Embracing the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

the approach of corporations in the UN Global Compact

MASTER THESIS

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Preface

"The question is no longer if companies have a responsibility to society, but how best to execute it" (Cramer-Montes, 2017, p. 2).

During my years at Erasmus University, I learned a lot about what it means to be a business. I especially realised how big the impact of companies can be on their environmental and social surroundings, both positively and negatively. I was instantly intrigued about how to stimulate companies to focus on a positive contribution to its environment. When the SDGs were published, I was impressed by how well-known they instantly were and thus the impact they could potentially have. With this research I have learned more about dilemmas companies are faced with in their daily business conduct. Having good intentions to contribute to sustainability is not the answer just yet, as the practicalities of this are quite difficult. I hope to encourage companies to take the sustainable choice when faced with these dilemmas in the future.

Executive Summary

The role of companies with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is said to be rather large. Where the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused mostly on governments, the SDGs have been positioned in a way that they also need the capacity of businesses in achieving a sustainable world. The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) has taken it upon themselves to encourage companies to contribute to the SDGs, next to requiring from companies they work on their principles on human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption. Companies have been contributing to the SDGs often through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, which is a way for companies to ensure their behaviour as a company can be regarded as sustainable. In order for companies to truly embrace sustainability, they have to reach the proactive attitude towards the SDGs, as identified by van Tulder (2014). These range from inactive, reactive, active to proactive. The more active the company becomes, the more the business is working from a societal business case. The SDGs are a way for companies to activate themselves. Companies that communicate on sustainability are often attacked for window dressing, involving companies using terms as sustainability to create a better image of themselves. If companies would truly incorporate the SDGs within their businesses, they would be wise to reverse materiality, as identified by van Tulder and Lucht (2016), where the SDGs dictate where the companies' attention should go to and where the material impacts are. When companies work from the SDGs when creating the SDGs, they are able to walk the talk. Another way for companies to integrate sustainability, is to integrate societal and environmental costs in their business model. Finally, the SDGs could be the driver for companies to move away from the classic notion of CSR and move to creating shared value (CSV), where societal needs are put at the centre. By grasping the complexity of current sustainability challenges through for example the SDGs into business strategies, companies can truly contribute to creating a sustainable world.

To see whether these companies are embracing the SDGs in their strategies, a list of indicators was set up. These indicators check the way in which companies are embracing the SDGs. To identify different phases, the four different attitudes towards sustainability as identified by van Tulder (2014) were adapted towards the SDGs. The sample of the research was the companies in the Netherlands chapter of the UN Global Compact, Global Compact Network Netherlands (GCNL), consisting of 106 companies. The indicators checked what companies published on their contributions to the SDGs. From these indicators, the companies were each assigned an attitude towards the SDGs, ranging from inactive, reactive, active to proactive, with in between stage of inactive to reactive, reactive to active and active to proactive. It was found that a little more than half of the group was identified as inactive, and the other little less than half of the group was identified as at least inactive to reactive up to proactive. From this group, five companies were identified for a second part of the research: a cast study based on interviews. For this case study, both large and SME companies were identified, in different sectors. There were two companies identified as inactive, one of which inactive to reactive, and 3 companies were identified as active. These companies were further questioned on their contributions to the SDGs.

Overall, on the basis of the indicators it can be concluded that the majority of companies is not yet communicating on the SDGs, however this is in line with expectations on the basis of other studies on the implementation of the SDGs by companies in the Netherlands. However, on the basis of the interviews, it was found that all the companies had made contemplations on the implementations of

the SDGs that were not publicly communicated. An important factor that enables to embracement of the SDGs are the size of the company: the percentage of large companies in the more active attitudes towards the SDGs is larger than the percentage of SMEs. This is also confirmed during the interviews, where the SMEs expressed difficulty with the implementation due to capacity constraints. The sector seems to make a difference, but no real conclusion can be drawn from this as results were quite sparse. The choice for specific SDGs was in some cases in line with the areas on which the Netherlands is already doing rather well as identified by the CBS (2016). The interviewed companies also expressed the enabling role the Global Compact Network was for them, encouraging them to either start or continue working on implementation of the SDGs. Most companies identified internal drivers to work on a sustainable world, next to the advantage of having a common language with other parties on sustainability. At the moment, most companies are linking the SDGs to their CSR strategies, as was found through both the interviews and the indicators, but in the interviews it came forward that most aim to go that step further and ensure embracement in the core strategies. Finally, the question was raised whether the SDGs are the system-changing goals society needs, which relates to why some companies may not communicate on the SDGs.

The results of the desk research were in most cases similar to what was found by the indicators, however not all information that a company has on the subject is also published. Therefore, these indicators can only show a limited image of the companies' efforts towards the SDGs. It is difficult to assess whether the companies are window dressing or being transparent on the basis of the indicators. The interviewed companies mostly confirmed the image as was found by the indicators, or did even better. Thus, these companies can be seen as being transparent. Overall, it can be concluded that companies within the network are working on the SDGs and the GCNL network can be an enabler in encouraging companies to embrace the SDGs.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, business, corporate social responsibility, UN Global Compact, sustainability

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Abbreviations

COP	Communication on Progress
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSV	Creating Shared Value
DJSI	Dow Jones Sustainability Index
GCNL	Global Compact Network Netherlands
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SBM	Sustainable Business Model
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, a well-known advocate for companies' involvement in sustainable development, recently said the following in a speech on social purpose: "In Unilever we decided to decouple our growth from environmental impact, increase our overall social impact. Unlike CSR, which just focuses on page 2 of the annual report, things under your own control, a part of your business, usually run by someone close to retirement" (Arthur W. Page Society, 2016, sec. 3:17-3:36). This poses some questions about what Unilever regards as corporate social responsibility (CSR), and what they aim to do beyond this. What is clear is that Unilever does not stakeholders to see them as a company that does "just" CSR – it wants something more. Moreover, in another recent interview with Bloomberg Paul Polman said "my ultimate goal will be actually that every company will report its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); that will really be a purpose drive business, I think they will have a better chance to be successful, a better change to be accepted by the society, and actually become a positive force for change" (Bloomberg, 2017, sec. 11:30-11:47). This could be the new kind of CSR, that goes further and aims to do more. But why would companies report its contributions to the SDGs? What would this mean for businesses?

1.1 Sustainable development and corporations

Sustainability has become a buzzword, used by lots of actors in various ways. Sustainability, or even sustainable development is commonly defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 16). It encompasses social, environmental and economic themes and generally accepted by big companies, governments and civil society (Giddings, Hopwood, & O'Brien, 2002). Another important aspect to mention here is the notion of the triple bottom line, of indeed the social, environmental and economic impact of a business (Elkington, 1998).

Around the year 2000, the United Nations (UN) set out two new initiatives. The first is the UN Global Compact Network (UNGC), where organisations and businesses come together to work towards sustainable development on a global scale. UNGC was set up to put together CEO's commitment to achieve sustainable development, through the Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights (UNGP's) (UN Global Compact, 2017a; United Nations, 2011). Where Global Compact wants to bring together companies working towards sustainability, there were also the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They were adopted in September 2000 by the governments of 191 nations, committing themselves to a new global partnership, aiming to half extreme poverty and some other time-bound targets related to sustainable development, with 2015 being its deadline (United Nations, 2015; World Health Organization, 2017). Seeing as the MDGs were only partly successful, the SDGs were developed to continue working on sustainable development. Even though results were definitely made with the MDGs, there was a need for new time-bound targets, going that extra mile. The SDGs are also known as the Global Goals, which is a nod to the previous MDGs, aimed at only the underdeveloped parts of the world, whereas the SDGs are meant for both underdeveloped

and well-developed countries (United Nations, 2017a). The new SDGs' aims reach further than the MDGs did. The MDGs consisted of eight goals, with 21 targets and 60 indicators (World Bank, 2008), while the SDGs consist of 17 goals, with 169 targets and over 300 indicators (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). An example of this is that the MDGs aimed to half poverty, whereas the SDGs aim to completely end all forms of poverty, by the year 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, the SDGs are more elaborate than the MDGs were, including issues such as inequality, sustainable consumption and production patterns, etc. (United Nations, 2015). Next to that, the SDGs are a call for action to all countries, whether they be developed, poor, or middle-income: the SDGs are meant to be universal (United Nations, 2017a).

Large companies such as Unilever are gradually embracing sustainable development in their corporate strategies. For example, over 200 companies are now enrolled in the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 2017b). Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, also served on the UN's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (Unilever, 2017b). This panel consisted of representatives from government, civil society and business tasked with advising the UN Secretary-General on the future development agenda for when the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expired in 2015. Ultimately, on 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nation's General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2017a). On 1 January 2016, the 17 SDGs came in to force, mobilizing countries to "end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind" as part of the new 2030 development agenda (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Each goal has specific targets to be achieved by 2030, and by including education, health, poverty, climate change and the (gender) inequality on the list of 17 goals, the SDGs and its 169 targets focus on the largest challenges faced by the world.

Another important point is that not just governments are expected to act, as was mostly the case with the MDGs. The SDGs are also a call to action for companies all around the world. Corporate involvement in sustainable development can be recognized by companies' contribution to the SDGs. Corporate involvement in sustainable development is often addressed in corporate social responsibility strategies. Corporate social responsibility can be defined as "policies and practices of corporations that say business responsibility for some of the wider societal good" (Matten & Moon, 2008, p. 405). Actively working towards implementing the SDGs can be seen as corporations' practices to make due on their responsibility to offer for the good of society. This then, can be coined as contributing to sustainable development, through environment, social and economic themes. However, not all companies are already showing an active or proactive approach to sustainability; there are also companies that show an inactive or reactive attitude towards sustainability (van Tulder et al., 2014).

