. Monthlycup reduces CO2 emissions for menstrual protection per person from 8 kg to such low levels that it is not measurable.

On average, a woman has menstruation for about 2,500 days in her life. During this time, they use an average of 12,000 sanitary napkins and tampons. The numbers reduced drastically when it comes to menstrual cups with an average of 7 during their life.

Menstrual cups offer the market's most environmentally conscious alternatives. Bandages and tampons often contain cotton and according to WWF, up to 29,000 liters of water are used to produce 1 kilo of cotton. Not only that, the traditional menstrual pads cause an estimated 3,750 tons of rubbish per year, in Sweden alone. Not to mention the absurd amounts of plastic that disposable protection contains. ‘‘Our goal has always been to make the world a better place - one menstrual cup at a time’’.

Interview with Lisa Perby – CEO and co-founder of MonthlyCup AB

Perby explains that the MonthlyCup, by increasing their sales, they are actually reducing consumption of traditional menstrual products with negative environmental impact. For every menstrual cup that is used, the planet saves 1.600 tampons. *‘‘that’s how sustainable we are’’* she mentions. Besides the main product, they try to make as little impact on the environment as possible and they try to be climate neutral. Most of the production is made in Sweden, for fair conditions but also to keep high standards and avoid the use of transportation modes to import materials. Likewise, the cup wash is produced in Malmö, Sweden and the tube is made out of sugar cane with leftover materials from other products. MonthlyCup try to use reused plastic when they need it. The respondent clarifies that she is not against plastic, but that they try to use plastic as little as possible when there is a better choice. If it is possible to reuse what they have in their warehouse, they do it. *‘‘We reduce, recycle and reuse. We also follow ISO-2001 for the environment’’*, she explained.

The respondent’s main motivation to start the company was because, back in 2014, there were not many menstrual protections in the market and the few available options used to be sold for high prices so the majority of menstruators did not have access to a wide range of period products. Another reason, was when she got a phone call about how bad the situation in developing countries was regarding menstruation, where people had to stay at home from school during their menstruation period and eventually, they were forced to drop out of the studies because they were way behind. Consequently, the respondent tried to make an alliance with a menstrual cup supplier to lower their prices to help people in developing countries, but they never got a reply for such alliance. Thereby, they (Lisa and her husband) decided to create their own company, Monthlycup, and put the production in Sweden and on the Swedish market. Perby explains that they did not want to produce in China, *‘‘if you do not know the working conditions, then you are not helping, and we started to work closely with the health centers and try to educate the people regarding the period that sometimes can have many stigmas and there is a lot to be said besides the product to try to educate people around that’’*.

Additionally, the respondent explains that her partner, Martin Perby, is a technical genius. He created the webpage and payment solutions in the business system while Lisa is the front person and works mainly in the sales. She adds that she is very driven and that it is her who engages with people. Perby searches until she finds the answers and she does not easily give up. Not giving up is very important when they started the business, since menstrual protection is not considered as a medical device in Europe, but in the US, it is.

Perby is a person who likes to do everything right. Even though she is not obligated by the EU regulations to test the menstrual cups, she does to protect the customers. *‘It is medicine that we are talking about. You don’t want the girls to have cancer, you must make sure that you are doing this correctly. Since, as I mentioned before, menstrual cup is not considered as medical device in Europe, trying to find its rules has been extremely difficult since, for instance, we only have to create a proper manufacture procedure but we are not forced to prove that the products don’t have toxics, but we still do it for our customers safety’*

Some skills that Perby has developed during the process from the start up face of MonthlyCup, are self-awareness and personal growth, which *‘it is a lot higher today’* according to her, and continues *‘I am very good at knowing what the things are that I am not good at and it is actually very important’*. She has noticed that her attention gets lost when she gets bored with tasks that do not interest her or she knows she is not good at, therefore she has learnt to delegate to her coworkers.

Perby explains that technical skills are of great importance in order to run the website, payment solutions, programming, and to stay in contact with resellers. However, these technical skills are not skills that she herself possesses, it is her business partner who possesses and who she describes as a *‘technical genius’*. Perby explains that it was not necessary for her role to have knowledge about technical skills, mainly because she and her partner complement each other well. They are good at different things. Martin Perby started the website *www.menstrualcup.com* and, according to the respondent, he has evolved several skills in regards of the technical aspects of the firm, for instance in programming, Perby says that Monthlycup was one of the first companies to use Apple pay and Swish, which are two payment solutions. *‘We were early adopters to make things easier for customers to shop’*. The respondent highlights that it is a constant learning process since everything is constantly and rapidly changing.

One key skill for a CEO, according to the her, is to have a lot of knowledge about your company, she argues that is essential to know and understand several many small things of the business since she is the head of it and therefore, it is necessary to have some kind of knowledge about everything. Even though the respondent is not an expert in some areas, she still can explain and communicate her decisions, plans, and strategies, which she believes is of great importance.

Perby states that she *‘knew pretty much nothing before’* and adds that she has learnt to be more conscious about what materials should be used and why these things are important for their product in order to offer a safe product for their consumers, she does not approve the use of unsafe products to be used in people’s bodies. *‘We want the cups to be considered as medical devices and if they would, it would be the producer’s responsibility to put safe products on the market. You could not buy menstrual cups for 5 Kroner. Nobody can tell you that a 5 SEK product is safe. That’s impossible’*. To tackle this, the CEO is trying to change the law. She wants the European Union to put more regulations in menstrual cups just as the FDA does it in the US. According to her, by doing this she is standing up for women's rights every day.

In this sense, Monthlycup have had various discussions together with midwives, menstruators, and medical devices experts to, not only find the right regulations, but also to make it as simple as possible for the consumer to use, as well as to prepare them to cover eventual risk factors.

On the other hand, MonthlyCup has built long-term agreements with suppliers in Sweden and Perby tells the interviewers that, in some occasions, she even picks up products herself driving an electric vehicle. Perby continues explaining that she tries to do everything right. All her agreements need to be meet specific requirements due to the FDA regulations, she mentions that aspects like packaging, instructions, materials, components, and other specifications must fulfil those requirements. Hence, she has had to learn and do research for every step of the production process to keep commercializing the products.

In regard to identifying market opportunities, the CEO comments that they have identified a need because they understood how it has to be produced and how they have to educate the users and raise awareness about the environmental impact. She also argues that MonthlyCup was one of the first companies that produced a mini-size menstrual cup, they saw that gap in the market and started the production and commercialization of it after asking their customers about what they want and why they want it. The firm is constantly trying to listen to their users and improve their products accordingly. Furthermore, the mini-size menstrual cup was not the only market opportunity they identified, Perby explained that they found a better solution to clean and sanitize the cup than the traditional way of boiling it, and created an alternative that is easier and more effective since, she mentions some of her users are not able to boil the products, which can cause risks of infections.

She concludes the interview mentioning that the company's intention is to keep working on sustainable issues since currently they are influencing 11 of the UN SDGs as well as following 4101, 4005 systems, FDA regulations and ISO 2001 and that is permanently communicated to their users from its social media and other digital platforms.

Finally, she wanted to share one of the latest innovations of the firm: a monthly subscription for those users who cannot afford to pay for the cups at once. The business model allows the consumers to divide the product's full price in small monthly payments, giving access to the product to more people and producing a bigger positive environmental impact while growing in sales.

4.3 Case 3: MiljöMatematik AB

MiljöMatematik AB is an idea-driven, non-profit company with a focus on sustainable food systems it was created by Lova Brodin together with her brother (Vidar). The company's driving force is "*to contribute to knowledge development for thriving companies and society within the planet's boundaries*". With the help of an interdisciplinary approach and innovative methods, the firm carry out assignments and projects in the environment, climate, and strategic sustainability work. MiljöMatematik proudly calls its stakeholders as "*total foodies and food*

nerds”, believing that the food system is the keystone to understand and solve all the world's problems, from production systems, to food's climate impact, social justice, and regenerative change.

Before diving into a project or assignment, they always introduce customers and partners to sustainability (e.g., planetary boundaries and sustainable business models) to set a common base. MiljöMatematik also have travel policies; no flights, preferable train, electric car or bicycle, car and ferry if necessary. A food policy is also in order. Always vegetarian and organic whenever possible. The carbon footprint goes into their accounting. Furthermore, a purchasing policy is included where reused/recovered always is the first choice. Meaning, all computers, phone etc are recovered. MiljöMatematik Malmö AB is committed to reduce absolute scope 1, 2 and 3 GHG emissions 50% by 2025 from a 2019 base year. They also commit that 50% of its suppliers by emissions covering purchased goods and services and fuel and energy related activities will have set science-based targets by 2025 from a 2019 base year. The targets covering greenhouse gas emissions from company operations (scopes 1 and 2) are consistent with reductions required to keep warming to 1.5°C.

Furthermore, the company's culture centres around the values of entrepreneurship, innovation, and practical experience from the food industry throughout the whole production process. its mission is: *“To transform the food system and to help making food part of the solution instead of part of the problem”* to achieve this, the venture works in three main areas, as follow:

- ***Innovation projects and collaborations***, in which the company work jointly with researchers, farmers, organizations and other experts with system innovation based on societal challenges.
- ***Assignments and consulting services***, through the facilitation of training programs, courses, and consultancy projects for sustainability-driven business development, the company also creates mathematical models and climate calculations.
- ***Knowledge and reinvestment***. In this area, the MiljöMatematik reinvest all its financial surplus to keep developing both its own business and other initiatives that contribute to build a “better world”.

Interview with Lova Brodin – Founder and CEO of MiljöMatematik AB

Brodin explained during the interview that she and her brother started to work in the food industry from a practical approach, trying from the beginning to improve it, they decided to combined their knowledge and background to create a more systematic approach that would transform the industry. The Brodin siblings have a strong technical education, on the one hand Lova is engineer in applied mathematics while her brother studied agroecology and biology, they identified this distinctive opportunity to combine the two disciplines and create a company that helps the food industry to be more efficient and sustainable.

Furthermore, Brodin mentioned that in order to achieve their mission, the company has a framing in every decision they make and in every project they work with, she states that

“everything that is out of such framing and does not match with their mission is not considered to be implemented”. The company works with the several stakeholders from agriculture, food companies, production, etc.

Even though there is no external sustainability plan. They started with the sustainability challenges in designing their mission and business plan. Since they have integrated that approach directly, and excluded everything that does not fit into our sustainability plan, they don't need to have an external document. However, of course they work with all aspects of sustainability within the business model, using for example the Doughnut Economics framework, including Planetary Boundaries, while defining challenges. They do climate accounts, have set Science Based Targets to reduce our impact, have social targets including shorter working hours, "freestyle" time in the schedule for everyone to be able to read in on or watch talks about interesting topics, talk a walk or whatever our employees feel that they need or want to do. And of course, starting from ecological and social targets, they set economic targets and design a business model to match those targets.

MiljöMatematik does have three different areas in which it operates. Lova explained that they provide consultancy services on the one hand, identify problems to be solved in project and collaboration in the other, while the third area centers around reinvesting the income in the implementation of more projects or in acquiring knowledge. Those three areas represent the fundamentals of the company and every activity within the three areas must be aligned with their mission. Reinvesting the income in more projects and knowledge allows the company to be profitable and to develop the skills required to keep running the business, according to Brodin *“our aim is to have one mission we want to accomplish but at the same time we want to be a regenerative company for ourselves like a social entrepreneurship or something similar”*. Therefore, the third area of the company is essential.

Likewise, Brodin highlighted the importance of having previous experience for the development of her business. Before MiljöMatematik the Brodin siblings ran a 100% organic café which gave us the knowledge of the hospitality and food industry. Offering organic products 10 years ago was not an easy endeavor, she mentioned, however, it gave them the ability and knowledge in the industry as well the opportunity to build a strong network within it. Lova believes that the such previous experience together with the technical knowledge, networks, and in combination with a scientific approach is not common and has been a key aspect for the differentiation of the firm since, in Brodin's words *“it makes it so much easier for us to talk to companies in the right way and talk to scientists in the right way also and talk to all the actors we need to be part of the movement”*.

On the other hand, from the company's inception, the CEO has been able to develop different skills that she did not visualize when it first started. The siblings thought that it would be enough with their technical knowledge to run the firm. However, as the firm grew, they realized that some entrepreneurial skills, like leadership and communication were essential. Lova considers that she needed, not only to be a boss, but also a leader for the company, partners, stakeholders, and other actors. Furthermore, as the company offers a complex service, she understood the importance to provide proper training through workshops and educational

session for their employees and customers. Whereby, communication has also been a key aspect for the firm. All of this, according to her, required organization and simplification. She mentions: *“I have had to learn how to give a clear explanation and get the attention to explain our system and try to inspire others. and that something I don't really think I would have to make at the beginning”*.

Regarding the sustainability aspect of the firm, Lova and her brother, as mentioned before, prioritize the implementation of projects that fulfill their mission and that are aligned with the company's values, even if that means working with zero profit. *“Sometimes for example we don't get any money, but we fulfill the principles and the impact goal or other goals”*.

The company also works continuously under the Doughnut economic model (Raworth, 2017). Since according to Brodin it combines the concept of planetary boundaries with the concept of social boundaries. Therefore, the firm aims to balance their operation under such framework, explained by Brodin: *“The model considers the economy as a tool including social and environmental aspects. We really like the model because it is very visual and is easy to understand and make us remember what we want to achieve. It is like the SDG's which you can easily read and understand”*.

Another important aspect is the continual cooperation with experts and partners in the industry with whom the company works closely. The Brodin siblings have been able to acquire and co-created knowledge together from such alliances. Likewise, Lova's mathematical background has given her the ability to solve problems and organize things in a specific way even if it is not a qualifying task as well as develop an ability to see patterns and have a systemic thinking which she considers to be the most important skill for her venture. Likewise, owning a company before helped her to understand how to do accounting and manage the company as a big one, even though it is still a small venture.

Since MiljöMatematik has different areas that operates unlike the business development skills are also considered relevant for Brodin. She mentioned that being flexible and not keeping attached to a single plan is not a conventional way to operate but it has worked certainly well during the company's growth process as well as the learning-by-doing approach in which the company experiments and perfect several procedures has also been highly relevant.

Finally, the way the company visualise a business opportunity is by focusing primarily in a challenge instead of a business opportunity itself. Once the firm has identified a problem to be solved, they start to build all the necessary tools, teams, and systems to implement or solve that challenge. Therefore, the entrepreneurial skills are what make the company be different than an NGO or another idealistic entrepreneur. As Lova claimed: *“It is much easier to talk to the stakeholders if we are able to show that we not only have a system to have an impact but also that we can employ people and operate as a company. So, we are not only idealistic but we can be seen real.....”*

“.....So I believe it is super important to be able to actually work with larger companies and partners and that we actually run it as a company, otherwise it is very hard. For example, now

we are working with companies like Oatly, and others. So, more and more companies want to join us because they see that we are actually a firm and not like a volunteer job or something idealistic.

Lova concludes that thanks to the entrepreneurial approach she has developed, she has been able to create change. In the start-up phase she thought that they would only make scientific research or would involve a political project. However, it the entrepreneurial approach what they consider as the most effective way to produce change.

4.4. Case 4: Coompanion

Coompanion is located throughout Sweden, and with its 25 independent regional organizations, owned and managed locally, it promotes cooperative entrepreneurship on equal terms, where ownership and governance are democratic and where sustainability from a social, economic, and environmental perspective is protected. With members in the form of organizations, cooperatives, social enterprises, student unions and public actors, the company's work results in companies that take social responsibility and create positive societal effects, local and regional development, and contribute to diversity of ownership models in the Swedish business community.

The company is involved as a support and sounding board throughout the process, from idea to ongoing business, its advice and information is free of charge thanks to its assignment from the Swedish state, which through the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth co-finances this part of our operations together with municipalities, regions and other actors. Coompanion has extensive experience of being a process leader for both individuals, groups, associations, and companies who want to realize their ideas together.

Finally, Coompanion tailors and offers training as needed. It can be about board work, group dynamics, conflict management, business development or leadership as well as it holds shorter and longer entrepreneurial trainings that are both inspiring and educational.

Interview with Lina Borghardt – Business Development/sustainable entrepreneur Coompanion.

Lina Borghardt highlights that thanks to the diversity of companies they work with (from start-up ideas, to established firms) they have been able to gained extensive experience in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship specially in the form of cooperatives in which the join support is the permanent objective, hence their primary focus consists on the support of social innovations and social entrepreneurial projects. She argues that their cooperatives' values go hand to hand with society's needs, and that they have a broad experience meeting those values and passions with entrepreneurs who wants to create a positive impact, therefore from her role as a business advisor in Coompanion as well as through her own company (she and her husband own a design studio that produces sustainable furniture) Borghardt has had the opportunity to work closely with EU projects that aim to *"make the world a better place"*.

For her the most challenging aspect of working within the sustainable entrepreneurship field is to be able to create profitable business while contributing to solve issues for the society and the environment. She explains that it is very important that companies re-invest their income to create more and more sustainable initiatives and that is something that must be imprinted in the DNA of every organization or individuals they support. Likewise, the regulatory framework is also pushing organization to have sustainability in their agendas and to be sustainable driven, especially in Sweden, therefore, it makes much easier to find projects and ideas that aim to tackle issues such as gender equality, environmental impact or inclusiveness.

Furthermore, Lina explains that since most of the companies they advise are small and medium enterprises they support them on the entrepreneurs' personal skills; she argues: *"In order to be sustainable in their business they also need to be sustainable as an individual."*, therefore they also strengthen those personal areas that need to be developed.

Borghardt believes in entrepreneurship as a generator of opportunities for those who are struggling getting a job in a Swedish company, the service and support that they provide, according to her, is a powerful solution that allows them to be financially sustainable. However, they must learn how to identify challenges and create solutions around those by understanding the user and customer needs, that in some cases might differ. Therefore, it is imperative that the entrepreneurs create strong networks by talking to their users, customer, partner, suppliers, and other actors they would work with in order to get feedback and create relationships for future alliances. She also mentions, that there is not a better way to understand the customer needs than go out and talk to people, ask them and comprehend what they want and how they can make a solution out of the gathered information. Therefore, networking, research, and alliances are some of the areas that Coompanion is constantly seeking to strength among sustainable entrepreneurs.

Additionally, she argues that entrepreneurs need to be able to take risks and be brave to learn, experiment, be curios, and grow. In her words, she argues: *"entrepreneurs must get used to the fact that it is a long-term process so they should be curious and active since you don't always have all the answers, so you should look for them with the customers and then come up with the solutions. We at Coompanion have this quote "there is no answers inside the building, you must go out and find them out there". get contacts and do a robust market research. specially for the start-ups"*

Furthermore, since Companion works with early-phase and mature entrepreneurs with social or environmentally friendly initiatives, it is common to meet individuals lacking entrepreneurial skills. Hence, Borghardt highlights the importance of their long-term entrepreneurial development programs in which the companies can grow and learn the necessary abilities and knowledge. That process might differ among individuals, she mentions that it might take months for some and years for others. therefore, to address this need the company has successfully designed and tailor development programs for every entrepreneur.

She continuous and explains that entrepreneurial skills are key for business owners so they can either buy them or collaborate with others, she argues that some entrepreneur struggle to focus,

plan and systemize. Therefore, Coompanion decided to implement a digital system that helps entrepreneurs to systemize, priorities and set goals, from which the company has received positive feedback among their users. The tool, according to Lina, has enhanced the managerial skills to create a greater impact since it allows to sort out the operations needed and to understand the business from an analytical perspective as well as to visualize the future growth of it for the upcoming years.

Being creative is also a characteristic that is considered relevant for Lina, she claims that particularly in the sustainability field it is essential to create new ways for getting contacts and getting help from other organizations or actors since it is hard to have all the solutions in one company. Hence, to be more efficient, she said that entrepreneurs also must have an experimental approach in which they try new things and identify what exactly they need to push the product or service forward. She concludes in this topic, *“for sustainable and social entrepreneurs you have many doors to push in.”*

On the other hand, Coompanion also gives a great relevance to the presentation skills so they also train the entrepreneurs to pitch their ideas and projects and to adapt those to different audiences. Likewise, as mentioned before, they must do a deep research to understand the 3 levels of their business which they call: *“System need, customer need, and user need”* and which could be different from each other and also entrepreneurs must be able to answer the question of why their solution could be important for their customers or users.

Regarding the personal maturity dimension Lina mentioned that one of the skills that she has identified as less present among entrepreneurs is the self-awareness to understand where they are downsizing or the areas in which they don't feel comfortable how to cope with that. Therefore, entrepreneurs need to motivate themselves and be able to improve the areas of self-awareness and leadership.

When she was asked regarding what skills outside the framework, they would include she recalls the follow *“I would say that for a sustainable entrepreneur it would be the ability to see your surroundings and make an analysis of what organizations or people or companies that have the same vision as you and get in contact with them. to make alliances, grasping the lowest apples of the tree. making analysis of the systemic map in your field and to really target the correct collaborators so in summary the analysis of the surrounding and the social skill of networking and communicating”*. For her, communicating is everything, that would be her number one, but also, according to her, sustainable entrepreneurs must know a little bit about everything.

4.5. Case 5: B-Light Organic AB

B-Light is a Swedish company that produces, designs, and manufactures clothing with the use of certified organic cotton, its materials are approved by the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) certification and are commercialized under Fair-Trade conditions. It was created by Jonas Larsson and Suzan Afshar after realizing a need for more comfortable, affordable, and nicely designed organic clothes. Its values center around sustainable operations, honesty commercialization and quality products. The firm operates in Sweden and have sales in other nearby countries such as Denmark and other farther markets as United States through its own

e-commerce platforms. The company have both direct and indirect sale with the help of resellers or wholesaler.

In B-light they constantly work to balance both social, economic, and environmental aspects throughout the whole operation. For this aim, the firm has partners in which they strongly rely and work closely within long-term agreements.

Interview with Jonas Larsson – CEO and co-founder of B-light Organic AB

Jonas Larsson is the CEO and co-founder together with his wife and he explains that they make everything from scratch, the company designs, try, test, and perfect their products. Larsson mentioned that they make prototypes, create patterns, try new methods, fabrics, and new designs to later order the materials from its suppliers in India and Turkey that holds the GOTS certification.

Further, the company try to be as sustainable as possible in terms of packaging and clothing, their desire is to use 100% organic cotton, however, the products still have some minor percentage of non-organic materials which are indispensable to make a functional final product. When it comes to plastic, the firm has eliminated the use of plastic for their packaging using organic cotton instead. The company also uses green transportation for their shipping.

The company is also exploring the possibility to find suppliers that are closer than India and Turkey to reduce their footprint as well as the option to produce some fabrics in Sweden which currently is too complex since Sweden is not a big producer of wood, for instance, likewise, according to Larsson there are some new techniques to produce new fabrics but those are still in premature phases which results in high costs for the company. Larsson claims that their intention is to keep looking for local options to avoid long-distance transportation.

Regarding the social aspect, the certification they work with ensures that the whole process is not only environmentally sustainable but also social and economic, since according to Larsson *“it controls every part of the process; from the cotton seed they put in the ground to the products they use, like chemicals, pesticides and others, as well as the fair wages for workers and retailers, the dying of the fabric, the packaging, everything is included in the certification and they take that certification very serious and carefully, because if they lose it they will not have business anymore. It is not only in the paper I have checked the certification many times myself and I know that it is really strict in terms of sustainability.”*

Larsson argues that, from his experiences as a sustainable entrepreneur, one of the most important aspects along the way is that he has learnt to be driven and to have determination, he has developed a way of thinking that makes him act quickly and take precise decisions, he explains, *“If I want something I go for it and do it”*, Likewise, to be brave and take risks since he did not know everything when he first started the firm. Larsson highlights the importance of his partners in India that, according to him, have had patience and good disposition to train him in the steps of the manufacturing processes.

Larsson claims that he has developed a win-to-win relationship with his supplier in India since, for the one hand, he knows all the technical characteristics of his products, and on the other the Indian manufacturer has explored the production of new kind of clothes as they used to make exclusively products for children before, resulting in a more flexible and adaptable operation for the both of the parties.

Larsson has also learnt to deal with the cultural differences when trading with India and Turkey, he explains that in India, for instance, most of the orders they make from can take several months even when they agree to be delivered in weeks. On the other hand, Larsson tells that within his entrepreneurial journey the common sense is crucial as well as to have simple plans like making the customer feel happy with their purchases, if they are not satisfied, they are encouraged to return the product free of charge until they do. In that way, the company get valuable feedback from which they can improve the customer experience.

B-light communicates with its customers mainly through their newsletter in which the company intends to explain everything as simple as possible, so the customers understand the message clearly. The newsletters are sent once a month. For now, they do not use other social media platforms as a promotion channel since they believe that digital advertising can be intrusive and that's not aligned with the company's philosophy. However, they acknowledge the relevance of using digital marketing, hence they are planning to implement it in the future but now they rather get customers who find the brand organically when looking for similar products.

On the other hand, the respondent comments that, as mentioned before, he has had to learn almost everything related to the company's operation. For instance, he had built the webshop on his own with no previous technical knowledge but with the desire to experiment, try, and improve and with no support from external consultants. He has re-designed the site several times and has become an expert in the practice to the point of designing e-commerce platforms for other companies. Furthermore, he didn't know anything about clothes before starting up the business and yet has been able to learn about it in addition to other knowledge he has acquired like finance and accounting, as he believes it is highly important to possess such knowledge rather than buying it so he as an entrepreneur can better understand the business.

He adds that being creative and looking for solution for everyday problems is key for his business, not to spend a lot of time thinking about the problem but trying to solve it, as it is something usual and recurrent. Likewise, learning to prioritize and to focus on what is relevant and productive is also crucial, reducing the time on things that seem "*fun and sexy*" but might not be very productive for the company.

Regarding sustainability he mentions that his principal driver is that he enjoys spending time outside and seeing the nature. He also appreciates the simple things in life, that's the reason why he doesn't like to add complex items to his products like plastic or complicated packing options. He is a bake-my-own-bread kind of person who has built three houses and loves to work with natural sources, so he is always looking for the most optimal solutions to make the most efficient use of materials. He explains: "*I really like to wear clothes that have a good*

purpose. I feel like a good person. I think climate change is very important and starting a company today without thinking about the environment it's a dead end, it will not work. Joe Biden said that the United States will cut down the emission in the next few years. which is a very big step for the world, and I am very happy about it."

He concludes the interview with the following message: *"you cannot sacrifice the earth in the entrepreneurial process. Some people just do it for business, but you need to do it with a meaning. Every entrepreneur must think sustainable. It's the source of a business nowadays. We can't take more than what we give"*.

4.6. Case 6: OmiOpi AB

OmiOpi is a Swedish company that produces organic, vegan, and alcohol-free drinks made from Quince (also called the Nordic Lemon). The company's mission is to contribute to a sustainable society by creating organic beverages. The firm believes that there is much more to do for both the environment and the climate, so their products are one step forward.

It was founded by Alexander Neumann who identified a market opportunity and create a drink that offers a different experience among their consumers evoking that memory of making traditional drinks for breakfast with family or friends. The experience includes the smell, color, taste, and fresh-high-quality ingredients, while, at the same time, designing procedures towards social, environmental, and economic positive impact and controlling every step of the production process.

OmiOpi makes emphasis in the responsible consumption and although the company is still young and, in some occasions, it is challenging to implement sustainable practices, its philosophy centers around innovation, fair practices, and the efficient use of natural resources. OmiOpi has an exclusivity agreement with a supplier that has 77 farmers outside Scandinavia to import the ingredients to Sweden.

Interview with Alexander Neumann – CEO and founder of OmiOpi AB

During the interview, CEO Alexander Neumann explains that the company's core values are around sustainability, hence, some of the sustainable practices are, among others, to buy the fruit from certified organic farmers in Europe, likewise, the firm is registered as an organic producer, and for the transportation they are planning to use fossil-free vehicles when the company reaches its growth phase. Additionally, they use 100% recyclable glass bottles as well as green electricity in its warehouse, replacing the consumption of single-use plastics.

On the other hand, Neumann tracks the certifications very carefully and ensures that his suppliers follow all the requirements to make sure they comply with the company's values. He mentioned that the company influences 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals, but mainly focused on 5: Zero Hunger, Gender equality, clean water sanitation, climate action, and life below water.

The sustainable entrepreneur believes that even though some sustainability procedures and requirements are still costly for small companies, the mentality to be sustainable is key for every entrepreneur. He also mentioned that sustainability can be achieved even by implementing small tasks and once the company has accomplished a clear vision, a concrete plan must be conceived, designed, and should align to such vision.

Subsequently, Alexander argues that he has developed several skills during time, he explains that: *“As an entrepreneur if you think about something, then just do it! you must act! and then all the things start to evolve and grow through the process.”* For Neumann the practical knowledge he gets within the operation of the venture has given him a broad knowledge and a problem solver expertise. He values action over planning, since according to him *“there are so many beautiful worlds but in a practical sense it is very difficult to make it happen”*. From the time that he started the company he has realized that there is a lot of information regarding sustainable entrepreneurship and the importance of getting knowledge and doing research to create a greater impact.