The role of companies and the private sector in realizing the SDGs has become more and more prominent in communication about the SDGs, as well. As said before, focus has gone from creating awareness to creating action for the realization of the SDGs. The way companies communicate about their corporate social responsibility strategies and policies influences the way stakeholders and others interested parties look at the company. By actively communicating on policies and strategies about a companies' corporate social responsibility, companies can create positive stakeholder relations, resulting in more positive advocacy and support behaviours, and build a corporate reputation (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). It gives stakeholders an idea of what kind of

activities the company is taking to give to the wider societal good. The SDGs could be a logical and accessible way of portraying what these activities are, and how the company is contributing to sustainable development.

Companies have shown an interest in knowing more about the SDGs and how to carry them out through networks such as the Global Compact Network Netherlands and the SDG Charter. 41% of businesses say they will indeed implement the SDGs into business strategies and overall business conduct within the next five years and 71% of businesses are already planning how to engage with the SDGs (PwC, 2015). This means businesses are already getting involved with the implementation of the SDGs and finding ways to contribute to the realization by 2030. Being a part of the Global Compact may perhaps be a facilitating factor for corporate implementation of the SDGs.

Getting back to Unilever's high ambitions for a companies' involvement and its social purpose. One way of describing the going beyond CSR is the concept of creating shared value (CSV), as coined by Porter and Kramer (2011). CSV suggests the transformation of social problems into business opportunities. CSV is meant to surpass CSR, and switch from shareholder value to societal investments. Where CSR is said to be mostly for reputation purposes and short-term oriented, CSV is meant to be an integral part to a company's profit and competitive advantage with a long-term orientation (Porter & Kramer, 2011). What is yet to be researched is the role of the SDGs in this transformation.

1.2 Linking the SDGs to corporate strategies

The literature about sustainable development and companies shows different ways where companies are contributing to sustainable development. Companies contribute to sustainability through for example their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies or communications. Companies can also link their CSR strategies to the SDGs, or, even more ambitious, their corporate strategic goals. Moreover, frontrunner companies aiming to go even beyond CSR could link the SDGs to corporate strategies to ease companies to potentially switch to CSV. The research aims to find what kind of issues companies may face when contributing to sustainability and how companies deal with this, including which factors are important for corporate embracement of the SDGs.

A company deciding to want to contribute to sustainable development is step one. Step two is finding ways to successfully implement this in corporate policies, such as corporate social responsibility policies. Understanding whether, how and why companies contribute to sustainable development is essential to enable corporate contributions to the realization of the SDGs to increase. For example, it is important that companies truly contribute to sustainable development, because of an active wish to contribute, and not use the term to "window dress" their contributions and only reactively work towards sustainability.

UN Global Compact (UNGC) has, next to focusing on the business principles of UNGC, also put an emphasis on contributing to realising the SDGs. Corporations involved in the network are active in pursuing sustainable development. Therefore, the research aims to find out whether being a part of the network is an enabling factor in implementing the SDGs into businesses. Moreover, the research wants to find out what this means for companies in the UNGC and whether they make the switch to becoming an active company more easily.

1.3 Research objective

With the information above in mind, this paper aims to identify why and how companies embrace the Sustainable Development Goals in their strategies, and what factors are important, possibly such as being a part of the UNGC. To sum up:

- Are companies in the UN Global Compact embracing the Sustainable Development Goals in their corporate (social responsibility) strategies?
    - Does being a part of the UN Global Compact network make a difference for the attitude towards sustainability and the SDGs?
    - Are the SDGs mostly linked to corporate social responsibility strategies or core strategies?
    - What are drivers to link corporate contributions to sustainability through the SDGs?
    - How advanced is the communication in contributions to the SDGs with companies within the network: is it window dressing or transparency?

1.4 Relevance

The Sustainable Development Goals are relatively new, as they have only been into force since the end of 2015 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). However, as shown in the examples above, the SDGs are very much active in the brains of organisations and businesses. This shows the (managerial) practical relevance of the research. By finding ways where companies can contribute to sustainable development, the research can find practical suggestions and implications for managers.

Moreover, since the SDGs have only been implemented for a short amount of time, relatively little research has been done on the SDGs by now. The academic relevance is thus the need for more research and practical suggestions for businesses and organisations, how to contribute to sustainable development and how to implement the SDGs in corporate policies. Moreover, it possibly could facilitate companies switching from CSR to CSV.

Furthermore, the multiple networks, commissions and charters formed by business leaders over the past year, show the need for companies to get clear ideas of how they can practically get involved in the realization of the SDGs. Therefore, if this research can draw some practical implications and suggestions for businesses in the Netherlands, this could ultimately help the further implementation and realization of the SDGs by 2030, explaining the societal relevance.

1.5 Structure of the paper

The paper starts with assessing what the role of corporations is within sustainability. Are companies mostly reacting to outside pressure to take up their responsibilities, or are they embracing sustainability in their corporate strategies and decision making? There are several factors that can be of influence on this, such as being a part of networks or adhering to certain guidelines or codes, or internal drivers for sustainability. To assess what the role of business within the UNGC is with the SDGs, two different data collection approaches are used and explained. Thereafter, the results of these data collection will be analysed and discussed, and conclusions will be drawn as to whether companies within the UNGC are indeed embracing the SDGs in their corporate strategies.

2. Literature Review

Sustainability, sustainable development, corporate social responsibility: these concepts are all used a lot, they are often used interchangeably, but what exactly do they mean? Companies are involved in sustainability for a while now; it is explored how and why companies are contributing to sustainability. Next to that, the UN established the MDGs around 2000, mostly meant for governmental actions, but also the UN Global Compact, meant to bring together businesses that embrace sustainability. And recently, companies have been given a larger role in sustainability through the SDGs. Companies involved in these initiatives are expected to have departed the inactive attitude towards sustainability.

Once companies have moved away from the inactive attitude, it is crucial not to get stuck in the reactive phase. What reasons companies have to contribute to the SDGs is of crucial importance: is it an intrinsic motivation, or due to external pressure, or is it just window dressing? Reasons for companies to communicate on their contributions to the SDGs can therefore also greatly differ. Moreover, being a part of the Global Compact network could be a factor in deciding the corporate attitude to the SDGs. Finally, there are those companies that are taking a proactive approach, and use the SDGs to create corporate strategies. The possible implementation of the SDGs within the core business strategies is explored, through for example the concept of Creating Shared Value. These companies create a value proposition that is based on the SDGs, by reversing materiality of the SDGs. In short, this chapter will walk through the way in which companies are and ought to be embracing the SDGs in their strategies, and what factors influence this.

2.1 Sustainability and corporations 101: the basics

2.1.1 Sustainable development and sustainability

Both the MDGs and the SDGs have the word "development" in them. But what defines development? And what defines sustainability? Sustainable development is commonly defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 16). Some of the drivers of growth in the past are no longer sustainable, for example fossil fuels and growing urbanisation (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017), meaning to offer a decent world for future generations drivers of growth have to change. In other words, the current economic model challenges the long-term stability and growth, and the SDGs can be the new framework to reserve the trend (WBCSD, 2017a). Taken together, sustainable development ensures a non-declining human well-being for a longer time (Atkinson, Hett, & Newcombe, 2000). Sustainability is often described not just in the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental, but in some cases the institutional dimensions is also added (Valentin & Spangenberg, 2000). This institutional dimension defines the political science, mechanisms and orientations, or the rules by which human interaction is guided. This dimension is not to be confused with the social dimension, which is the sum of human capital.

This poses the question whether and in what way it differs from sustainability. Sustainability has become a so-called buzzword with fuzzy logic, mostly because is it both difficult to define and measure (Phillis & Andriantiatsaholiniaina, 2001). Sustainability and sustainable development are

often used interchangeably in theories, because the two concepts seemed to have overflowed into another. The origin of the word sustainability is in ecology, where it is defined as "the ability of the whole or parts of a biotic community to extend its form into the future" (Ariansen, 1999). However, sustainable development, shifts focus to society as a broader whole (Baker, 2005). Worldwide media coverage shows that 'sustainability' is more used than 'sustainable development', possibly indicating that not only the two terms are used interchangeably, but perhaps also a shift to the more generic terminology of sustainability (Barkemeyer, Holt, Preuss, & Tsang, 2011). This interchangeability is a critique-point on sustainability, as it creates obscurity.

Development can mean different things to different entities and different entities may emphasize different parts of development (Waage et al., 2010). Sustainable development entails several themes such as, but not only economic growth. Other themes under development are modernisation, structural change and inequality alleviation (Waage et al., 2010). The distinction between focusing on the so-called ends and means, meaning the difference between focusing more on wellbeing, freedom, expanded choices versus focusing on wealth and economic growth, shows that different institutions or organizations emphasize different parts (Anand & Sen, 2000).

2.1.2 Similar but not the same: corporate social responsibility and sustainability

The SDGs form a way for companies to make due on their corporate responsibility to contribute to sustainable development. Corporate social responsibility (CSR), as defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life (WBCSD, 2000). Sustainable development is then an improved, sustained quality of life. There are however very different views on what social responsibility exactly entails (Kolk, 2016). CSR can be seen as business doing more than what it is obligated to do, or going beyond compliance (Kolk, 2016; Kolk & van Tulder, 2010; KrSharma & Tomar, 2013).

Both the concepts CSR and sustainability have been defined to tackle issues in society, with the role of businesses explained. However, their theoretical origin in research differs (Bansal & Song, 2016). Where the research on CSR in its origin takes a more normative position focusing on the unethical practices of businesses, sustainability or sustainable development has its research origin in a more systems perspective focusing on the business-driven failure in systems (Bansal & Song, 2016). The risk here is that business act responsibly or support sustainable development only when the business case calls for it and it benefits the business' interests. Kolk and Van Tulder (2010) conclude similarly that CSR means going beyond compliance, focusing on economic profitability while also contributing to social issues, however not involving systematic change. Sustainable development is focusing on economic growth that is also socially and environmentally sustainable.

CSR is also seen as an integral part of sustainable development, as corporate responsibility can be seen as a synonym for sustainable development (Bhagwat, 2011). Thus, corporate financial, corporate environmental and corporate social responsibility are elements within corporate responsibility. CSR is mostly built on the stakeholder approach and corporate engagement as a member of society. In other words, society and business are complimentary to contribute to sustainable development, again showing the integral connection between the two (KrSharma & Tomar, 2013). Businesses need to integrate the three objectives of sustainable development in their

strategies: economic, environmental and social. CSR has to become an integral part of their business in order to contribute to sustainable development. The link with the SDGs is relevant as well, as a possible means to make the positive impact an integral part of the company.

This research focuses on whether businesses are implementing the SDGs into their strategies, for example their CSR strategies. It aims to find the link between sustainable development and how companies are implementing this in their company, by for example linking the SDGs, which are for sustainable development, in their (CSR) strategies. The link between the two is not as clear as it is in the theories. The main reason for this is that organisations often do not realise this clear distinction (Bansal & Song, 2016). The research will therefore mostly focus on sustainability as such, because companies can link the SDGs to not only CSR strategies, but perhaps also core strategies. It is mostly their contribution to sustainability that is relevant here, whether that is through their CSR strategies or other another way.

2.1.3 Transition to a sustainable enterprise: what kind of companies are active in CSR

Van Tulder et al. (2014) identified four business cases for sustainability: inactive, reactive, active and proactive (figure 1). These attitudes are not fixed: it is possible for a company to be between two stages, as they are fluid. A companies' attitude towards sustainability, and thus also towards specific sustainability initiatives such as the SDGs, is dynamic and keeps on changing. The business cases are defined based on two concepts: the basic attitude of the company and the societal responsiveness of the company. The basis attitude of the company can be one more oriented to focus on liabilities or to focus on responsibilities. The societal responsiveness can be either from an intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

The first business case, inactive, can be described as corporate *self responsibility*, where the business case for sustainability is that of profit maximization or costs minimization.

Figure 1: Attitude and Societal Responsiveness model (Van Tulder et al., 2014)

This archetype has the basic attitude of liability, and an intrinsic societal responsiveness, resulting in a classic business case. To move to any next stage, there needs to be some type of triggering event, or critical milestones beyond which the system changes. It is the point at which a new balance is achieved. This activation happens when stakeholders demand it. The resulting extrovert attitude is essentially reactive. The reactive business model is a defensive business case, and aims to lower damages as the results potential or realised reputational losses. It is therefore described as corporate social *responsiveness*. These companies are mostly out looking and for responding to external issues. There is still an attitude of liability, but now the societal responsiveness is extrinsic, because of the aim to avoid reputational losses.

Active companies have a clear vision on why and how CSR and sustainability can be a competitive advantage, and they see the strategic business case (Porter & Kramer, 2006). These companies tend

to be inspired by ethical values and are strongly outward-looking in their strategies, and are therefore described as corporate social *responsibility*, the original CSR. The basis attitude moves from liability to responsibility, however the main societal responsiveness at this point is still intrinsic. These companies often develop a value proposition that can be classified as 'rich' and that has an active business case in which managers, employees, but also societal stakeholders are encouraged to achieve higher levels of sustainability (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015; van Tulder et al., 2014). For a company to move from the inactive to the active phase, there needs to be internal alignment. Only when there is an intrinsic motivation directed towards taking responsibility for sustainability do we see organisations tip decisively towards sustainability. Thus, many tipping points must be passed in order to achieve internal alignment.

The fourth business model archetypes as coined by van Tulder et al. (2014) is the proactive or societal business case. In this business case, companies understand the need to involve all stakeholders in addressing issues, and is characterised by an interactive practice, which can be coined both as an in- and out looking approach. It is therefore an attitude of responsibility, and a mixed societal responsiveness, both intrinsic and extrinsic. At this stage, to move from a reactive to a proactive business case, there is need for external alignment. Unless the organisation is capable of achieving new balance with external parties, an active attitude also makes a company vulnerable to relapse. A proactive business model is coupled with solving specific societal problems, meaning a societal business case. Therefore, this type can be coined as corporate *societal* responsibility, where companies aim for a systemic and new type of economy. There is not yet an example of a company which realized strategy can be coined as proactive, however some companies' intended strategy could perhaps be coined as such.

2.1.4 Why companies are involved in sustainability

CSR strategies have only recently really gained momentum, and have become prominent since the 1990's and early 2000s within teaching, research institutions, governments, NGOs and, perhaps most notably, corporations (Bryane, 2003; Garriga & Melé, 2004). This heightened corporate attention to sustainability was many cases not particularly voluntary, as many companies started their CSR in a reactive way, after public responses to issues that the company before had not considered to be a part of their corporate responsibilities (Porter & Kramer, 2006; van Tulder et al., 2014). This results in often superficial solutions through public relations and media campaigns, because corporations are often unequipped to handle the public response in a strategic or operational way (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

The role of business in sustainability is however increasingly more important. In fact, corporations arguably cannot be missed in achieving sustainable development (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2012). Corporate sustainability strategies are also needed to create a clear picture of the economic, social, legal and political requirements for the company in market competition situations. In fact, businesses need to achieve both economic, social and environmental sustainability and recognise that they need equal attention (Schaltegger et al., 2012). It has been stressed in literature that there is a need to internalize the environmental concerns in strategic, operational and governance processes of businesses (Redclift, 2005).

Part of the reasons that companies are interested in sustainability is that they have to find a balance between maximizing shareholder value, by doing business, and stakeholder value, by looking at

society (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Ideally, both should and possibly could be incorporated in daily business, because CSR strategies can make for long-term profits, whilst also contributing to the better good of society. The initiatives mentioned above aim to make both possible. Moreover, CSR as coined by the WBCSD both mentions the "contribution to sustainable economic development" and "working with stakeholders" (WBCSD, 2000). Thus, CSR does not mean to only focus on the ethics and morals of doing business, but also to make economic sustainability sure for your business. Often, however, companies implement CSR strategies as a response to the need to contribute to society and to communicate what "good" things the company is involved in at this moment (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). In economic terms, CSR is a strategic tool, which helps to both achieve economic objectives and, if applicable, wealth creation for shareholders (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Companies that actively pursue CSR and openly communicate on it, can attract market demand from a specific segment in the market, which is interested in companies that aim to contribute to the better of society (Bryane, 2003). Ultimately, engaging in CSR creates a stronger brand-image, with possibly a higher market demand; together, its economic aim is to increase profits. The combination of both factors emphasizes that only focusing on maximizing shareholder value is not sustainable, because the company ignores the needs and expectations of other parties, the stakeholders (Bryane, 2003). However, the strategic motives for CSR are equally big as the moral or ethical motives (Graafland & van de Ven, 2006).

Then again, sometimes the economic and the ethical aim of CSR strategies and projects comes together. Examples of this are environmental projects that ultimately also create economic growth, as laid out in the so-called 'Brundtland Report' (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Often, if done correctly, environmentally friendly business can also be profitable for companies. This applies to multiple themes of sustainable development. SustainAbility (2004) also concludes that it is important to have a clearer understanding of the business case of CSR. So far, there are indeed many initiatives for sustainable development, however they are filled with the frontrunner companies involved in sustainable development, and still miss the contribution and membership of the majority of companies (Garriga & Melé, 2004; SustainAbility, 2004).

2.2 Sustainability initiatives and corporations: departing an inactive or reactive attitude

2.2.1 Companies aim to move to a more (pro-)active attitude

Companies have largely been operating by an inactive or reactive attitude towards sustainability. Coming back to the question about how CSR relates to sustainability, in the ideal situation, when businesses are all classified as proactive, CSR ultimately will be sustainability. Namely, in this situation, the societal business case, companies create situations where they work from a perspective of adding to society and working in a sustainable way. To see how companies can progress from this inactive or reactive approach to an active or even proactive approach, the research will look at the way corporate sustainability initiatives evolved over time.

2.2.2 UN from 2000

In the beginning of 2000, the report 'We the Peoples – The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century' was released by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, known as the Millennium Report (United Nations, 2017b). The report, published ahead of the Millennium Summit in 2000, lays out a vision for the UN in the age of globalization. The report announced several specific goals and programme initiatives as an overall action plan to make globalization a force for good for people everywhere (Annan, 2000). In the report, Annan announces that a different course is needed to realise this. People could be at the centre of everything we do, meaning also an economy that must advance broader, and more inclusive, social purposes. Moreover, it explains the need for a new system and a better governance.

Another important revelation in the report is that In the report, Annan proposes that global companies must have a leadership role, inviting them into the Global Compact (Annan, 2000). In the Global Compact companies are asked to help governments and institutions like the UN and take their part of responsibility to ensure sustainable development.

When talking about the future of the UN, a renewed United Nations, Kofi Annan describes that the UN cannot meet the challenges of sustainable development alone and other actors are needed. Moreover, he emphasizes the following values as important for the new era: freedom, equity and solidarity, tolerance, non-violence, respect for nature and shared responsibility. To apply these values, the report announces the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were officially endorsed at the Millennium Summit (Annan, 2000). To ensure the new era of globalization, the participation in the international public domain of a lot of different actors is needed, for example the private sector, local authorities, scientific and educational institutions and others.