Furthermore, Neumann also explains that he has developed and evolved skills over time as the company is built and that he wants his business to be even more sustainable now than when it first started. He tells during the interview that the more he learns, the more he discovers that sustainable entrepreneurship is not only necessary but also it is a large topic that requires knowledge and skills since nowadays, according to him, there are more sustainable options in the market than it used to be before. Therefore, sustainable entrepreneurs must be well prepared; he acknowledges the importance to properly identify what skills entrepreneurs can learn and what others they can “buy” from external consultants or get from strategic cooperation, for instance, he recalls that for the technical part of his company (website, carbon emissions measures, visual showcase of the products) he received support from external consultants. However, he mentions that it is very important for entrepreneur to develop the technical part of the business.

Regarding the management of his suppliers, he explains that he has had to develop social skills to build long-term relationships with them. He says: *“Most of the sustainable businesses are not making a lot of money, they are making it with the heart, you need to have strong networks and collaborations. So, you must very efficient to avoid wasting materials of products, so building a relationship with your suppliers, with your customers is key.”*

At the beginning of the firm, Neumann identified an opportunity that mainly focused on the alliances with organic partners. However, overtime he has also realized that his customers give a great importance to consume non-animal products. Therefore, he has revised his all-supply network and adapted it to produce 100% vegan beverages so he can math with his segment's values. And that is something he has discovered over time. Additionally, the firm also cares about waste management, so the company is constantly working on being as efficient as possible.

One of the biggest lessons he has gotten is to be brave to change and to be flexible to adapt the products according to the customers feedback and interest. This is what he mentions in this

regard: *“Don't be afraid to listen to what your customers say because it is them who run the business, not you. so, I need to adapt the product to their needs”*. Another insight he gave is to rely in experts and make cooperation with people or organizations that can be beneficial for the growth of the company and its sustainable balance. it is very important to find support outside from experts and people who know and don't be too proud to listen to others. *“It is not possible to build a business all by yourself so you must receive support”* Neumann remarks.

The entrepreneur has also had to cope with the emotions, he explains that running a business can sometimes be frustrating and one can experiment ups and downs during the process and it requires patience and hard work to overcome those emotional moments when things seem not to work as planned. Neumann argues that every time he has some difficult times with his venture he tries to go back to his “roots” and “keep doing in what he believes in”. He thinks it is very important to believe in the products or services that one is selling and, as mentioned before, get support from others since he says: *“you will never do it alone”*. Running a business, he continues, requires sacrifices, hard work, and full-time dedication, it is: *“a lifestyle you must accept”*.

He concludes the interview saying that the marketing tool that the company believes is very powerful is the word of mouth, they do not like conducting surveys or other traditional strategies, instead they let the consumers try the product and feel the experience they want to transmit, gather feedback and improve the product accordingly.

Lastly, he gives a final insight for sustainable entrepreneurs and says: *“Get as much knowledge as possible about sustainability, do an extensive research before launching a product or service since there is a lot of information about the topic out there”*.

4.7. Case 7: Dooek AB

Dooek is a Swedish company that produces food wraps that are sustainable and made from 100% natural ingredients, such as cotton, beeswax or vegetable wax, coconut oil and resin. They are used to store food and keep it fresh longer. They are plastic-free, reusable, and made from left-over fabrics, and it is considered to be the green replacement for plastic and aluminum foils.

The company's mission is to inspire and motivate people to take small steps to a sustainable household by offering a plastic-free and reusable alternative to reduce the use of conventional materials that have a negative environmental impact. The products can be use used several times and prevents single use of plastic and aluminum foils when storing food. Dooek designs, manufacture, and distributes its products in the most sustainable way since it is 100% natural, the raw materials are purchased from nearby countries to avoid long-distance transportation, and the production is circular. In this way the company's values center around making a more efficient use of resources by reducing, reusing, and recycling. The firm operates from Sweden.

Interview with Priscilla Hendrik Hessle – CEO and co-founder of Dooek AB

The CEO comments that she started the business with her brother two years ago when they identified a problem of changing traditional wrapping products with negative environmental impact for more sustainable and environmental friendly ones; initially they focused mainly on B2C sales. However, it has shifted towards B2B channels as they recognized a market opportunity in that segment.

Priscilla comes from the Netherlands but lives in Sweden, therefore, she is focused in the Nordics markets while her brother is concentrated in other markets. The company focuses in the whole value chain from the production to distribution and makes sure that it is as sustainable as possible, they use fabrics that are leftovers and that meet the requirements of being organic. Since its production method is rather new in Sweden in a big scale, they have the production plant in Germany. The company itself does not have a sustainable certification yet, however, all the partners they work with do. Hence, they can communicate to their customers that the products are organic and with zero emissions.

Regarding the social aspect, Priscilla comments: *“At the end of the day we all are consumers, so our mission connects with our values and beliefs. When we think about sustainability sometimes it might be very abstract to know exactly what we can do so I feel that sustainability is a social mission. We all need to do this together we all are part of a bigger community. we also have the idea to be more inclusive, to work with a group of people in the society and that's one of the ambitions that we have”*.

Hendrik's biggest driver is the passion she feels for her products, such feeling has allowed her to develop the knowhow and skills needed to run the business. She highlights the fact that doing research in her field has been crucial as well as strengthen networking and relationships is essential for building her business. According to her, learning how to work with people is something that one can develop automatically along the way but it also requires to be prepared and well informed so she thinks that doing research, read, and absorb has also been fundamental.

Her background is in communication and customer experience; therefore, she can easily connect with people and tell them what they want to communicate. She strongly believes that sustainability does not have to be boring and that they are creating a brand with a personality that makes the people feel proud and “cool” while consuming products with a positive impact, *“like everyone can be a leader and create change for a sustainable development”*, Hendrik argues. When she first started the firm, she used to do everything by her own, all was handmade, so she had to learn the technical specification of the ingredients she would use as well as the process to ensure it is as sustainable and organic as possible. From that time, she has gained the knowledge and technical skills that are necessary to deal with her partners, suppliers, and consumers as well as to identify in which areas she can complement with other actors.

On the other hand, Priscilla pinpointed the importance to set goals and to know where to go and what the company wants to achieve and break down the big plan in small and achievable pieces since for a small company those tasks are to be done by few people so they must be very

efficient and structured by having a clear mind mapping to follow. Likewise, she mentioned that her company must be agile and flexible since the conditions might vary at any time but at the same time not forgetting the direction where the firm is leading to.

She compares running a business with the military, and mentioned that her husband helps her to be very structured since he was part of the army and he is a highly discipline and structured person, therefore, she has learnt how to focus and prioritize which for a small firm is much easier, according to her.

Regarding the technical aspect of the firm (website, e-commerce, and other digital tools) she explained that he received support from external but pinpointed the importance to the technical skills in her business. Therefore, she is constantly working in creating partnerships and doing networking among experts that have an extensive knowledge in the fields that the company might need. She said: *“For example for the e-commerce I ask the experts several questions like what do I need to survive, how I can address the market, how I can differentiate from my competitors and all those things because everything is new so I need to learn from experts to avoid mistakes and if you know the right people the process is much faster, for instance, one of friends is one of the best strategist in the Netherlands, she has helped me to improve my storytelling and build up the mission that connects with my consumers”*

Additionally, since she is very creative one of the biggest challenges has been to explain her ideas with others and also manage the frustration that running a business in some occasion might contain, she said: *“it is a roller coaster, there are ups and downs”* and that she sometimes might be insecure if she does not see the results. One of the solutions to cope with that, according to her, is doing research which might take a lot of time, but that is something all entrepreneurs must do and must rely to form skills.

Finally, she mentioned that two of the skills that she has developed are the presentation skills and her storytelling, since she must inspire her consumers and employees as well as listening to different stakeholder's opinions and insights to improve her products. Likewise, Hendrik is a entrepreneur that learn from experience and testing different ideas in her worlds she said: *“I have learnt how to make the product in a sustainable way and also the plan by testing, testing and testing or in another worlds Doing by learning”*

Her final thoughts during the interview were: *“I think the world is changing all the time and you must do research. talk to experts, ask them all the things you need to know. and don't make it too big. keep it simple all the time because this is a very complex and big thing (sustainability). Focus on the purpose and of course you need to develop the skills but that's something that will come organically. you start really slow, so you have to make it as less complicated as possible, so it does not become overwhelming”*.

4.8 Case 8: Great Earth AB

Great Earth started more than 30 years ago in Sweden, with the goal of making a contribution to a sustainable development by producing nutritional supplements that are organic, natural, and healthy. Its products are developed so people can get *“what they actually need, nothing*

more”. In that sense the company avoids wasting the planet’s resources unnecessarily. Currently, Great Earth is one of the Sweden’s leading players in natural health food, their aim is to make the people feel better with a wide range of supplements for a better life. Its products are made for every person regardless their age or condition.

Great Earth mission is to contribute to a *“future where a good life nourishes a better world for people and the planet”*. Likewise, the firm believes that by making the people feel happier, stronger, and better related to their health they are making a big contribution to a sustainable development since that strength will *“spread and create a chain reaction of good vibes. When we feel good, we simply have better conditions to make the world a slightly better place”*.

Interview with Jorunn Wallton-Haaland – CEO of Great Earth AB

Wallton-Haaland is the CEO and board member of the firm, she mentioned during the interview that the company produces vitamins, minerals, and food supplements with the highest quality and standard in Sweden. The company is well known for the technology they use and the evolution it has experimented by better identifying the customers’ needs and interests. Such evolution was made by a recent launch of their own web-shop which was made to build a closer relationship with its final consumers and be an addition to the intermediary business model they will continue to have where the distribution is made through resellers and pharmacies. Now the firm is able to know exactly which products have a better performance among their users and which others need to be better promoted. That information has been crucial since it has allowed the company to better understand their final users. According to Jorunn: *“The main reason behind the decision of opening our own e-commerce was to comprehend what the customer wants since we truly believe that we should not produce things that the people don't need or the people don't eat”*.

Furthermore, she adds that sustainability has been present in all the company’s decisions in the last years, according to her: *“We focus in 3 different things: Sustainable finances, sustainable footprint, and then sustainable environment for us as people”*. She continues: *“We make sure that we are in balance and we take care of our family, our place and our city. When it comes to finances, we need to be financially sustainable in order to keep running the company and of course we have to produce the things in a sustainable way everything from how we transport, produce, and how we distribute to customers. 3 years ago, we made the sustainability report with indicators that measure all these areas and we are very proud that we got really good results. We know that we are a small company but still we keep track on our sustainable operation”*. The company uses recycled plastic for their packaging and is also a member of Bower where you can deposit your used plastic anywhere where it is allowed to recycle – and get points that you can use in different ways. The reason why they are still using plastic is because, so far, it is the best option to keep the product fresh. However, the company is working on some alternative options to reduce as much as possible the use of it, like selling boxes that can be refilled and reused. When it comes to sustainability, Jorunn tells that they have been able to team-up with people and companies who are experts in the field, so the company receives support from an external consultant firm which specializes in sustainability issues. Additionally, she mentioned that they use a network of competent people in different areas to

understand what the most optimal choices are regarding topics like transport, finances, and other aspects. The CEO said that being open to create partnership with people who are experts is part of the core of the business. When she was asked about how they manage such alliances, the CEO gave the following insights: *“it is imprinted in our core values, you need to like the people you work with you need to trust them and you need to share values so the good thing about our partners is that we come from the same set of skills and values and that's key. Likewise, building long-term relationships since it takes a lot of time and effort to get to know each other so it is key to build those long-term relationships. We also make long agreements, so they know that they are safe with us for a long time. and keep them close, we include them in our meetings and our goals. We treat them as employees as if they were part of our company”*.

As mentioned before, sustainability is in the fundamentals of the firm and in every taken decision, the CEO argues that they not only identify a good market opportunity but also, they analyze if it also meets their sustainable goals. The firm wants to compensate and pay back, their desire is to be associated with a fair and a sustainable organization and to be an influential voice by communicating the company's core values. *“So, it's not only what we offer but also how we do it and how we communicate, that's one of our key skills, you can find sustainability everywhere in our organization even in our coffee breaks”* she explains. On the other hand, regarding technical skills the CEO said that those are highly important and that every company need to have them in one way or another, the firms can either buy the skills from external experts or have them inhouse. In the case of Great Earth, the company analyzes what are the necessary skills that they need to fulfill their sustainable goals for 2030 and 2023 agendas and then make the decision to buy them or employ them. She stated that in the company they know what their plan is, what their goals and what competencies they need but it constantly changes, therefore they also need to be flexible. Concerning the webshop for example, they received external support since the operation demands it. Likewise, they have decided to also partner with specialist in digital marketing, technical development, and graphic design. The company chooses the competencies it needs, and it is in the middle compiling all of them together. On the other hand, since the products have complex technical specifications that need to be clearly explain to the consumers, the company communicates all the ingredients and their properties in a simple and efficient way so the users know what they need.

The company has an external production, but an internal product specialist who oversees identifying what products need to be produced and how they need to be composed. The CEO comments: *“For example, when we need magnesium, which is our best-selling of all time, we decide what kind of magnesium we require and what level we need and then the production plant does it for us”*. After the production process is done it is sold mainly to Sweden and some minor amounts to Finland and Norway. The firm is also planning to sell to other countries close to the Nordics by the beginning of 2022. Furthermore, for the CEO the managerial skills are key, she mentioned that they are essential to run the company, since her background is in business processes, she gives a great value to the management part of the business. Regarding this concern she says: *“We try to mix all our skills, but you need to run the business from a management perspective. and those skills you certainly need them”*.

Moreover, entrepreneurship is in the DNA of Great Earth, according to the CEO, that what has made the company successful since they believe in what they are doing, and they act accordingly. The company has a philosophy to try new things that might or might not work but always learning from every experience that allow them to enhance the decision-making process. She argues: *“We just try, maybe we fail but we always learn something out of it. That's something good about a small company, that you can change a being flexible”*. She also thinks that nowadays it is more feasible and less costly to try new things since there are more options due to the digital era in which companies are able to test and see how the market reacts and take the best decisions out of it. According to her: *“Now it's very easy to try, if it works it works if not, you learn and move on”*.