2.2.3 The Millennium Development Goals

Table 1: Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Development Goals
1. Reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half relative to 1990
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Reduce child mortality by two-thirds relative to 1990
5. Improve maternal health, including reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters relative to 1990
6. Prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

As a result of this renewed vision for the UN, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in September 2000 by nations, committing themselves to a new global partnership, aiming to half extreme poverty and some other time-bound targets related to sustainable development, with 2015 being its deadline (United Nations, 2015). It included eight goals (Table 1); some goals are focused on reducing or completing ending a certain theme, other goals are focused on promoting and enduring a certain theme. The goals ultimately consist of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators, meant to measure progress of the MDGs (UN Millennium Project, 2006b). The MDGs overall are meant to motivate to increase development efforts, as mostly performed by richer, well-developed countries, in and for poor, underdeveloped countries (Easterly, 2008).

To ensure that the MDGs would be successful in reversing issues as poverty, hunger and diseases, in 2002 the United Nations Secretary-General commissioned The Millennium Project (UN Millennium Project, 2006a). The Millennium Project was asked to recommend a concrete action plan, which was eventually published in 2005 "Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals", led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs. The report shows practical implications and calls for partnership between both rich and poor countries. The core recommendation made in the report is that strategies for poverty reduction should have the MDGs at their centre, focusing on tackling the practical ground-level challenges of development (UN Millennium Project, 2005). As for developing countries, to identify what the current state of things is, these countries should do rigorous "needs assessments", to design adequate interventions to get on track for the 2015 deadline.

The report by the Millennium Project stresses the fundamental importance of the proposed solutions, as at this point in time (2005), progress was falling behind and the 2015 deadline was approaching (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Even though technology and knowledge should be able to realize the MDGs, by 2005 this was not yet implemented at a large enough scale (UN Millennium Project, 2006a). When looking at the results major advances were made in poverty reduction, education of children, interventions to cut child deaths and the spread of diseases, etc. (United Nations, 2010). The MDGs most certainly have achieved success in encouraging global, political debate, it created a focus for advocacy, improving not just the amount of aid, but also creating more focus on the aid, and the improvement of monitoring of projects related to development (Waage et al., 2010). Overall, the publicity and aid increases show that there were indeed increases in development efforts by richer countries, portraying the success of the MDGs (Easterly, 2008).

There are however also critiques on the results. Overall, the MDGs have a lot of challenges within the conceptualisation and execution of the MDGs, for the goals, the targets and the indicators (Waage et al., 2010). The goals are specific, meaning that it leaves gaps and fails to benefit from synergies in implementation. As for the results, they were very uneven, and differed per region (United Nations, 2010). Issues that are still at play are concentrated to already poorer, more vulnerable populations of the world, such as impact of climate change and armed conflict. The number of people undernourished is still growing and billions of people still live in extreme poverty. Therefore, new policies and interventions will have to increase focus on decreasing the perhaps still growing inequalities between the rich and poor, and those disadvantaged because of race, age, sex or disability (United Nations, 2010).

In 2005 at the UN World Summit it was declared that the continent Africa was the only odd one out: it was not on track to achieve any of the MDGs by the 2015 deadline (United Nations General Assembly, 2005; Waage et al., 2010). It could however be argued that the design and the way the MDGs were set up made it possible to argue successes in Africa as failures in the MDG indicators (Easterly, 2008). Africa was at the lowest possible rates for education levels, per capita income, child mortality, etc., making it even more difficult than for some other developing regions to achieve the hard measures as set out by MDGs.

2.2.4 Global Compact
Another major implication of the UN report was the launch of the UN Global Compact (UNGC), which was launched in 1999 by the Secretary-General, to engage businesses in promoting respect

for human rights, equitable labour standards and protection of the environment (Annan, 2000). Annan invites businesses to work along the UN and "initiate a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market" (United Nations, 1999). UN Global Compact brings organisations and businesses together to work towards sustainable development on a global scale. Business are invited to incorporate your impact on the areas of human rights, labour rights, environment and the fourth area on anti-corruption, into concrete management practices. With currently more than 8000 companies and 4000 non-business participants are part of the network, it is the world's largest voluntary network; larger than other other sustainability initiatives such as the WBCSD, Global Reporting Initiative and SA8000 (McKinsey & Company, 2004; UN Global Compact, 2017d). The majority of participating companies within the network from industrialized countries are transnational companies, where most participating companies within the network from developing countries are small and medium-sized enterprises (McKinsey & Company, 2004). The growth of the network can be explained by several strengths of the network (Kell, 2013). First, the network focuses on internalizing the UN principles and sustainability into business processes and strategies, which is still a very relevant issue for businesses. Next, the secretary-general's of UNGC have sustained their support for the network and its work. Moreover, governmental support is also still present and perhaps even grew over time. Finally, the enhancement of the governance framework of the network to support business engagement and ensure there are effective accountability measures. These four strengths of the network are partly reasons for the rapid growth, among other variables.

To join the Global Compact, companies are asked to voluntary underline some statements. Companies are asked to undersign the principles the network stands for and practice responsible business operations (UN Global Compact, 2017d). Moreover, they are asked to support the direct society around companies and engage with your local surroundings. Companies ought to commit to pushing sustainability into the DNA of your organization, meaning "to create a culture of integrity across business or organization, from strategy to operations" (UN Global Compact, 2017d). They are also required to report annually on your efforts in aligning with the principles, by handing in a Communication on Progress yearly, involving statements on what the company is doing on these principles. Companies are asked to support the work of the UNGC office through an annual financial commitment, although this is also voluntary.

Businesses voluntary pledge to these statements. What is required is a commitment from the chief executive or some other equivalent, with support from a possible Board (UN Global Compact, 2017d). Again, this commitment must relate to the four areas of human rights, labour rights, environment and anti-corruption. It is also emphasized that corporations are expected to ensure that all areas are addressed equally and not does not offset a negative impact in another area. Another requirement is the Communication on Progress (COP), outlining the efforts of the company to conduct responsible business. Companies are however free to choose what to hand in – an already existing sustainability, annual or integrated report, or a specific document written for this purpose. These COPs are all available on the website of UN Global Compact.

As UNGC is a voluntary initiative, it "relies on public accountability, transparency and enlightened self-interest of companies" (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007, p. 164). The idea behind the voluntary contribution by companies is that they are encouraged to create innovativeness around the four areas of the principles of UNGC and fasten the idea of a sustainable future, seeing as mandatory

laws and regulations have not achieved this so far (Kell & Levin, 2002). Moreover, the multi-stakeholder approach reflects a new way of international cooperation and working together towards global change (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). However, the cooperation with the NGOs in the network is not really strong, so companies are ought to make sure themselves they work with their stakeholders. UNGC is based on ethical values and business working from this mind-set. Therefore, participating in the network can be to emphasize the importance of stakeholders, of universal rights, of common good and of sustainable development as such (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). However, as Cetindamar & Hudsoy (2007) found, companies have both an ethical and an economic reason for for becoming a UNGC participant. Participants in the network enjoy an increased corporate reputation and better network opportunities, and cost advantages are not present, but they are not a likely motivation for becoming an UNGC participant. Supporters of the way the initiative works, say the network poses an opportunity for dialogue between all types of organisations, including business, civil society and international organisations, and together they can create a consensus on global ethical standards (Kell & Levin, 2003; Rasche, 2009). Moreover, the network is a learning platform, which business can use to improve their CSR contributions (Ruggie, 2001). It can only be this type of learning platform if there are indeed low entry barriers, because this encourages companies to join, even if they are not progressed much on CSR or sustainable development (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014).

This however also means companies themselves are responsible for adhering to the principles and can be involved in the network even if they only report with a statement from the CEO of the company. Self-regulatory initiatives, like UNGC, are aimed at addressing governance gaps on the global level meaning the lack or rules and regulations to achieve a sustainable future (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). These initiatives have become an important in addressing negative business externalities, through advocacy for global CSR standards for business. With these initiatives, there is the ongoing debate of what the best governance, compliance and incentive mechanisms is to make sure that they encourage CSR standards.

This also begs the question of the legitimacy and effectiveness of a self-regulatory global governance initiative like this. Voegtlin and Pless (2014) illustrate this with the well-known example of the companies in the oil industry, Shell and BP. Both companies were removed from the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) after environmental disasters due to business processes of the company, BP in Mexico and Shell in Niger (Dow Jones, 2010; Reuters, 2011). Eventually both were re-enlisted in the DJSI in respectively 2013 and 2016 (Dow Jones, 2016). Both of these companies are active participants in UNGC, and are thus required to uphold the ten principles which the network stands for, including three principle son environmental protection. This raises the question whether being a part of Global Compact means that companies are in fact interested in contributing to sustainable development. Critique here is that UNGC ought to monitor and sanction compliance with the ten principles by their member companies (Nolan, 2005). This is also reflected in the fact that companies have the option to either use their CSR reports as their Communication On Progress (COP), and they can in fact be disconnected. Another critique is that companies may join UNGC, because there is a very low entry barrier (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). This may also attract companies that profit from the legitimacy companies get from being a part of Global Compact, even if they do not work according the principles of the network. This, and the example above raises the idea of 'bluewashing', where companies use the label of Global Compact, as being a part of the UN, to disguise or to 'bluewash' their CSR contributions, which are in fact not up to par (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). Being a part of a network such as UNGC can create positive reputational effect, which can be either a positive

externality when intentions for joining are from a moral responsibility perspective, or a goal in itself, similar to bluewashing (van den Brule, 2008; Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). Seth and Schepers (2014) summarize the critiques on the network as the "promise-performance gap", meaning the difference between the promise that is made by the network and the performance actually achieved by the participants in the network.