Subsequently, she pinpointed that a learning-by-doing attitude has been a constant posture within the firm in which the feedback and the insights from the stakeholders is highly appreciated and considered. She said: *“We didn't have all the knowledge in the beginning, we need to learn and to listen to our direct users, with the implementation of our own webshop we have learned more in six months than ever, now we are more curios and more flexible”*. She continues: *“We have launched a new product (double capsule) and if we did not have our webshop it would take us about five months to know whether the product is a hit or not. because it takes much more time to activate a product from the reseller. When we launched this product, we saw immediately how it was going in terms of orders and today it is our best-seller product for the last month, and that is amazing we wouldn't have known that if we didn't have that direct contact”*

On the other hand, the company also cares about the internal well-being of its staff, and has created a safe environment for the employees to be able to develop their skills, the CEO believes that if they manage to provide a safe environment, the staff will feel included, trusted and proud to share the same goals. She develops the following: *“I understand that we all are humans and that we can make mistakes so they safer the working environment the easier it is to develop those skills. You need that extra energy to give that extra mile if you are trusted”*.

That attitude has been useful to cope with, for instance, the crisis caused by the pandemic (corona virus). What the CEO comments that one of the biggest lessons she has learnt during the crisis is that now she sits down and reflects on different possible scenarios and create potential solutions for every of them, she imagines what is the worst thing that might happen and start building decisions based on that, then she communicates that to all the employees, she says *“This is happening and this is how it can impact us and this is the backup plan that we need to implement”*.

Another strategy they have made during the pandemic was, they carefully revised the company's finance and analyzed how much time they could survive if everything had to stop. The company realized they could make it for 10 months and communicate it to the staff, so they feel safe and with the security to have a job in despite on the situation. The company even set up the conference room as a classroom to receive the children in case the government

decided to close the schools. According to this, the CEO remarks: “ *We did all of this just to make sure that we can plan and act with sufficient time and that we are ready, we did not have to get to the point of having the children in our offices, but what I am trying to say is that we must analyze the situation, communicate to the people, and then plan what you are doing. hence I need to understand the emotions for me as a person and my colleagues and then you need to talk about it and plan around it*”.

5. Analysis

This chapter is oriented towards the findings obtained from the participants who were interviewed. Henceforth, the empirical data that was acquired and exposed in the previous section will be summarized, organized, and classified within the theoretical framework. The individual summary will also be showcased as separate figures to verify the extent to which the information collected from the interviews matches with the one found in the theory. The respondents' answers are then compiled in cross cases, followed by an analysis where similarities and differences in the collected data are identified and discussed in general terms.

Finally, in the separate figures some skills that are not included in Lichtenstein and Lyons skills framework were found and are presented, since those skills were relevant for the interviewees and mentioned several times by them

5.1 Individual analysis of the collected data

Case 1: Organic Inspiration AB

The first step to analyse the collected data from the interviews is to confirm that the companies meet the definitions of this study on both sustainability and sustainable entrepreneurship, once this first step has been completed and the suitability of the firm has been ensured, it is pertinent to analyse the EDS skill framework under such context from an individual level for every respondent, this will help to shadow the purpose of this study. The same pattern will be applied for each of the eight cases followed by their correspondent figure.

For the case of Organic Inspiration, it is evident that the company fulfil the definitions of sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainability. As mentioned before, this study uses the SE definition provided Shepherd & Patzelt (2011): *focused on the preservation of the nature, life support, and community in the pursuit of perceived opportunities to bring into existence future products, processes, and services for gains (economic and non-economic) to individuals, the economy and society*. Therefore, it has been found that Organic Inspiration is aligned to it since the firm develops digital platforms that inspire people to choose natural health and sustainable lifestyles (Ekoappen) to spread knowledge and influence people to choose a more sustainable life of living. From its operation the company gets economic gains through its business model of monthly subscriptions, creating a source of income without dismissing the company's values around sustainability, while getting non-economic gains such as brand recognition, collaboration with other sustainable business, reduction of footprint and negative environmental impact.

Furthermore, The respondent explains how in Organic inspiration they balance the three pillar of sustainability, (environment, society, and economy) by the utilization of natural products and not utilization of materials like plastic and paper on the one hand, the awareness of sustainable practices among society on the other, and finally creating income and helping to the local economy which matches with Horton and Horton (2019) who argues that sustainability *signifies staying within the planetary boundaries, entails modes of living,*

working and, being that allow all people on the planet to reach healthy, fulfilling, and economically safe lives without damaging the ecosystem and without risking the future well-being of humans and the hearth (WCED, 198)

Concerning the entrepreneurial skills, the respondent gave great importance to technical aspect of the firm, since it is a completely digital product Organic Inspiration needs to have a robust technological means, therefore the entrepreneurs manifested that she has learnt how to be a web editor and developed not only the EkoAppen but also another digital platform.

Moreover, during her time creating the business she said she has learnt and recognised “*what she cannot do and take in people who can do that for her*”, which matches with the managerial skills dimension within the EDS framework, in which those are defined as the ability to organize and efficiently manage the operations of the business. The respondent’s argument aligns particularly in the subsection of management that contains planning organizing, supervising, directing, and networking as entrepreneurial skills of the managerial dimension (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001). Additionally, another answer that can be matched within the same dimension is when the responded referred to her experience as a sustainable entrepreneur as follow: “*It is also about being open and listening, taking in what both our partners and readers want and see*” which can be categorized in the marketing/sales subsection which contains the skills of identifying customers, distribution channels, supply chain.

Finally, as it can be seen in figure 4 the respondent provided skills that are not present in the EDS framework and that are worth mentioning as being key for the successful implementation of the sustainable venture. Such skills are leadership (when he mentioned: “*I have learned to be a good leader*”), initiative, determination, do research, experiment, and be flexible. See figure 4.

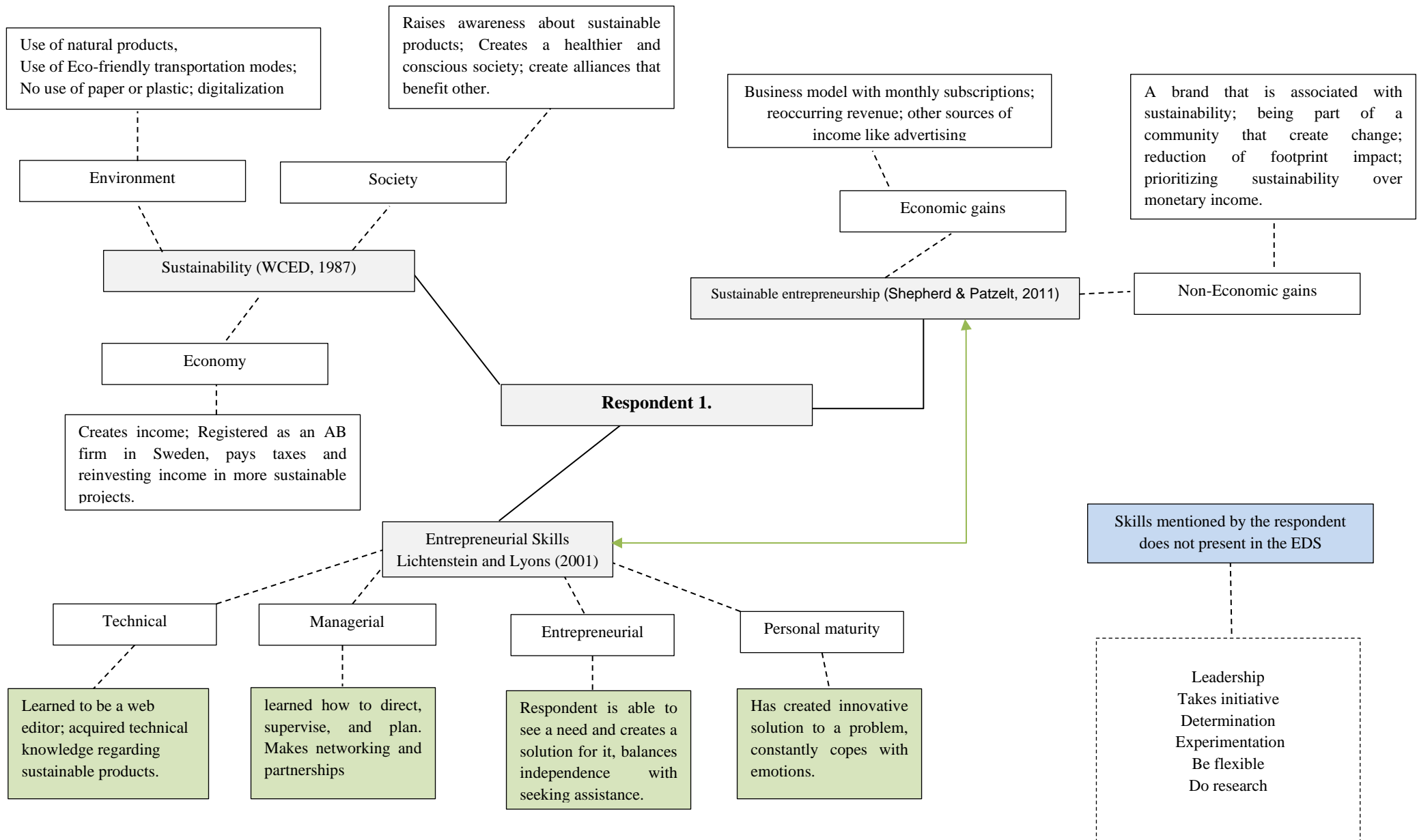


Figure 5: Analysis chart for case 1, Ninnie Sjösten, Organic Inspiration AB

Case 2: MonthlyCup AB

What makes MonthlyCup be considered as a sustainable entrepreneurial company under Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) definition is that it both balances the 3 pillars of social, economy and environment as well as it gets economic and no-economic gains, as shown in figure 4, the firm produces Eco-friendly menstrual products, saves 1.600 tampons for every menstrual cup, aims to have a climate neutral product, and has a local production (environmental pillar). Has programs in developing countries to educate users about menstruation, demystify it, and reduce school drop-outs, as well as it creates fair working conditions (social pillar), and is a registered company in Sweden that creates jobs, report taxes, and creates income that contributes to the local economy. (Economic pillar) (WCED, 1987). Thanks to its sustainable approach, the company has been able to commercialize the products in foreign markets (economic gains) while having a reduction of the negative environmental impact that traditional products generate (non-economic gains) Shepherd and Patzelt (2011).

Referring to the entrepreneurial skills, the technical aspect has been crucial for the success of MonthlyCup since the entrepreneur has used these skills with the support of her partner who according to her is a *“technical genius”* and that has created the website and incorporated the digital payment platforms on it. This technical characteristic of the firm is aligned with the definition of the dimension as the Ability to perform the key operations of that business particularly in the skills to identify and obtain the equipment/plant/technology (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001).

Furthermore, it can be seen that the entrepreneur has a strong managerial profile, since according to her she is *“the front person”* of the company, referring to having direct contact with both suppliers and customers, she has developed almost all of the skills under the EDS managerial dimension since she is in charge of the planning, networking, distribution channels, supply chain, legal and regulation aspects of the product, and the resolution of the problems that arise from the daily operation of the firm. However, she argued during the interview that she *“did not know anything before starting up the company”* and therefore she has acquired such abilities along the way and by interacting with the people and processes. Such learning process is aligned with Kutzhanova et al., (2009). Who argue, that skills grow gradually as they are continuously applied in real-life circumstances instead of initially appearing at their complete capacity.

Moreover, when the entrepreneur mentioned: *“We identify an opportunity to offer a better solution for menstruators while saving the planet and educating our users”* that opportunity recognition is aligned with the entrepreneurial dimension within the EDS which is defined as the ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions to capture those opportunities (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001). Another entrepreneurial skill that can be identified in the same dimension is the presentation skills when the entrepreneur mentioned: *“we are in constant communication with midwives, final users, policymakers, and other stakeholders to find regulations and improve our product”* that permanent feedback has allowed the CEO to enhance her ability to explain her business plan and present it in a clear and concise way.

On the other hand, the personally maturity dimension defined as the self-awareness, willingness and ability to accept responsibility, emotional development, and creative ability (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001) was also recognized by the CEO during the meeting when she explains *“Now I am more self-aware, I know what are the things that I am good at, and also what are the things that bored me like quality management for instance, for those kinds of things I get someone else to do it for me”*. This statement can relate to both personal maturity skills since it includes the ability to reflect and be introspective as well as administrative skills as it encompasses manage people relations and advisory board relations.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Flexibility: The company listened to its users and launched the mini-size menstrual cup
- Innovation/Leadership: The CEO said they were one of the first adopters of digital payments.
- Take action/determination: The CEO said they decided to open the company and commercialize the product in Sweden, after they tried to make an alliance with a producer in Spain without succeed.
- Persistence/ Resilience: Perby repeated several times the ability to insist and “keep trying” has been crucial.
- Do research, investigate: The entrepreneur is constantly investigating new markets, regulations, partnerships, and strategic alliances.