Another issue is that of adverse selection, meaning a situation involving asymmetric information (Balakrishnan & Korza, 1993). First of all, as there are more participants and the network grows, it will be more difficult to keep group cohesiveness and ensure there is no freeriding, or in this specific case bluewashing (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). This is to a number of issues. First, companies that have a weak CSR performance are invited to join the network, just as much as any other company (Sethi & Schepers, 2014). Moreover, there is low accountability and transparency required from participants, and the lack of specificity creates difficulties in ensuring enough financial support. Thus, the high number of participants creates low group cohesiveness and fever incentive to commit the to the ten principles of the network (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). This problem could be (partly) solved by on the one hand enforcing compliance and on the other hand foster a learning curve among participants to improve the CSR performance of those who are lagging behind (Berliner & Prakash, 2012). At the moment, the only sanction there is, is to be publicly delisted from the network if a company fails to hand in their Communication On Progress on time (Sethi & Schepers, 2014). To ensure there is no promise-performance gap and transformational change is truly achieved, there is a need to focus on both qualitative *and* quantitative growth (Rasche & Waddock, 2014). This is in line with the idea that if there are more participants, but the learning is also increased, the overall performance of the network and the participants is higher as well. Moreover, seeing as the very nature of the initiative is to bring all types of companies together and learn to perform well on sustainable development, most of the critiques misunderstand this idea (Rasche, 2009).

2.2.5 The Sustainable Development Goals
As can be concluded from the above, changes were needed for a new, next development agenda as a successor to the MDGs. This ended up being the 2030-agenda as set out by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (table 2). The SDGs have been decided upon by the UN General Assembly, consisting of Heads of State and Government and High Representatives (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Moreover, the goals are meant to be universal, "leaving no one behind" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The 2030 Development Agenda emphasizes the universal character of the goals by expecting ownership from all governments.

Several things should still be achieved by the SDGs. Some of the MDGs are not yet achieved and are a part of the SDGs as well. When analysing the progress of the MDGs, Waage et al. (2010) concluded that future development goals should create more synergies, by building on shared ideas on development. The SDGs link the social, economic and environmental aspects of the different goals, meaning also the link between the goals across time ensuring that focusing on one of the goals short term does not compromise another goal in the long term (Stafford-Smith et al., 2016). Or as Moore (2015) concluded, a post-2015 agenda should focus not just on creating changes within the existing goals, targets and economic and social models, but go beyond this and create long term transformations. There are some forms of discontinuity between the MDGs and the SDGs. Firstly, the MDGs were seen as focusing on changes in behaviour mostly by the richer, well-developed countries. However, in 2006 it already became clear that cooperation between the poorer,

Table 2: Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goals
1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

underdeveloped countries and the richer, well-developed countries is essential in realizing the goals (Sachs & McArthur, 2005). One of the most obvious differences is that the number of goals has more than doubled from 8 to 17 goals, and the indicators are much more complex (with 169 sub-goals) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). For this reason, the Copenhagen Consensus Center argues for only 19 targets instead of the 169, to ensure that resources are focused on achieving the targets instead of collecting data to see whether the 169 targets are achieved or not (Copenhagen Consensus Center, 2017; van Asperen, 2016). The SDGs focus on different issues, such as sustainability, inequality, migration, etc. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the SDGs were developed with contributions from a great variety people and organisations (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

Another important aspect that is different from the MDGs is the role of businesses and governments in achieving the SDGs. After the SDGs came into force in 2015, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stressed at the 2015 Forum that "governments must take the lead in living up to their pledges. At the same time, I am counting on the private sector to drive success" (UN News Centre, 2015). The Forum strongly emphasized that the sustainable development agenda for 2030 cannot be achieved without business. The first year of the SDGs has gone by, and it has mostly been focused on creating awareness about the SDGs, what they are and why they exist (Kingo, 2016). Now it is time to look beyond the theory and move towards action on the realization of the SDGs by 2030. More specifically, the SDGs should become fully embraced by corporations. Both businesses and governments play a vital role in realising sustainable change. There is however still the critiques that the SDGs are once again way to top-down, or so-called "cockpit-ism" (Hajer et al., 2015). This is

explained as the "illusion" that governments and intergovernmental organizations implying and steering companies and local governments from a top-down position is ineffective in solving global issues. Therefore, indeed, the effort of other parties such as businesses and civil society is needed.

The SDGs are very ambitious with the 2030 agenda. However, this was one of the criticisms for the MDGS, there people wondered whether the global community should accept a goal of halving world poverty instead of completely ending it, which is the new goal (van Asperen, 2016). Therefore, to succeed, the SDGs must be accompanied by an inclusive approach to growth (Stafford-Smith et al., 2016). What organisations are still unsure of is how to actually implement the SDGs, not just by companies, but also by civil society, governments etc., as the UN does not give clear ideas on how to go about this (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The same counts for measuring the success, as there are diverse tools for implementation and evaluation, therefore making it impossible to assess accountability for organisations and governments (Pogge & Sengupta, 2015b). Another disadvantage is that the SDGs are a statement of aspirations in the form or voluntary agreements or actions, with no binding factor to them (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). However, the advantage in this is that companies and governments are invited to go for an even higher and more ambitious scope (Pogge & Sengupta, 2015b). Another important factor to ensure the realization of the SDGs is that governments formalize their commitments and report on their progress (Biermann, Kanie, & Kim, 2017). This also requires governments to relate global governance arrangements to the SDGS and translate the goals into national contexts.

2.2.6 Non-UN initiatives

Next to these sustainability initiatives initiated by the UN, there are several other important initiatives that shape today's corporate sustainability landscape. First, the OECD, or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, aims to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world, through for example the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD, 2017a). For countries that are part of the OECD, is required they adhere to these guidelines. Next to the OECD Guidelines, the OECD supports the UN in ensuring the success of the SDGs (OECD, 2017b). It does so by bringing together its existing knowledge and tools, and by creating partnerships between international and non-governmental organisations such as the OECD, the private sector and civil society.

Second, the ISO 26000 is an international guideline for implementing CSR into organisations (International Organization for Standardization, 2017). It provides companies with a normative context to decide on societal responsibilities and structurally implement CSR into the company. It has been put together by the International Organization of Standardization and organizations and experts, including business, governments, trade unions, consumers and NGOs from 94 countries. It also emphasizes the need for stakeholder engagement and creating a common language on what CSR means for businesses. However, it is a management system standard and is therefore not intended to be used for certification purposes, or regulatory use. It is intended to provide organizations with guidance concerning social responsibility and can be seen as an international guideline. The ISO 26000 is a way to implement the OECD Guidelines in your business.

Another example is the Business and Sustainable Development Commission. January 2016 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, leaders from business, finance, civil society, labour and international organisations came together to form the Business and Sustainable Development

Commission, aiming to find the business case for businesses to achieve the SDGs and inform businesses on how they can contribute to realising the SDGs (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). They conclude that "the business case for sustainable development as core strategy gets much stronger as the world achieves the SDGs" (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017, p. 13). The commission recommends companies to bring their mission, vision and strategies in line with the SDGs, just like UNGC does in their SDG Compass. They emphasize that companies often still feel like the SDGs are mostly aimed at governments, and not directly at businesses. In fact, PwC found that 49% of business agree that government has the prime responsibility to achieve the SDGs (PwC, 2015). However, "achieving the SDGs opens up US12 trillion dollar of market opportunities in the four economic systems examined by the Commission, (…) which are food and agriculture, cities, energy and materials, and health and well-being. They represent around 60 percent of the real economy and are critical to delivering the SDGs" (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017, p. 12). Meaning that indeed a lot of business opportunities for companies. Moreover, they emphasize that businesses that have a clear focus on sustainability and what it means for their business often perform better financially than businesses that do not have this focus, making the economic business case very clear.

2.2.7 Evolution of sustainability initiatives

The former MDGs and now SDGs are just one of the many initiatives for sustainable development, started by not just the UN, but also other organisations, companies, NGO's etc. Sustainable development efforts range in scope from single company (e.g. Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (Unilever, 2017a)), industry initiatives (e.g. the Fair Wear Foundation), national initiatives (e.g. the SDG Charter, in the Netherlands) and international initiatives (e.g. United Nations Global Compact).

Van Tulder and Van Der Zwart (2005) explain 4 different types of approaches or orientations towards (international) corporate responsibility, with international organizations or initiatives, such as the ones mentioned earlier. The first is an inactive international corporate responsibility (ICR) approach, which is mostly applicable to larger, international institutions for efficiency. Examples of such institutions are the WTO and the IMF, which largely leave the meaning and the practical side of ICR to the market and companies itself. Risks for these organisations are that the efficiency approach does not always fit with views on ICR from different countries or organisations.

Next, there is a reactive ICR approach, which is applicable to the OECD and the ISO, meaning their aim is to find an agreed upon bottom-line of principles and standards, to be able to oblige lots of organisations. With this approach, there is for example the risk of the "lowest common denominator" (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005, p. 250), meaning the regime that will be put forward is the point at which organisations all agree on, but does not spark them to pursue higher standards or practices.

A next step is the active ICR approach, which can be seen with the UN, the World Bank and the ILO (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005). This approach is characterised by institutions that are active drivers of ICR, which a more idealistic approach through guidelines and ambitions. With the active approach, there is the risk of adverse selection, meaning that companies could potentially adhere to these guidelines of the institutions mainly for PR and greenwashing.

Finally, the proactive ICR approach is the next step in ICR institutions, of which there is not yet an example. This approach is characterised by continuous improvement through dialogue with

stakeholders and a partnership focus (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005). Risks here are that partnerships that are made are only temporary, and, because of the possibly high compliance level aims, the amount of companies adopting to this type of institutions may be limited.

What can be concluded from the several initiatives, is that slowly they are becoming more intense and more complex, in itself but also because of the increasing number of initiatives. This was also a critique point as made by the Business and Sustainable Development Commission, in that the dispersion of frameworks and reporting standards makes it time-consuming, expensive and difficult for companies (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). It would therefore be good to bring together or align the existing frameworks more, in order for companies to have a clear view of what is out there and what they can use.

The timeline in these initiatives and frameworks shows a gradual change from using codes and guidelines with a somewhat mandatory character (OECD Guidelines, UN Guiding Principles, ISO 26000), to a more principle or goals oriented, partnership-based character (SDGs, Business and Sustainable Development Commission, UNGC, etc.). Moreover, the subject of the initiatives has also changed. The traditional initiatives were mainly focused on ending poverty, ending diseases and decreasing mortality rates, and were to be picked up by governments of developed countries. The newer initiatives are focused on the complexity of societal problems, also involving poverty, but also on inequality, climate change, etc. Sustainable development has thus become more complex and more intense in what it means, not only for governments, but also with regard to the role of businesses. This shows another difference over time. Where at first sustainability was more of a top-down approach, with governments taking the lead, recently the role not only of businesses, but other types of organisations such as NGOs and knowledge institutes has become of more importance, stressing the need for partnerships and multi-stakeholder approaches.

2.3 Why companies are contributing to sustainable development: move to an active attitude

2.3.1 Business drivers for embracing sustainability

Corporations have different drivers about why they are involved with sustainable development or sustainability initiatives, and therefore also possibly with regard to the SDGs. First, there is the perhaps mostly debated reason of instrumental motives, meaning the belief that being a part of initiatives surrounding social benefits result in positive economic results (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). Being a part of these initiatives can be a source of competitive advantage, open up new business opportunities, and combine the needs of both shareholders and other stakeholders involved with the business (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Frost & Sullivan & GlobeScan, 2017).

Second, there are institutional motives, meaning external pressure to gain legitimacy due to a changing environment (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). Legitimacy, as defined by Suchman (1995, p. 574) is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions". It is important for businesses to adhere to pressures from stakeholders and being a part of a social initiative helps keep up public support for a companies' activities (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009).

Moreover, companies often publish their intentions with regard to contributing positively to society, however, their realised strategy may be different. Being a part of a social initiative can help companies to increase their contributions. The more the intended strategy resembles the realised strategy, the higher the legitimacy of the company. Therefore, it is very important to take external factors, such as being a part of a social initiative, into account when dealing with sustainability, because they may change the direction of the real strategy (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015). The need for a strong social agenda is due to several institutional forces, such as customer need for corporate transparency or insurance that companies do not neglect human, environmental or labour rights during business conduct (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009).

Third, there is also the moral perspective, meaning business' belief that they have an ethical duty to adhere to social responsibilities (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). Even if the above reasons are true, managers still often have an equally strong wish to contribute to a sustainable future (Graafland & van de Ven, 2006). Business often truly believe that businesses have a responsibility to contribute to their local communities and a better future world.

2.3.2 Voluntarily taking up responsibilities

The very basic understanding of corporate contributions to sustainability is that of voluntarism (Garriga & Melé, 2004). The corporate examples of initiatives for sustainability above are mostly voluntary. Moreover, CSR as coined by the WBCSD, refers to voluntary initiatives taken by businesses to act responsibly in relation to all stakeholders. Even though the initiatives are not obligatory, companies are still contributing in sustainability and drawing up CSR strategies. The reason for this could perhaps be because it relies on (public) accountability and a certain level of transparency (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Another example could be companies' self-interest. The rationale behind this is that regulations have thus far been unsuccessful in creating a more sustainable and fair future. Through voluntary involvement of companies in sustainable development, by working on themes as human rights, labour rights, environmental and anti-corruption issues, it could encourage higher productivity, higher efficiency and more innovative ideas from corporations to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future (Bryane, 2003; Kell & Levin, 2002). The initiatives try to prove the benefits of encouragement instead of punishment to achieve the biggest results towards sustainable development (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Moreover, regulation does not offer companies that already "do enough" on CSR according to regulations to perform even better. By voluntary adhering to these kind of initiatives, companies are moving away from in an inactive attitude, in which they only oblige to what is mandatory and what regulations demand from them (van Tulder et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Stakeholder Management

Part of the reasons that companies are interested in sustainability is that they have to find a balance between maximizing shareholder value, by doing business, and stakeholder value, by looking at society (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Ideally, both should and possibly could be incorporated in daily business, because CSR strategies can make for long-term profits, whilst also contributing to the better good of society. Next to their shareholders, companies are also held accountable to their other stakeholders, which are also in some way affected by a companies' operations (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Effective stakeholder management is a key part of the societal responsibilities companies have (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Stakeholders can include customers, employees, suppliers, partners and local neighbourhoods. Another important stakeholder worth mentioning here is the

relationship of corporations with public actors, such as UN organisations or national government bodies. As noted before, private sector has been actively involved in sustainable development, more so now that the SDGs are presented, than at the time of the MDGs. This new, 'softer' type of a relationship can be helpful in achieving common goals (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). The cooperation between government, business and NGOs could, if performed correctly, benefit society by aiming to achieve common social objectives (Bryane, 2003). However, Knox et al. (2005) concluded that companies at the moment do not necessarily use CSR strategies or projects to better their stakeholder relationships. Bigger companies seem more equipped to first identify their important stakeholders, and prioritising them (Knox et al., 2005). Moreover, they more often link their CSR strategies to societal goals and outcomes.

2.3.4 Network

Some of the initiatives mentioned earlier are membership- or participation based organizations, and provide the company with a network of companies embracing sustainability, another key aspect of corporations contribution to sustainability (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Thus, networking is very important in the interactions between organisations in these initiatives (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Companies can learn from real-life examples from other companies and organisations how they handled their projects, strategies, and communications on sustainable development and their CSR practices. This can also be said for UN Global Compact. UN Global Compact aims to bring the conflicting aims of maximizing shareholder and stakeholder value together (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). CSR is often seen as either or, and Global Compact is an initiative that aims to bring together the idea that CSR can bring about long-term profits, and the idea that it is the right thing to do. Global Compact has established a broad normative consensus on both global ethical values and CSR standards over the years, where it is expected of companies to uphold the 10 principles (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). Even the global leader in ESG and Corporate Governance research and ratings Sustainalytics provides Global Compact compliance service, where it checks whether companies comply with the ten principles (Sustainalytics, 2016). And even though there are critiques about the way the network is governed, UNGC has been successful in making CSR visible globally (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). Moreover, companies can come in contact with other businesses embracing sustainability, which can inspire and help them to become more active as well.

2.3.5 The impact of CSR

More and more companies now have CSR programmes, strategies or projects (SustainAbility, 2004). It can be concluded that, because sustainability itself is rather subjective and difficult to measure, it is also quite difficult to measure the impact of CSR efforts (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). The eco-efficiency and eco-efficacy of sustainability efforts are very different, and thus to measure impacts of CSR, a systematic and holistic approach should be used (Korhonen, 2003). Moreover, SustainAbility (2004) researched whether and how much CSR initiatives, such as the ones mentioned earlier, are indeed contributing to a transition towards sustainable development. The report goes on to conclude that even though more and more companies are making much progress, the business case for proactively working on CSR programmes has yet to become clear for the majority of companies (SustainAbility, 2004).

There are some notions about the impact of CSR, on which academic debate has not settled yet. As said before, companies hope to influence the consumer relation with their CSR project by improving their brand image. It is said that consumers will gradually favour their products and services to be

from companies that have CSR programs and can therefore be regarded as transparent and trustworthy (Knox et al., 2005). However, if measured, the nominal outcome of a positive change could be negative. For example, if the negative environmental and societal impact of a product or service is reduced, it might be that more products and services and being produced, meaning in the end the impact might be increased in total (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Customers are not the only stakeholders affected by companies and their CSR programmes. Investors will also increasingly favour responsible companies, and potential employees will prefer to work for responsible companies.

Porter and Kramer (Porter & Kramer, 2006) argue that prevailing CSR ambitions are fragmented and not connected to main strategies of companies. This way companies miss out on the opportunities that companies can have whilst also greatly benefitting society. They propose that companies ought to use the same processes and frameworks for their social responsibility as they use for their "other" corporate strategies – a process of 'creating shared value', which will be discussed further down.

2.3.6 The role of the UN Global Compact
The impact of the UN Global Compact (UNGC) is very difficult to measure the impact in the form of how much UNGC has contributed to sustainable development. Therefore, it would be better to measure whether the members/participants of UNGC have adopted the ideas, norms and cultures that are a part of UNGC into their business operations (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Therefore, UNGC has had several of these assessment projects, for example one by SustainAbility (2004). They concluded that, in accordance with what the research concluded earlier, the organisation should create more clarity on the business case of contributing to sustainable development to really grow and gain the many organisations as members. It should however be noted that, seeing as this assessment was in 2004, there is a relatively short period of time between the start of UNGC and the assessment. This type of organisations are based on multi-stakeholder partnerships with participants from all kinds or regions, countries, beliefs, regimes, etc., which means it takes a lot of time (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007).

More recently, Schembera (2016) found that there is indeed a positive impact to be found: being a long-time UNGC participant has a positive effect on the overall UNGC implementation. However, this positive impact is not enormously large. In a similar sense, Berliner & Prakash (2015) found that CSR ratings of UNGC participants increase over time, and due to the voluntary nature of the network, this is realised at a lower cost than if they would not have been part of the network. The network provides them with goodwill benefits, even if they have not made the costly changes to their human rights and environmental policies, possibly leading to strategic shirking. A strong local UNGC network can on the other hand have a large, positive impact on the level of UNGC implementation in the network, regardless of how long a company has been involved in the network (Schembera, 2016). Other enabling factors for the impact of UNGC are strong domestic governance institutions and being an internationally oriented company, instead of a domestically oriented company (Knudsen, 2011).