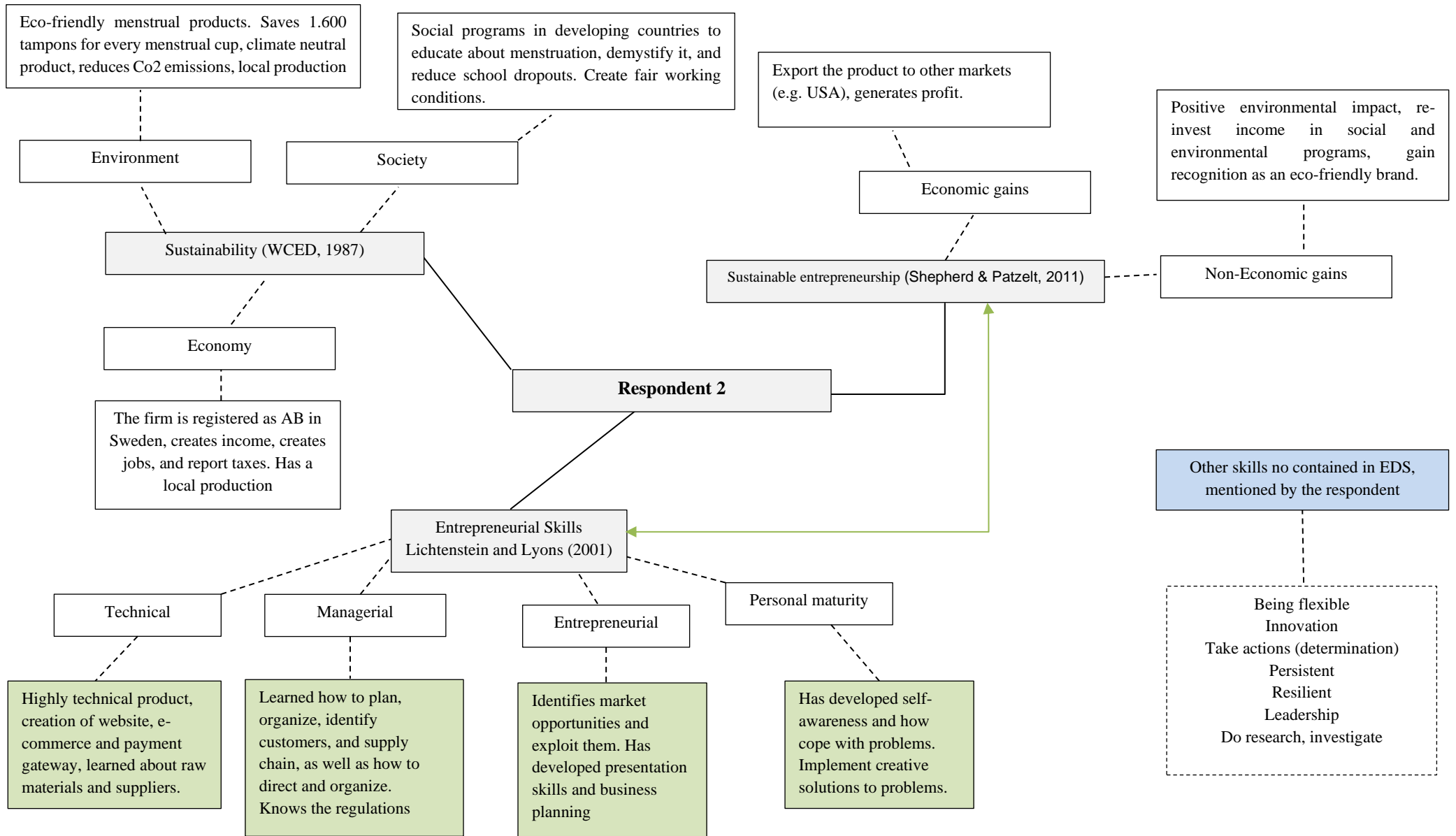


Figure 6: Analysis chart for case 2, Lisa Perby, MonthlyCup AB

Case 3: MiljöMatematik AB

The respondent argued that in MiljöMatematik AB they want to create a new food system that is more efficient and that reduces the negative environmental impact, by combining different disciplines such as mathematics, agroecology and biology to make models that can improve the food system. According to the CEO, the company aims to make the food “*part of the solution, instead of part of the problem*” while raising awareness in the society regarding more responsible composition and including several stakeholders along the process. Likewise, the company re-invest the profit into the implementation of more sustainable projects. Such social, environmental, and economic approach is what make the sustainable entrepreneurs suitable into the present study. Likewise, among the non-economic gains the company gets is the recognition and good will among stakeholders thanks to the successful implementation of sustainable projects from a multidisciplinary method. While one of the economic gains is that the venture has been able to be profitable that is returned to the execution of more developments, as well as the education and training of the personnel. Therefore, it is evident that the company also matches with Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) definition on sustainable entrepreneurship.

The technical skills in perhaps the most important dimension of the sustainable entrepreneur when she argued during the interview that “*me and my brother decided to apply our technical knowledge (mathematics, biology, agroecology) towards the creation of food systems*” that technical background is aligned with the dimension’s definition as the ability to perform the key operations of the business (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001) particularly in the skills to identify and obtain the technology/plant/equipment.

On the other hand, the managerial dimension was also highlighted by the sustainable entrepreneur in the statement in which she argued: “*I learned how to run the company as a business thanks to my past experience when I ran a coffee, and I had to deal with suppliers, customers and other actors in the food industry*” therefore she developed the ability to organize and efficiently manage the operations (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001) of the business since, from the beginning her vision was to create profit that could be re-invest in the development of more sustainable projects.

Moreover, the entrepreneurial skill defined by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) as the ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities can be clearly extracted from the explanation of the entrepreneur in which she said: “*We identified a need to improve the food system, and wanted to combine our technical disciplines to create change within the industry, however we don’t see that as a market opportunity, but a problem to be solved*”. Therefore, the entrepreneur also had to learn how to present her projects and train the actors or stakeholders, as well as create business plans around them.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Interdisciplinary work: By combining different disciplines and receiving feedback to create and improve her sustainable business.
- System thinking: The CEO said that thanks to her technical background she has a systemic thinking that she uses to solve problems and implement projects.
- Altruism: She argued that she has given up income for the company by rejecting the implementation of projects that does not match with the company's values.
- Flexibility: The entrepreneur listens to her partners and stakeholders to adapt and improve the company's operation.
- Simplify: This skill was found during the interview when the entrepreneur said: *"being an entrepreneur can be overwhelming, so what I do is try to make the things as simple as possible"*

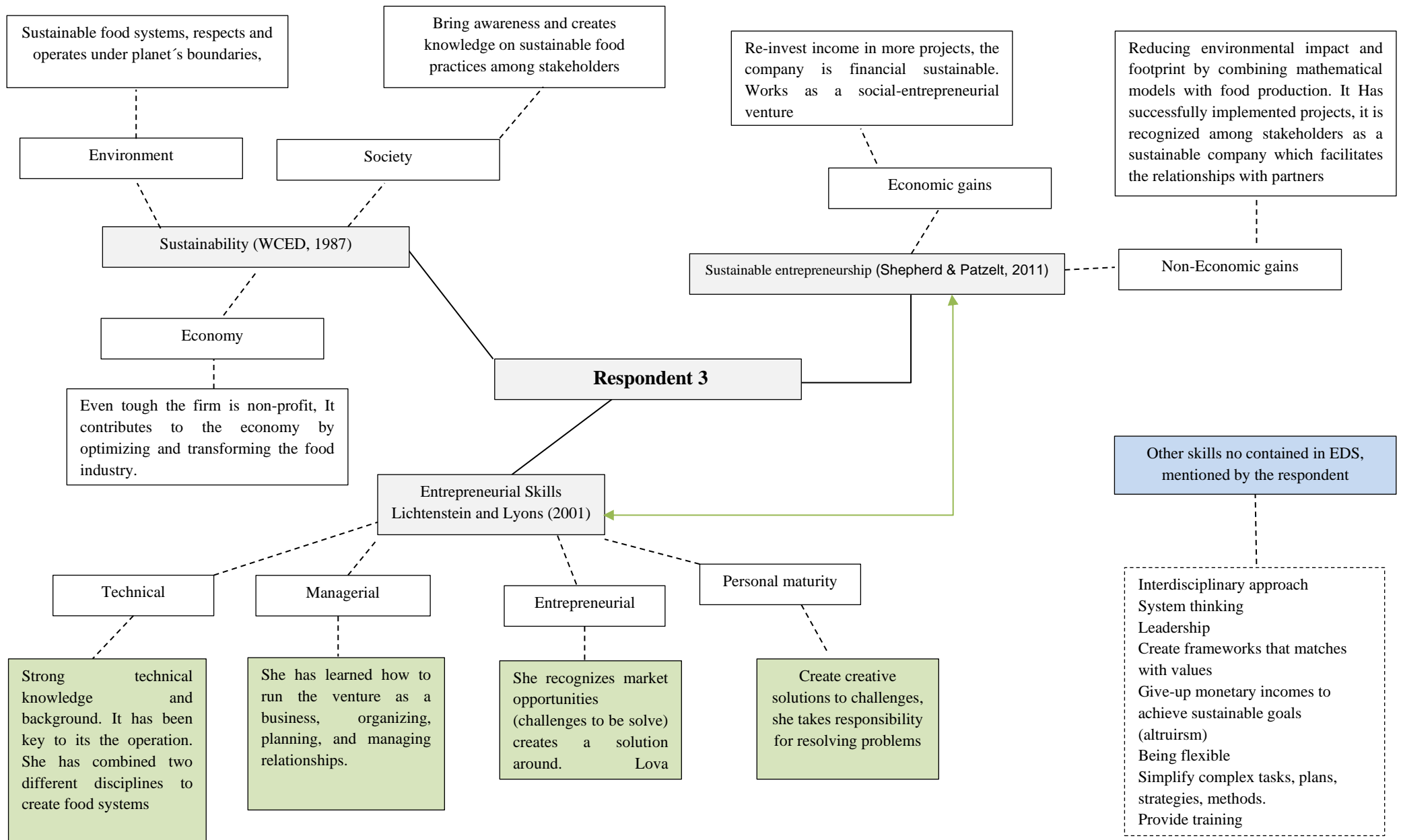


Figure 7: Analysis chart for case 3: Lova Brodin, MiljöMatematik AB

Case 4: Coompanion

Coompanion balances the three sustainable development pillars by assisting sustainable entrepreneurs to develop responsible projects that solve relevant issues (environment pillar), It promotes entrepreneurship among individuals, creating more opportunities to people who struggle finding jobs in Sweden (social pillar); Coompanion helps to create more companies, more jobs, taxes. Thereby, it impacts the local economy (economy pillar). Which both economic and non-economic gains by receiving financial support from public entities to keep promoting the development of sustainable companies (Economic gains) (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011) and by creating a strong multidisciplinary network around sustainable entrepreneurship (non-economic gains) (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011).

It can be extracted from the interview that the entrepreneur knows the operation of the firm, and she also mentioned that technical skills are important only for those entrepreneurs leading projects with a technological approach. However, she acknowledges the importance of developing the technical dimension even if the venture to be developed does not require complex knowledge. On the other hand, one of the most important skills mentioned by the respondent is the managerial skills. She argued that: *“the most important aspect for the entrepreneurs, especially in the start-up phase is networking”* such ability is included in the EDS framework under the managerial dimension and is defined as the ability to organize and efficiently manage the operation of the firm Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) including activities like planning, organizing, supervising, directing, and networking.

In the entrepreneurial dimension, she mentioned the she knows how to connect market needs with entrepreneur's solution by developing creative initiatives driven by social and environmental benefits. (Personal maturity skills).

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Leadership: Entrepreneurs must be able to lead their teams and to persuade others to support them.
- Long-term thinking: The respondent said that entrepreneurs must think in long-term results with short-term actions.
- Cooperates with experts: To receive feedback and advice from experienced sustainable entrepreneurs.
- Do research: This ability was found crucial from the respondent's insight and is one of the most important yet more difficult to develop among entrepreneurs (especially during the early stages of the firm)

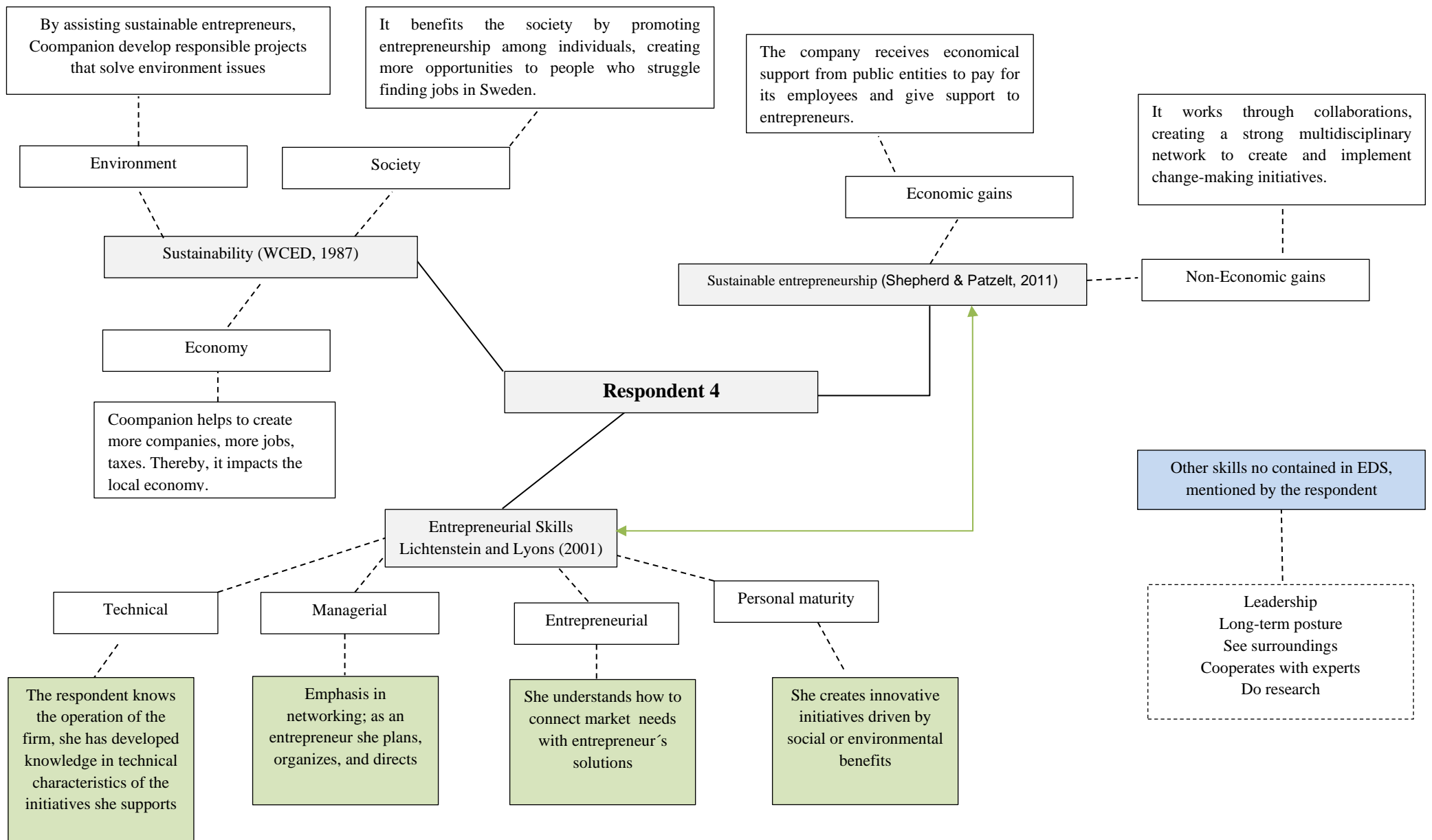


Figure 8: Analysis chart for case 4: Lina Boghard, Coompanion

Case 5: B-Light Organic AB

It is evident that B-light fulfills the requirement of a sustainable company since it works with certified organic products to manufacture garments (environment pillar), the company's suppliers have social programs that include fair work conditions and local production (social pillar) and lastly it has partnerships with resellers and is registered in the Swedish market and legally established, which generate taxes and contributes to the economic dynamism of the region (economic pillar). Furthermore, the company's economic gains are the entry to new markets thanks to its sustainable orientation and to the CEO's determination of working exclusively with certified producers, while its non-economic gains are the Co2 reduction, recognition among users as a eco-friendly brand, and opportunities to partner with other sustainable entities or stakeholders.

In regard to the technical skills, it can be seen that the CEO has given great importance to the development of his technical abilities, this can be concluded from his following explanation: *"I have learnt how to build my own webshop, to the point that I have developed several webshops not only for my company but also for other people's ventures"*. Likewise, he mentioned that he learnt everything by a constant process of doing, testing, and improving, which can be connected with both the definition of the actual technical skill of the EDS (previously provided) and also with the Kutzhanova et al., (2009) argument of the gradual skills improvement by continuously applied them in real-life actions.

Furthermore, the respondent manifested that he has developed planning skills; recognize the importance of accounting, finances, and networking. He said: *"I have to learn everything from scratch, before opening my business I did not know anything of this, but now I know that I have to be organize and plan"*. Likewise, the marketing and sales skills can be identified and extracted from the interview since he mentioned that: *"I know how to identify customers and the right distribution strategy"* which can also be connected with the entrepreneurial skills dimension as the ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001). The personal maturity dimension was also mentioned by the entrepreneur when he said that he has had to cope with the frustration that might arise when trading with international suppliers, in his worlds he said: *"I have learned to be patient, especially with my partners in India"* See figure 7.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Learning-by-doing: He has launched his products and his webshop after several trials and learnings along the way, this skill has been found crucial.
- Altruism: Give-up income for sustainable contribution
- Passion for work: He found a purpose and works to pursue passionately.
- Patience: He said: *"trust the process, and be patient"*.

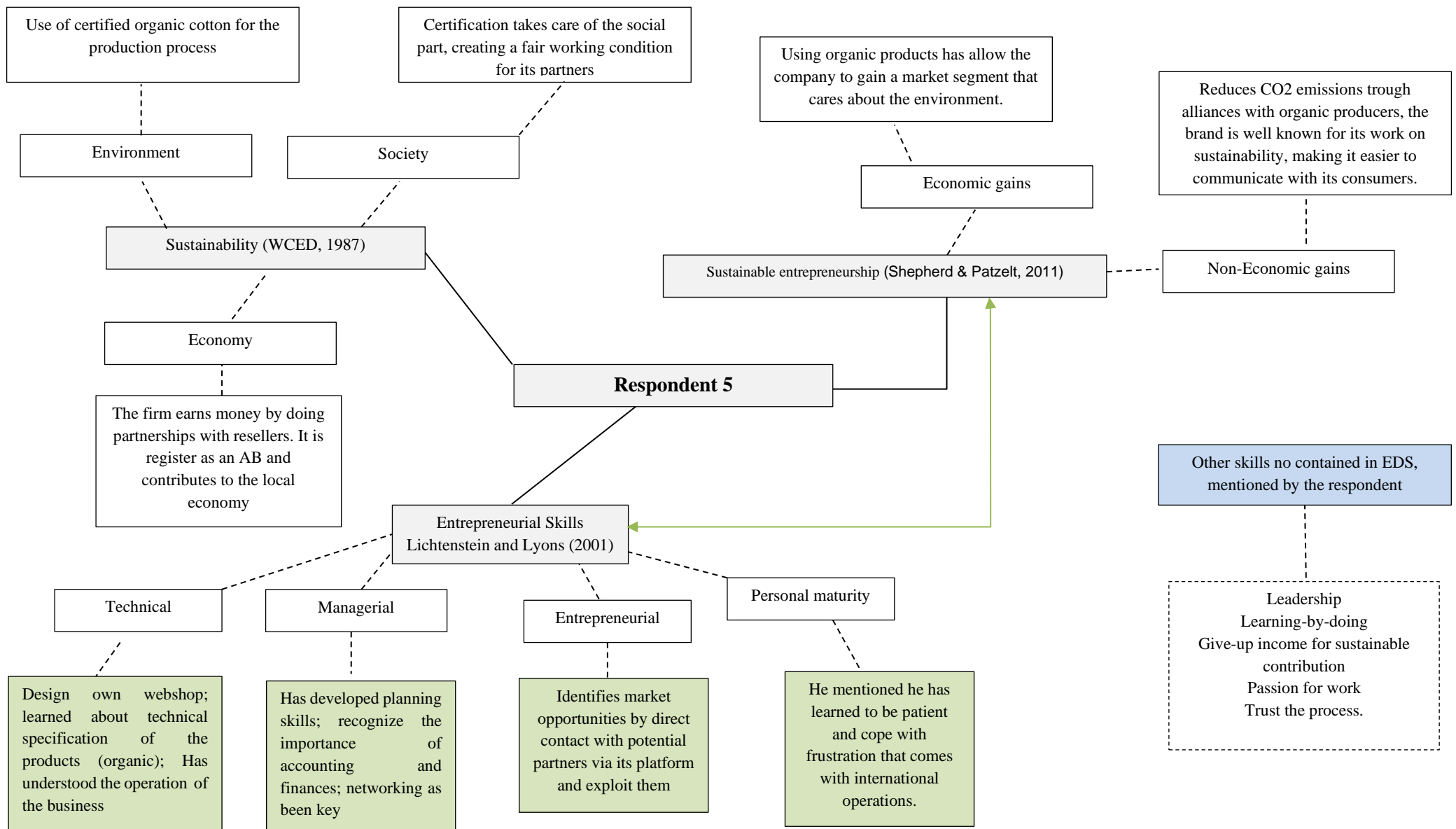


Figure 9: Analysis chart for case 5: Jonas Larsson, B-Light Organic

Case 6: OmiOpi AB

It is observable from the interview and from the information collected about the company that it does comply with the definition of a sustainable company since it works around the three pillar as follows: the firm produces organic drinks without the use of animal product (environment pillar); it makes alliances with organic producers under fair work conditions (social pillar); and lastly, it contributes to the local economy by reporting taxes and collaborating with other entrepreneurs (social pillar). Under this context, the company gets both economic and non-economic gains. On the one hand thanks to the organic production, the company has the opportunity to access a market segment that is willing to pay a higher price for it; while on the other, the sustainable approach allows the firm to be part of a strong network of sustainable entrepreneurs who the CEO can collaborate with through strategic alliances that contribute to the firm's growth.

In terms of the technical skills it is evident that the CEO developed this dimension as he mentioned: *"I learn the specific characteristic of my product, and what ingredients we should use to make it organically"* which is aligned with the operational dimension within the EDS framework that is explained by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) as the skills necessary to produce the product and service. Another aspect worth to mention is the ability to learn and resolve problems which can be found on the High-order sub-section of the managerial skill dimension within the EDS framework this could be extracted by the respondent explanation as: *"being an entrepreneur is a learning process on how to solve daily problems"*. Likewise, this ability also includes the learning process from a managerial perspective, which contains planning, organizing, supervising, directing, networking. Under those abilities the entrepreneur explain that he has enveloped them since he has had to formalize and standardize certain processes from the early stages. Therefore, this skill set (managerial) has been found fundamental.

Moving to the entrepreneurial skill dimension, the CEO argued that he found the need for vegan products and he exploited it. Regarding this, he said: *"I listened to my customers and identified that they wanted not only natural products but also products that do not include any animal components on it, and we start to produce everything based on that"*. Which is aligned with the definition previously included regarding entrepreneurial skill dimension in the EDS framework. (Ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities) (Lichtenstein and Lyons, 2001). The last dimension that could be extracted from the interview was the personal maturity in which he mentioned that he has experimented *"ups and downs"* during the entrepreneurial journey and he has learnt how to cope with it.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Learning-by-doing: The respondent mentioned that he do the things first and then he learns how to make it better along the way. He also said that he spend more time in doing and testing what he wants to develop than thinking or planning around it.
- Takes action/determination: He said that one advice he would give to other sustainable entrepreneurs goes as follow: *“Just do it, be determined and don’t wait until the perfect moment if you want to contribute to a sustainable development”*.
- Cooperation with experts: Several times the interviewee remarked the importance to receive consultancy or advice from people who have knowledge and experience in the field. He said: *“It is important to work with experts and keep them really close, so you can ask them for advice every time you need it, so you can learn and improve your product”*
- Do research: The entrepreneur spends several hours a week investigating both about the product, the markets, and new solutions he might offer.
- Simplify: For the respondent make the things simple to compensate the, as he recognizes, overcomplicated entrepreneurial process.

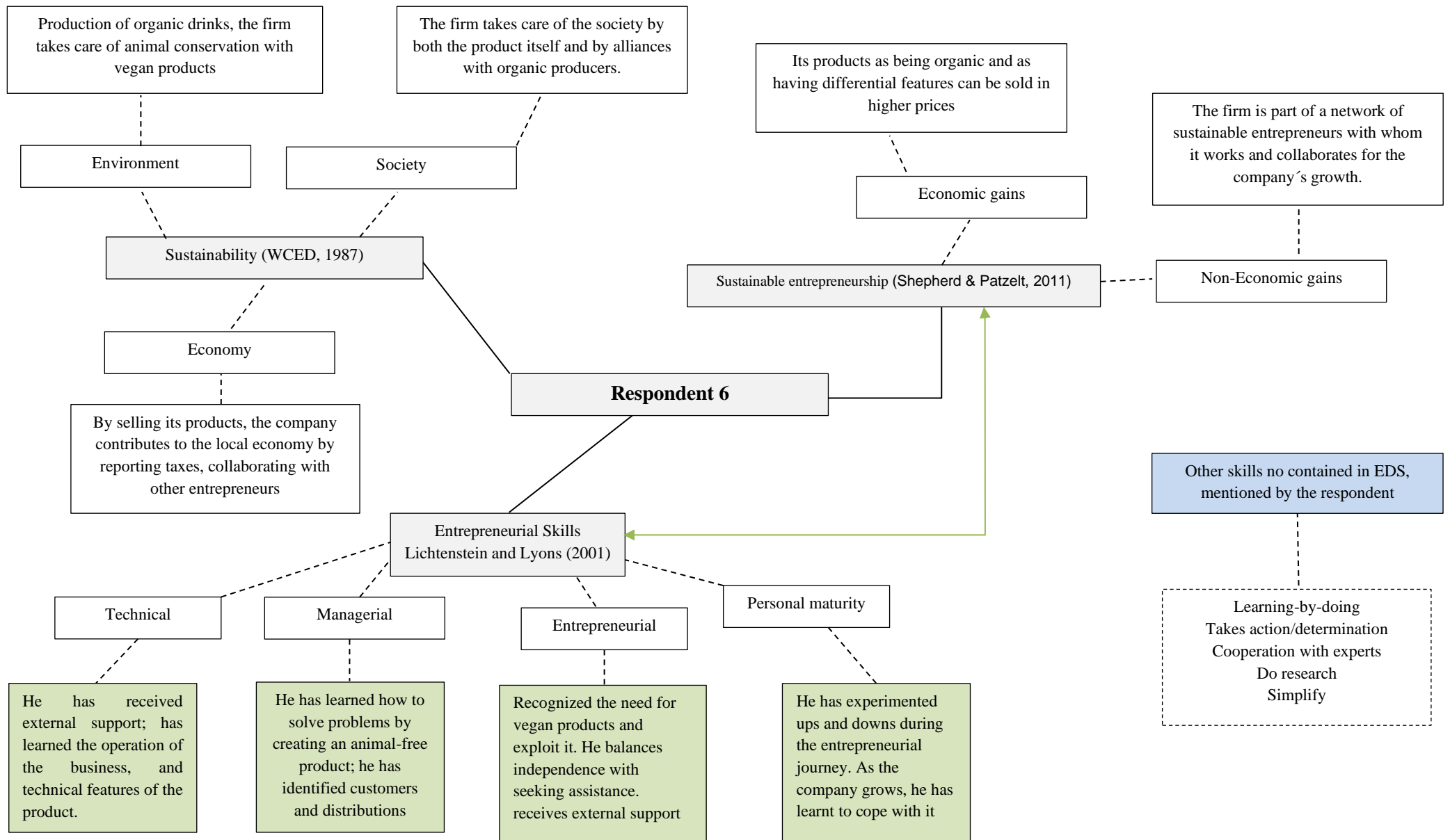


Figure 10: Analysis chart for case 6: Alexander Neumann, OmiOpi AB

Case 7: Dooek

Dooek has also a balance between social, environment and economy in the sense that the company produces eco-friendly food wraps, replacing the use of plastic, the products are organic and biodegradable which can be associated with the environmental pillar; while it brings awareness on sustainability among the society and partners with more sustainable entrepreneurs (social pillar); and lastly contributes to the local economy by acquiring the materials from nearby markets, is registered as AB in Sweden (economy pillar).

Thanks to its sustainable approach among the company's economic gains (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011) is that it has the opportunity to increase the B2B market due to the high demand of organic and sustainable products, as well as the regulations that provide a favorable context for those kinds of products. While the non-economic gains obtained by such approach are the collaboration and partnership with companies, suppliers, and experts with the same values, creating a network of leaders and entrepreneurs who want to create change.

Referring to the technical aspect, it is evident that the interviewee has earn and developed technical skills particularly for the products they make, in this sense the CEO said: *"I used to make everything from scratch when I first started the company, I used to make all the products by myself, so know exactly what materials and components my products need"*. However, for the technological aspect of the firm (website, and other digital platforms) she preferred to receive external support. Therefore, the technical skills can be considered relevant for the operation of the firm. Particularly in the operational and suppliers/raw materials aspects.

Regarding the managerial skill dimension, the CEO said: *"When I started, I had a B2C model, but I identified the opportunity to go for a B2B operation since I found that I could have a greater impact"*. Therefore, it can be said that the marketing and sales skill under the managerial skillset dimension has been determinant for the success of the company. Likewise, the entrepreneurial skill dimension can be identified when the respondent recognized a market need of replacing the use of plastic a create a solution for it. Lastly, she referred to her entrepreneurial experience as a "roller-coaster" and that she has had to cope with all the emotions that arises when running the business.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- Learning-by-doing: The entrepreneur has a practical approach; it is evident that she implements actions and learn along the way. According to her: *"I learned how to make my product by actually doing it by myself and with my own hands, and then improve it based on the people's insights"*
- Taking action/determination: According to the CEO, it is fundamental for every entrepreneur to have that attitude to propose initiatives and implement plans. The

interviewee manifested that one should be convinced and believe in your product or service and take actions to make it happen.