UN Global Compact is a type of multi-stakeholder initiatives, which is a part of a more evolved type of stakeholder management (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). The network shows a new way of international cooperation, vital for multi-stakeholder partnerships such as the SDGs. Next to working according to the UNGPs and contributing to sustainable development, UNGC has also committed to

implementing the SDG's (Kingo, 2016). An example is the SDG Compass that UNGC developed, explaining how the SDGs may affect an organisation, and offering tools and knowledge about how to implement the SDGs and put them at the centre of the organisation (GRI, UN Global Compact, & WBCSD, 2015). Participants are also asked to involve themselves in the SDGs and engage with partnerships to advance the SDGs, as well as advancing the UNGC principles (UN Global Compact, 2017d). In order for this, UNGC has set up several platforms focused on different sectors, where participants can work together to for example find breakthrough innovations or financial innovations for the SDGs (UN Global Compact, 2017b). To realize the SDGs, multi-stakeholder partnerships between business, NGOs, governments the United Nations and other important actors are required (Dodds, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that multi-stakeholder initiatives such as UNGC can possibly be instrumental in achieving the SDGs. UNGC could also possibly make an impact in inspiring companies to embrace the SDGs and thus inspire them the move to an active sustainability attitude.

2.3.7 Communication on CSR

Companies contribute to sustainable development in part to create a positive brand image. Important here is that the corporate contributions to sustainability are communicated to their stakeholders. There are several ways companies communicate about these contributions. The main wait of communicating a commitment to CSR is through codes of conduct and CSR reports (van den Brule, 2008). Codes of conduct or codes of ethics often show what ethical or moral codes a company adheres to, and expects their associates to adhere to as well. Code of conducts are agreements and basic principles a company communicates to members, business partners and other relevant stakeholders, who are expected to keep by this code (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005). The code often lays out what is acceptable or not about themes similar to the SDGs, for example child labour, human rights, labour rights, trade unions, safety regulations, etc.

Next to a code of conduct, which is mostly aimed at practically making sure the stakeholders work according to the same principles, companies often also have their own CSR programmes or strategies, which they communicate about. Cornelissen (2017) identifies three basis CSR communication strategies: informational, the persuasive and the dialogue strategy. The information model is meant to objectively inform the public of what the corporations' activities surrounding CSR are, and works according to a one-way symmetrical model, meaning the public is not asked to get involved. The persuasive strategy involves a two-way model of communication, but is asymmetrical, in that the public can give feedback, but is not actively involved in the decision making. The final version is the dialogue strategy, in which case there is two-way symmetrical communication, meaning stakeholders are more involved in the decision making of the CSR strategy.

Companies often report about their work and contributions on CSR and sustainable development in an annual sustainability report, or in their integrated report. Even though more companies are publishing these reports, and their average length is longer, the quality of the reports has barely improved, according to the CEO of Sustainability (Knox et al., 2005). Moreover, only a limited amount of companies reports on the SDGs in their public communication (PwC, 2015). This will partly be because the SDGs have only been published in 2015. Therefore, if companies are using the SDGs for their strategies, they are likely to still do this internally and are not ready to communicate this externally. Next to that, standards and frameworks for integrated reporting are becoming more and more common, meaning the integration of social and environmental reporting through the

Global Reporting Initiative and the Integrated Reporting Framework support by UN Global Compact (Cornelissen, 2017). Ihlen and Roper (2014) found that corporations more and more claim not to be on a path towards sustainability, but that is already an integral part of the company, through years of experience and integration of sustainability principles. On the one hand this is a promising notion, in which corporations are all on board the sustainability-train. However, on the other hand, it may mean companies are seeing sustainability as a rather unproblematic notion, solved in part through the implementation of these sustainability principles. This may be true, but they may not address the truly fundamental problems in society and the dilemmas of the concepts involved in CSR.

2.3.8 Window dressing

One of the biggest pitfalls in CSR and corporate contributions to sustainability is that of window dressing or greenwashing (van den Brule, 2008). CSR is often said to be a public relations tool, instead of companies really embracing sustainability in their businesses. The fact that there is no clear definition of what is means and what is entails makes it more difficult for other parties to objectively assess the implementation of sustainability within corporates. Again, the term window dressing is also lacking a clear and agreed upon definition. In general, it is agreed that window dressing involves CSR being of small strategic value in core strategies and decision making, where it plays a large part in the external communication process, thus the p art where a companies' reputation is managed (Griffin & Weber, 2006; van den Brule, 2008; Weaver, Trevino, & Cohchran, 1999). The external communication and altering public perceptions of the companies' behaviour is the main goal through for example public relations (PR), and not the internal embracing of sustainability in strategies and policies. A more specific type of window dressing is 'bluewashing', in which case companies voluntary associate themselves with the humanitarian community through the United Nations, without also taking the accountability (van den Brule, 2008). This criticism applies to becoming a member of the UN Global Compact. Seeing as there is no requirement to become a member, companies have the option to put the UNGC logo on their website or reports, without actually embracing what the network stands for and what is expected from companies.

CSR reports and code of conducts are to be used as a checklist to formulate and implement CSR goals and objectives (van Tulder & Buck, 2006). Effective CSR consists of policy that is close to a firms' core business processes (Schouten & Remmé, 2006). In order for there to be no window dressing, the CSR policies must therefore be as close to core business as possible, and the code of conduct must be incorporated in day-to-day business (van den Brule, 2008). This decoupling takes away from the value they are meant to have. To assess whether this decoupling took place and there is the case of window dressing, there are two types of frameworks.

The first is the compliance likelihood framework, which analyses the specificity and compliance components of codes of conduct to assess whether they are actually translated into real behaviour and action (van Tulder & Kolk, 2001). The more specific the code of conduct is, the more likely it is to be measured and monitored adequately. The specificity is then divided into two types, namely the social, environmental or generic *issues* that are in the code, and the specificity of *focus* of organizations, geographic scope and nature (Kolk & van Tulder, 2003). The second is the implementation likelihood framework, which enables a systematic analysis of CSR reports (Kolk, 2004b). The reports are analysed on the criteria focus, organization, performance and monitoring (Kolk, 2004a). Based on these criteria, different CSR accountability strategies can be identified (see figure 2) (van den Brule, 2008).

Figure 2: CSR accountability strategies (van den Brule, 2008)

There is no window dressing when there is no code of conduct and no CSR report. Similarly, when only one of the two is published, and that has a high compliance or implementation likelihood, there is no window dressing either. On the complete opposite side is true CSR integration, where both the implementation and compliance likelihood is high. The most consistent type of window dressing in this model is where both compliance and implementation likelihood is low. In this case the decoupling is clear, and may be a deliberate strategy. It is a combination of input window dressing, when compliance likelihood is low and there is no CSR report, and output window dressing, when implementation likelihood is low and there is no code of conduct.

2.4 Advancing SDGs by corporations: moving to a proactive attitude

2.4.1 (CSR) strategies and the SDGs

Research to find out if companies are integrating the SDGs in their strategies, and if so, why and how, is slowly increasing in numbers. PwC has done some research into how companies are dealing with the SDGs. 92% of business is aware of the SDGs and that action is needed (PwC, 2015). Of these companies, 71% is already planning on how to contribute to the SDGs, where only 10% of business says that business has prime responsibility in achieving the SDGs (PwC, 2015). Overall, there is a high level of awareness, and, compared to the self-assess responsibility level of business, a relatively high commitment to creating action. According to a research done by BSR and Globescan (2015) one in three companies planned on using the SDGs as input for they corporate objectives. The flip-side to this is that two in three companies is not planning on doing this just yet. As said before, companies often assume that the SDGs are not just an intergovernmental initiative, but also that the governments are responsible for the implementation of the SDGs. This is the case, but only up to a certain point. Some of the goals might for example not be in the scope or interest of companies, explaining their lack of action. Most companies that are actively contributing to the realisation of the SDGs view sustainable development as CSR (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017).

To incorporate the SDGs into a companies' strategies, companies have to see the business case in them and use available tools such as the SDG Compass by UNGC, GRI and WBCSD. It requires

companies to take a holistic approach to aligning every part of their business to the SDGs (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). This will encourage companies to extend strategic horizons and therefore deliver long-term advantages for their stakeholders. Companies can implement or use the SDGs in several different ways. Some companies use the SDGs in their reporting on their CSR or their contribution to sustainable development. Moreover, they communicate their work to their stakeholders in this way. Next to that, companies can use the SDGs as a mapping tool, through for example tools as the SDG Compass, as mentioned earlier. Another option is to link the SDGs to corporate strategies, possibly CSR strategies or core strategies. Research has yet to find out how companies are contributing to the SDGs and whether they implement the SDGs in their company strategies or business conduct. These results show mixed images of company involvement with the SDGs. The SDGs form a common language for the public and private sector to communicate (Frost & Sullivan & GlobeScan, 2017). As Frost & Sullivan & GlobeScan (2017) conclude, even though the common denominator within the SDGs is the mandate for change, the real opportunity to reap the benefits from the SDGs lies with businesses and with their ability to go beyond business-as-usual and set up concrete multi-stakeholder partnerships to effectively realise the SDGs.

2.4.2 Avoid harm versus do good

It is vital that companies have the right intentions in order for them to truly contribute to sustainable development. Relating this to the attitudes of sustainability as set out by van Tulder, (van Tulder et al., 2014), there are four types of corporate sayings summarizing these attitudes. Inactive companies are concerned with 'doing things right', and reactive companies with 'not doing anything wrong'. This contrasts with to active companies which aim to 'do the right thing', and proactive companies which want to 'do the right things right' or 'do well by doing good'. In here lies the first distinction, where inactive or reactive companies need to progress to active, by not just doing the bare minimum, but going beyond this and aim to do the right thing, first.