- Learn from experts: The respondent is constantly listening to experience and knowledgeable people in the industry, getting insights and lessons to be applied in her own venture.
- Being flexible: this skill can be extracted by the willingness of the interviewee to adapt her product and her distribution channels (from B2C to B2B) according to the customers needs.
- Do Research: Look for new solutions and improvements for the venture. The entrepreneur is permanently investigating both the market, and the innovations that can be added to her products.
- Simplify: The interviewee said that she breaks down the big plans in small tasks so the entrepreneurial actions are not that “overwhelming”. See figure 10

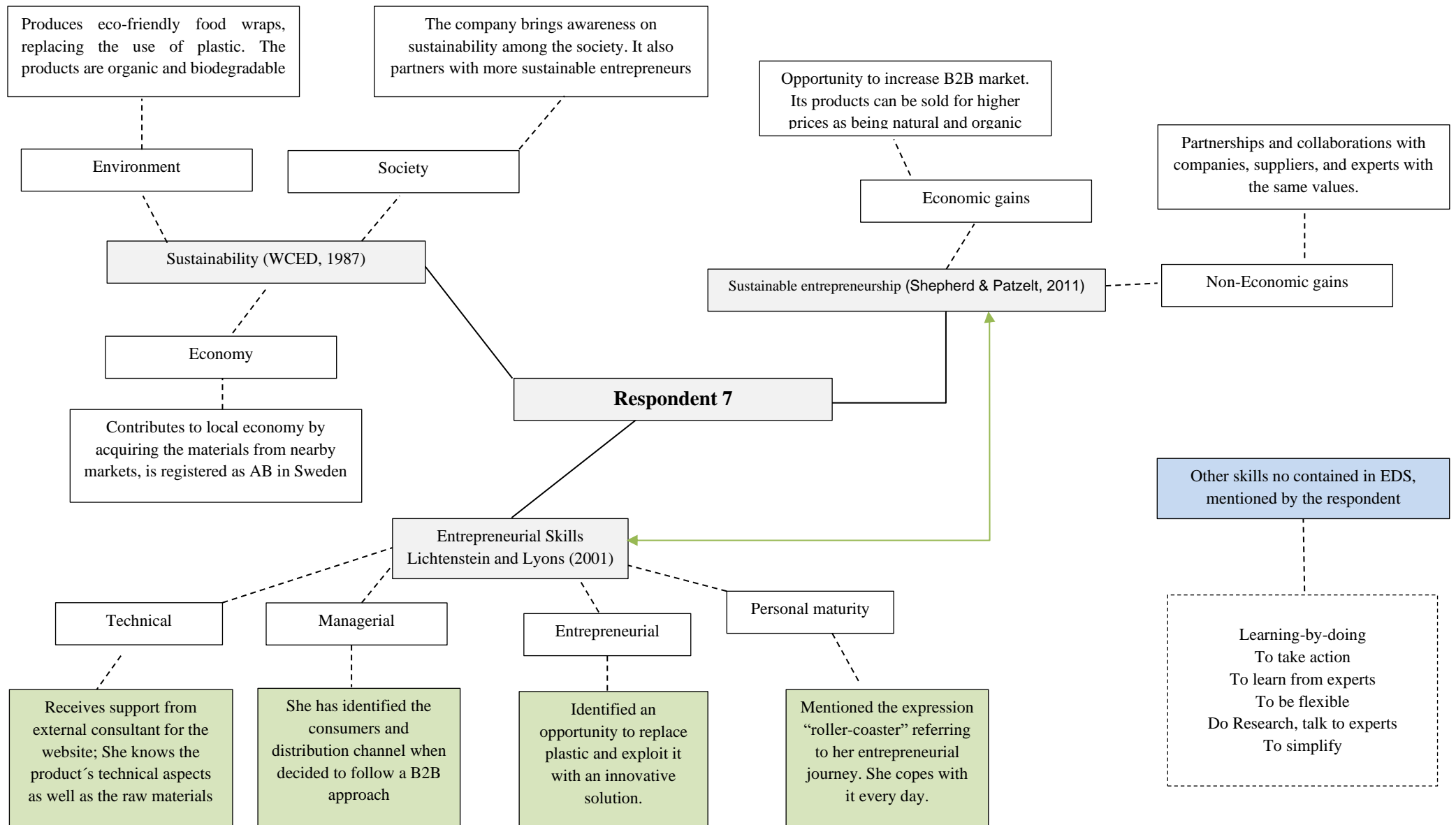


Figure 11: Analysis chart for case 7: Hendrik Hessle, Dooek

Case 8: Great Earth

The last company that was interviewed was Great Earth, the venture is the oldest among the other eight companies selected for the present study with over 30 years working on sustainable solutions. They have been balancing the three pillars for the last decades since it manufactures organic and natural nutritional supplements with state-of-art technology (environment pillar); the company considers sustainability as a social mission and can only be achieved by working together (social pillar) which is aligned with Lans, et al., (2014) who mentioned that accomplishing economic, social and environmental goals is a shared challenge rather than a singular posture. Moreover, due to the company's experience in the market, it has created jobs, taxes, long-term relationships that contributes to the local economy (economic pillar).

Regarding the technical skills, the interviewee mentioned several times that they have received external consultancy for the technological aspect of the firm, particularly for the website and other digital platforms or social media sites. While they have a technical product expert inhouse that is in charge of the product development. Therefore, the firm is considered to have a robust technical approach. It can be evidenced by the new webshop it has been developed to connect the company with their direct users and combined with the previous intermediary business model but also with the production of new supplements with new components included based on the information collected on the direct interaction with the final user. Consequently, the firms approach can be connected to the theory in the sense that Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) defined the technical skills as the ability to perform the key operation of the business including the product itself, the suppliers and raw materials, the equipment, plan and technology.

On the other hand, it was evident that the managerial dimension is undoubtedly the most important set of skills for the interviewee thanks to her managerial background in which she has developed abilities such as planning, organizing, directing, networking, and supervise. Such managerial perspective could be evidenced when the respondent said: *"it (management) is key, it is what you really need to run a company, perhaps it is because of my background in business processes. I know that I need to run the business from a managerial perspective, those kinds of skills that you certainty need to develop"*

Moving to the entrepreneurial skills dimension, it can be evidenced that the company has imprinted the entrepreneurial spirit within the core values of the firm, even though the company is a 30 years firm, it still has that flexible and flat sprit in which every person can add value, propose solutions or improvements to have greater positive impact in society, and try new things. This assumption can be concluded from the following argument given by the respondent: *"The entrepreneurial skills are on our DNA, we have to support our staff, that's what make us successful. We strongly believe in what we are doing, and we just do it, we just try. Maybe we fail but we learn something out of it"*. Likewise, the CEO identified the need to connect with their direct users and made a solution to that need, which is aligned with the entrepreneurial skill definition under the EDS framework previously explained as the ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities.

Furthermore, it is remarkable how the company copes with the personal maturity dimension. It is evident that these skills are also predominant in the firm since the CEO mentioned their permanent pursuit of creating a “safe place to work” in which the staff can feel comfortable to cope with difficulties and so the employees and the CEO itself can give that “extra mile” in crucial moments the company might face. This is evident when the respondent said: *“When the COVID-19 pandemic started we had a plan in which prepare ourselves for the different scenarios we might face, we did it so the people could feel safer and we communicate the plan to all the team, so we could empower them”*. Therefore, it can be said that the entrepreneur also gives great importance to cope with the emotional aspect and considers it crucial for the development of new products and strategies.

Finally, the entrepreneur provided the following skills that are not present in the ESD framework and that are considered relevant for the venture since she mentioned them several times during the session:

- To be flexible: Regarding this skill the respondent mentioned several times arguments like the following: *“One of the good things of being a small company is that you can change and being flexible. Sometimes things are costly to try out and sometimes it is not that hard. Now that everything is digital, it's very easy to try, if it works it works if not you learn and move on”*.
- Leadership: The respondent demonstrated a great ability to direct and lead the staff in difficult times and cope with them by convincing and creating proper conditions together with a clear plan to follow so the staff could feel empowered, included and part of the solution.
- Learning-by-going: This skill goes back and can be also found in the previous statement on the flexibility skill in which the respondent said that even when things might not work one can still learn from them. Therefore, it demonstrates a learning-by-doing posture.
- Adaptation: This is similar to the “being flexible” skill, however, in this case the adaptation refers to the ability to see the context and adapt accordingly, this could be seen when the respondent created different solutions to several potential scenarios that could have arisen during the COVID 19 pandemic situation. Such adaptation was crucial to face with such harsh context.
- Cores values: The ability to create a set of values that are imprinted in the company’s DNA and that goes to every decision the company has.
- Determination: To better explain this skill found during the interview the CEO manifested she have a” Just do it” way of thinking, that can also be connected with the learning-by-doing setting.

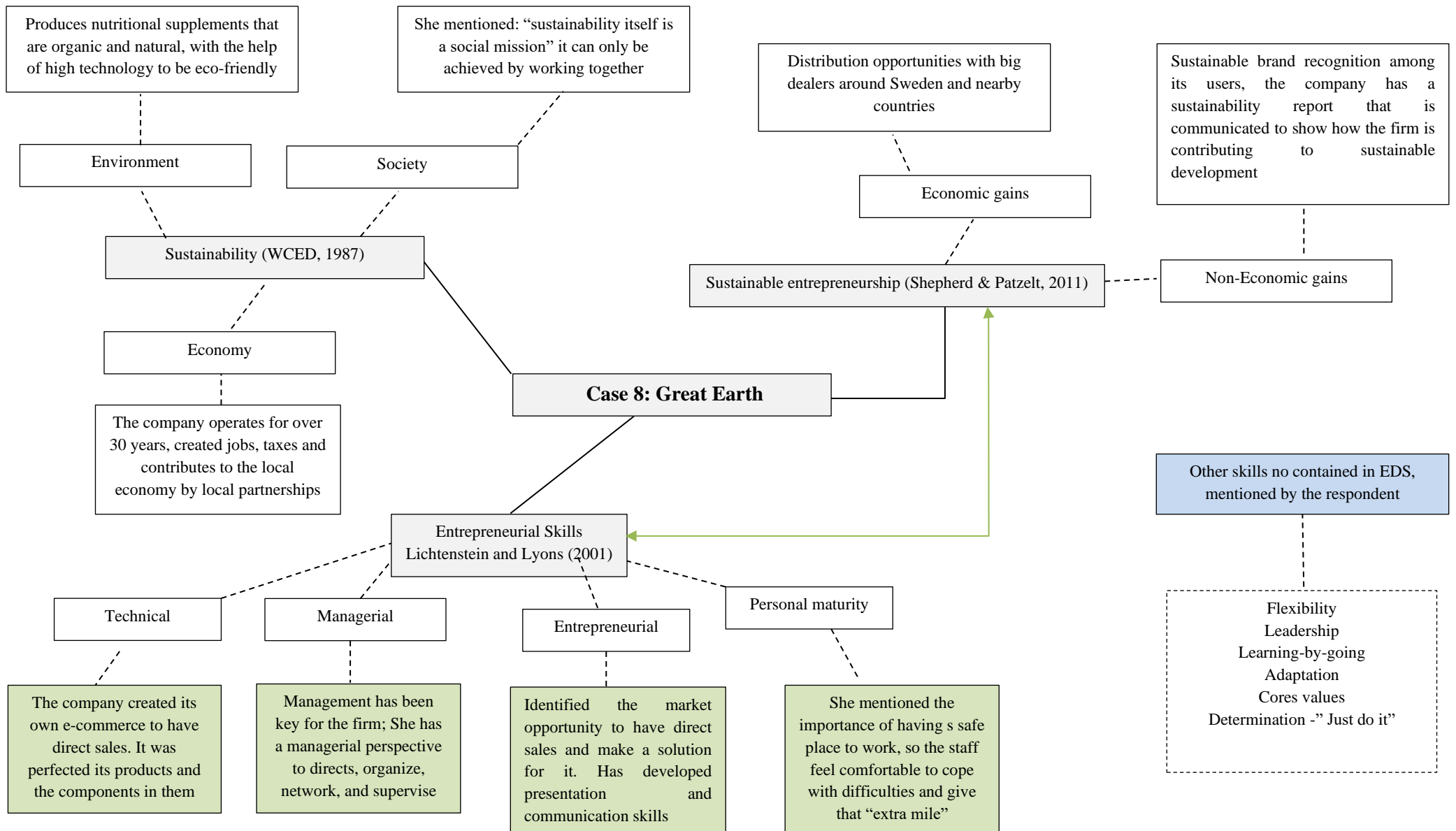


Figure 12: Analysis chart for case 8: Great Earth

5.2 Cross case analysis

Similarities

When analyzing each respondent answers individually it could be interpreted that there are several similarities when it comes to entrepreneurial skills within sustainable entrepreneurship. For example, it can be seen that the majority of the that the respondents find of importance are matching with the ones presented by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001). Hence, the following analysis will explain the similarities that were found for every dimension within the EDS and will be presented and summarized on table 6.

Similarities in Technical skills dimension

The individual interviews showed that 8 out of 8 respondents have found the operational skill set relevant and influential within the operation of the businesses as well as it being developed by the entrepreneurs during the different stages of the firms. This is evident since every responded showed a great importance of growing those necessary skills to produce to product or service Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001). While the Equipment, plant, and technology sub-section within the technical dimension was the second most similar among the respondents with a coincidence of 7 out of 8 entrepreneurs who highlighted the use and development of such skill. Another similarity within the technical skills is that none of the respondents mentioned something related to the “office or production space” skills, therefore it can be concluded that the skill was not necessary for any of the entrepreneurs to flourish a sustainable entrepreneurship venture and is also considered a similarity since it was not relevant during the interview for any of the participants.

Similarities in managerial skills dimension

The managerial dimension encompasses six set of skills. Three of those were considered most relevant among the entrepreneurs; marketing/sales and high-order with 8 out of 8 respondents who have used and developed the skill, while administrative skills were highlighted by 7 of the sustainable entrepreneurs, the respondent number 7 was the only one who did not find the skill fundamental for the development of the sustainable venture. The legal aspect is also worth mentioning within the similarities since the respondent 2 was the only one who considered the skill relevant for her venture.

Similarities in entrepreneurial skills dimension

Among the participants the entrepreneurial skill dimension of the EDS framework was generally accepted by the entrepreneurs since 2 out of 3 skills set were found relevant for 8 and 7 of the respondents (environmental scanning and business concept respectively) while the third skill set (business concept) was mentioned by 6 of the participants. Hence, there is a high coincidence of such dimension among the entrepreneurs. This could be a logical result since the dimension include skills such us business plan, presentation skills, market gap recognition,

independence, seeking assistance. Thanks to the nature of the companies that were interviewed it can be considered that the entrepreneurial spirit and the different skills contained in it play a relevant role for the majority of the sustainable enterprises.

Similarities in personal maturity skills dimension

Personal maturity skills include self-awareness, accountability, emotional coping, and creativity, it can be seen that the most relevant dimension for the interviewees was creativity with 8 out of 8 respondents who repeatedly mentioned characteristics that can be matched with the creativity aspect. All the entrepreneurs showed a great ability of generating creative solutions to the problems or needs they want to address. Therefore, creativity can be considered as a must-have and must-develop skill among sustainable entrepreneurs. On the other hand, emotional coping was also an important skill with 6 similarities and only respondents 1 and 7 did not consider the emotional aspect crucial for their ventures. However, overall, the dimension shows a high coincidence and is well accepted among the participants. This can be explained due to sustainable entrepreneurs aim to balance both the operation of the business with the creation of core values that are imprinted in every decision and process.

Differences

When it comes to the differences, there were a few traditional skills that did not match with the respondents. In this case, it was the financial set of skills, and the legal set of skills. The lack of importance regarding the financial set of skills could possibly be explained by the fact that most of the companies, where the respondents operate, were small businesses in terms of number of employees, since size and turnover were not included or taken into account in this study. Likewise, However, it is of great importance to highlight that these are only the researchers' own speculations, as this cannot be explained with the help of selected theories. Even though, the skill framework was generally accepted among the respondents there are still some differences that are worth mentioning.

Differences in technical skills dimension

The most different aspect within the technical dimension was how the respondents deal with suppliers and raw materials in which the respondents 1, 3, and 5 did not refer to this aspect and did not consider this ability relevant, while the other participants found this skill useful and worth to be employed and developed. This could be explained partially because respondents 3 and 5 are digital business and have little use of materials and therefore little relationship with suppliers, and respondent 5 has a long-term agreement with specific suppliers in India and Turkey so he has had to deal with the same partners for a long time, hence it can explain that the respondent did not mention the skill set.

Differences in managerial skills dimension

As mentioned before, within the managerial dimension the most diverse skill set was the financial one in which only three respondents considered the implementation and development

of financial abilities. This can be explained since respondents 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 said during the interviews that the use to acquire this from external consultants, therefore they do not consider the development of the skill as its fullest. Instead, they prefer to hire someone else and develop the basics understanding of it. On the other hand, another similarity goes to the legal skills, the only respondent who gave a great importance to it was the number 2. This could be argued from the nature of the product the entrepreneur produces (menstrual cups) and the argument she said regarding her desire to find regulation to the product. Therefore, she has developed such legal aspect that allows her to find the proper rules for the product in the European Union.

Differences in entrepreneurial skill dimension

As argued before, the entrepreneurial aspect was found generally embraced by the respondents. However, it can be found some differences in the balance of independence with seeking assistance in which half of the respondents uses and develops the dimension while the other half does not. Likewise, the business plan and presentation skills were not found important by two of the entrepreneurs (4 and 5). On the other hand, respondents 2, 7, and 8 found relevance in the three skills set within the entrepreneurial dimension. While respondent 5 was the only one who found only one skill relevant (environment scanning).

Differences in personal maturity skill dimension

The personal maturity skill dimension shows differences in the sense that only three of the respondents (2, 4, and 5) mentioned the whole skill set during the interviews while respondent 6 was the only one who has only one skill (creativity) as a relevant to run the sustainable business. The few differences among participants in this dimension could be explain from the nature of the ventures, in which several challenges arise and need to be addresses from different perspectives. Finally, as mentioned before all of the respondents have a creativity mind set and difference in that aspect was not found.

New skills

The responses and analysis showed that several new skills could be identified during the analysis of the collected data (see Table 6.). This is, according to the authors skills that the majority agreed on and with the help of the analysis, skills that did not match with the established literature. The skills are the following; determination, research, experiment/learning-by-doing, and flexibility.

As mentioned above, the skills are agreed on with the majority of the respondents (five out of eight) and therefore identified as new skills in this study. Regarding determination, the respondents argue that it is of importance to make decisions and take action without thinking about it too much. In this case, it is also about mindset. This, since five of the respondents highlighted that it is was of great importance to make up your mind and pull it through, instead of t. Secondly, research, is a skill which includes being more careful and think a step ahead. Experiment/learning-by-doing consists of exactly what it says, to learn from your actions and

possible mistakes. Flexibility is about adapting to changes that continuously happen to or within the world the respondents operate in.

In some way, a connection between the four new identified skills can be made, but in some way, they also go against each other. Determination is about decision making and take action without thinking and research includes the ability to not go ahead of yourself and think it through before acting. Likewise, experimenting means to do both of the previous mentioned skills and learning by doing is in some way a combination of both being taking action, do research and being flexible.

Leadership, to simplify and to cooperate with experts are skills beyond the above mentioned, which could be pointed out during the analysis. These are not shown in Table 6., since each, only three out of eight respondent found of significant. Still, they are worth mentioning and to be pointed out.

Dimensions	Description	Skill Set	Definition	Respondents.							
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Technical skills	Ability to perform the key operations of that business	Operational	The skills necessary to produce the product or service	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Suppliers/ raw materials	The skills to obtain them, as necessary		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
		Office or production space	The skills to match needs and availability								
		Equipment/ plant/ technology	The skills to identify and obtain them	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Managerial skills	Ability to organize and efficiently manage the operations	Management	Planning, organizing, supervising, directing, networking	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
		Marketing/ sales	Identifying customers, distribution channels, supply chain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Financial	Managing financial resources, accounting, budgeting				✓	✓			✓
		Legal	Organization form, risk management, privacy, and security		✓						
		Administrative	People relations, advisory board relations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		High-Order	Learning, problem-solving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Entrepreneurial skills	Ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities	Business Concept	Business plan, presentation skills	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
		Environmental Scanning	Recognize market gap, exploit market opportunity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Advisory board and networking	Balance independence with seeking assistance		✓		✓			✓	✓

Personal maturity skills	Self-awareness, willingness, and ability to accept responsibility, emotional development, and creative ability	Self-awareness	Ability to reflect and be introspective		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
		Accountability	Ability to take responsibility for resolving a problem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		Emotional coping	Emotional ability to cope with a problem		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		Creativity	Ability to produce a creative solution to a problem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
New skills identified from the interviews				Respondents							
Tailored sustainable entrepreneurship skills		Skill		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Determination		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
		Research		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
		Experiment Learning by doing		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
		Flexibility		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓

Table 6. Cross case analysis

5.4 Proposed framework

The study aims to explore which previously developed traditional entrepreneurial skills is connected with the recently established entrepreneurial activity, called sustainable entrepreneurship as well as to help sustainable entrepreneurs to build the necessary skills that increase the development of projects aiming to balance social, environmental, and economical problems.

The empirical collected data together with the analysis has made it possible to develop a model (see Figure 12.) which shows a proposal on how the traditional and the new identified skills could interact with each other. It visualizes which and how previous entrepreneurial skills are connected with the entrepreneurial skills within sustainable entrepreneurship. As presented in Figure 12., the study presents that determination, research, experiment/learning by doing, and flexibility should be included into the entrepreneurial skills within sustainable entrepreneurship.

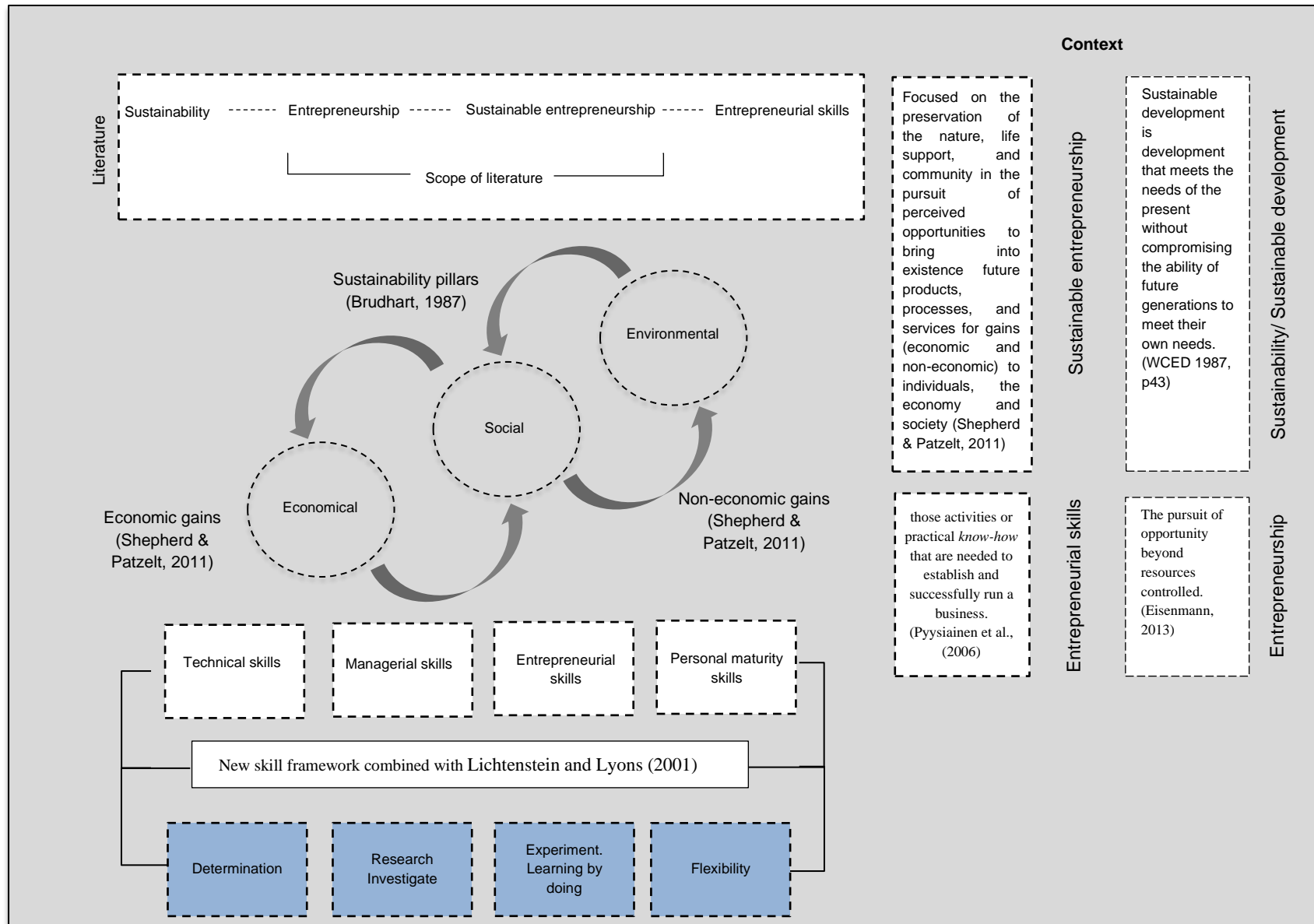


Figure 13: Proposed framework

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to explore a new approach concerning an unexplored connection between sustainable entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills. Meaning how previously developed traditional entrepreneurial skills is connected with the recently established entrepreneurial activity, called sustainable entrepreneurship as well as to help sustainable entrepreneurs to build the necessary skills that increase the development of projects aiming to balance social, environmental, and economical problems. Therefore, the research question to answer in this study is *“Which entrepreneurial skills (or set of skills) must be acquired and nurtured by entrepreneurs to successfully flourish a sustainable business?”*

With this in mind, based on the chosen theories and the empirical collected data, following conclusions have been made. The connection between entrepreneurial skills and sustainable entrepreneurship can clearly be distinguished. On the other hand, one can draw the conclusion that there are other skills that do not fit the traditional entrepreneurial skills presented by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001) and that a fifth category could be imprinted into the entrepreneurial skills necessary to flourish a successful business. Therefore, the following entrepreneurial skills; determination, research, experiment/learning-by-doing, and flexibility should be included into the entrepreneurial skills within sustainable entrepreneurship.

It is the combination of the traditional entrepreneurial skills presented by Lichtenstein and Lyon (2001) and the ones the respondents find important, that make the set of skills to be acquired by entrepreneurs complete.

7. Limitations

Firstly, the study is limited to exploring the connection between entrepreneurial skills and sustainable entrepreneurship presented on the skills by Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001). This is something that instead could be widened and explored beyond this study's scope. The research methodology itself can be seen as a limitation, since the researchers are the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data in a qualitative study. Secondly, only eight respondents were used for the primary data, which cannot imply the results of this research to the entire population. A quantitative study could solve this problem. Further, this study was limited to Sweden and therefore, the findings are isolated to one country only.

Factors such as financial aspects, size of company and industry were not in focus in this study, it is therefore acknowledged that these factors may have an impact in the scope of this study. Finally, the conclusions made it clear that this study cannot be generalized, as it based on only eight respondents and was limited to Sweden.

8. Future research

After the analysis it has appeared that a number of new skills emerged that were not included in the study's literature. These skills were not included in the interview guide and may therefore be of greater significance than what this study has been able to demonstrate. Therefore, it is suggested to further investigate the significance of those skills. Further, factors such as financial aspects, size of company and industry were not in focus and has therefore not been significant in the selection of respondents for this study. Another proposal for future research is to compare different industries and investigate what entrepreneurial skills are of importance in the context of sustainable entrepreneurship. This study is based on a qualitative method, a proposal for further research is to do a research with a quantitative approach in order to obtain more general results.

Another proposal for future research is to examine the proposed framework (see Figure 12.) to get a more specific model, tailored to the specific area in question or certain type of industry. This study consisted of eight interviews. Thus, further research would be to interview a larger number of respondents. It would also be interesting to perform a similar study in other countries in order to explore differences and/or similarities in the entrepreneurial skills in the context of sustainable entrepreneurship there. This study has pointed out skills that fit and identified those that are new and different. It is not shown to what extent they are entrepreneurial skills and thereby, how those new and different skills should be treated.

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Appendix 1 – Interview guide

Q1) Could you briefly explain what your company does and what your role is?

Q2) What does your company do to make (company) as sustainable as possible?

Q3) When you started your business/started working, what skills mattered in that process?

Q4) Have you developed any skills during your time at (company)?

Q5) What skills have mattered the most to make your business as sustainable as possible?

Q6) What has influenced your current skills?

- Under the following dimensions, what skills have been the most important for your sustainable business. Why have they been important?

1. Technical skills (Ability to perform the key operations of that business)

2. Managerial skills (Ability to organize and efficiently manage the operations)

3. Entrepreneurial skills (Ability to identify market opportunities and create solutions that capture those opportunities.)

4. Personal maturity skills (Self-awareness, willingness, and ability to accept responsibility, emotional development, and creative ability)



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