A similar distinction between companies' ambitions is that between corporate targets for 'avoiding harm' and those that aim to 'do good' (van Zanten, 2017). 'Doing good' is then companies that perform actions that go beyond the societal expectations, while 'avoiding harm' means doing what society expects (Lin-hi & Müller, 2013). In other words, companies that proactively seek to add to society want to create positive externalities, where companies that reactively want to avoid harm seek to cut negative externalities. Van Zanten (2017) found that companies contribute more to the SDGs when they aim to avoid harm, rather than when they aim to do good. The main corporate focus surrounding the SDGs is on "managing and minimizing their environmental and social footprints, thereby meeting societal expectations" (van Zanten, 2017, p. 18). As a result, companies cut their impact on many SDGs through avoiding harm, and also attempt to do good and contribute to a little SDGs, however also do nothing on other SDGs. Going beyond CSR, and business as usual, can thus be a challenge. Similarly, Bhandari and Javakhadze (2017) found that companies that highly emphasize their CSR and their will to "do good" are not the best companies for shareholders to invest in, because it is a bad predictor for the company's bottom lines. The focus on these CSR strategies imposes costs on companies due to foregone investment opportunities, leading to losses in the end. Even though this is a different line of reasoning, it is another reason for companies to focus more on avoiding harm than doing good.

2.4.3 Reversing materiality

The role of business in the SDGs is large, but the real challenge is in how to truly embrace it as a company. In order for the potential of the SDGs to be realised, it is of high importance that companies see the impact they have on the purpose of businesses worldwide. This can only happen when companies are successful in aligning their corporate strategies to the SDGs, to be able to jointly contribute to solve the problems as posed by the SDGs (EY, 2016). In here lies the big challenge, where companies are able to move from awareness to action, or from rhetoric to practice, by implementing the SDGs in strategic activities. This is especially true through the eyes of the public, which thinks of companies as very important and expects companies to take their responsibility by addressing the SDGs sufficiently, which is the 'trust gap' (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016).

To ensure that companies address the SDGs, they have to be made "material". Companies use material assessments to identify, select and prioritize the most significant sustainability issues for the companies and its stakeholders (Calabrese, Costa, Levialdi, & Menichini, 2016). The most "material" issues are addressed firstly in company strategies, as they require the most, or the most immediate action by the company. This materiality assessment however is flawed in that it is a reactive attitude to sustainability, and creates a fragmented view on contributing to sustainable development. This starts from the company, and then the prioritizing results from a response to stakeholder pressure (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016). This issue prioritization is often a reactive practice, in that companies tend to choose to report on the quick-win issues in the materiality assessment, or report only on those issues about which stakeholders are negatively pressuring the company. Therefore, the trust gap will only be solved by a limited amount.

As van Tulder and Lucht (2016) suggest, by including the SDGs in the materiality assessment, it can reverse the logic of creating this prioritization. The SDGs have a long term outlook, resulting in a strategic focus for companies, whilst also solving the trust gap and making society trust companies again. The SDGs are the defined threshold for the worldwide issues and can so make this strategically relevant for businesses. Moreover, the interrelatedness of the SDGs mean that they need a long term outlook, instead of a short term for self-interest or risk management. The SDGs are therefore an opportunity to move from a reactive (or even inactive) attitude towards sustainability to a proactive approach.

The relation of this to the attitudes to sustainability can be found in figure 3. Based on whether the company does or does not talk about sustainability, and actually walk sustainably, there are four options (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016). In the inactive attitude, the company works according to the narrow approach of fiduciary duty and where it does not create a trust gap, it also does not enhance the trust of society in its ability to contribute to sustainability. In this case company neither walk or talk about sustainability. Next, there are the greenwashing companies, that do talk about sustainability, but do not walk sustainability. These reactive companies enlarge the trust gap and confirm society's scepticism.

		Talk about sustainability	
		NO	**YES**
Walk sustainably	**NO**	Inactive: narrow fiduciary duty approach; low expectations/low trust	Reactive: green/blue-washing; confirms scepticism and increases trust gap
	YES	Active: Broad fiduciary duty approach; fear of reputational damage; regaining (tacit) trust	Proactive: Alignment of trust; building trust in collaboration (co-creation) with important stakeholders

Figure 3: Walking the Talk; Four options (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016)

On the other side, there are the companies that both walk and talk about sustainability, the active companies (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016). They have a broader definition of fiduciary duty and companies aim to integrate sustainability in their corporate strategies. However, because of its complexity and long-term outtake, they may not be entirely successful. Therefore, this creates a risk in that if they do not succeed, this again confirms the scepticism. Companies must prioritize on which sustainability issues to act, but also on which to communicate. This relates to the fourth and final proactive attitude to sustainability, where the company does walk sustainably, but does not talk about it. These frontrunner companies know the risk in communicating, and they therefore choose not to talk, perhaps not to task too much on their contributions to sustainability.

The SDGs can form a way for the trust gap to be solved, as it creates an opportunity to proactively contribute to sustainability. Van Tulder and Lucht (2016) identified seven important steps to meet reversed materiality. Companies should first depart from societal needs, through the SDGs when creating strategies. To truly embrace the SDGs, companies should make a gap analysis and assess the present materiality. Next step is to define present, but also potential future spill-over effects, through the connections between the SDGs. Thereafter, companies ought to assess their stakeholder portfolio and define a future agenda accordingly, meaning decide on which SDGs the company wants to get engaged with for a sustainable future. The last step is a connected leadership challenge, where effective leadership means enabling the company to overcome the tipping points, both internally and externally, to move to a proactive approach to sustainability. The SDGs are thus at the starting point of a strategy, making them truly material for the company. Reversing materiality proves the enhanced complexity for companies that comes with the SDGs, as they have to literally reverse the way they create their strategies.

2.4.4 Sustainable business models

The CSR literature so far has focused mostly on creating societal value by switching from shareholder profit to stakeholder or social investments. What does this mean for the business model of an individual company? The business model of a company explains how the company is organized (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015), or in other words, it is an abstract formulation of a companies' way of creating value. An example of representing a companies' business model is the business model canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). This business model canvas shows the different elements in a company, consisting of the key partners, the key activities, the key resources, the customer relationships, the channels, the customer segment, the cost structure, the revenue streams and last but not least the value proposition. The value proposition is at the core of the

company and its details on what value the company wants to give to its customers, or what value does the company add to its inputs (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015).

Obviously, the business model as projected in this canvas can be different from reality, explaining the difference between strategic intent and realization of company (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Meaning that the intended business model as portrayed in the business model canvas is hardly ever the same as the real business model. The intended value proposition could be to provide a positive contribution to society, however the realization might be that the companies business has negative externalities that override the positives. As mentioned earlier, the nominal outcome of a positive change could still be negative (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). An important theory to mention here is legitimacy theory, as mentioned earlier. The more the intended strategy resembles the realised strategy, the higher the legitimacy of the company. Therefore, it is very important to take external factors, which define the extrinsic motivates of a company, into account when dealing with sustainability, because they may change the direction of the real strategy (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015) (figure 4).
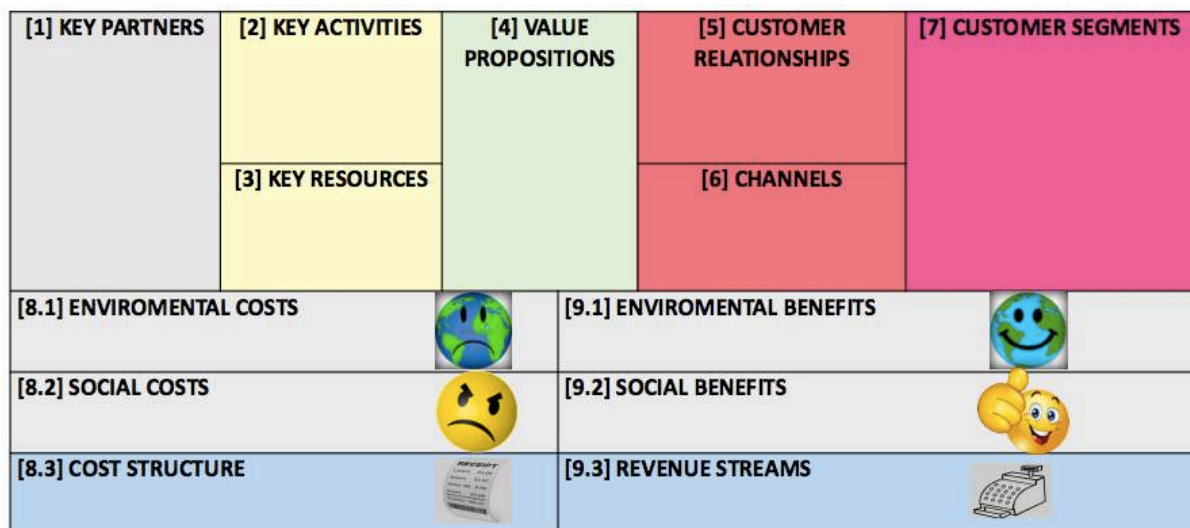
Figure 4: The Business Model Canvas Plus (van Tulder, 2017a)

There is a difference between a mainstream business model, and a sustainable business model. A sustainable business model (SBM) incorporates not just an economic purpose, meaning profit, but besides the economic purpose, also an environmental and societal purpose (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014). This means the business model focuses not just on the one single bottom line of Profit, but a triple bottom line of Profit, People and Planet, or the triple bottom line (Bocken et al., 2014; The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015). This form of inclusive business pays attention to not just the direct stakeholders of employees, customers, shareholders and partners, but also society and the environment. Moreover, it creates an analytical tool for researchers to assess the ways in which companies create ecological, economic and social value (Boons, Montalvo, Quist, & Wagner, 2013). There are clear benefits from having a sustainable business model, both for society and for the company: it makes implementing sustainability in corporate strategies and processes easier, and encourages innovation for sustainability (Bocken et al., 2014). Moreover, such a business model can be a real driver for competitive advantage. A way to expand on the original canvas model is to add the environmental and social costs and benefits, to integrate these into your intended business

model (The Partnerships Resource Center, 2015). This is a way for companies to see where they are having a positive impact, and where they have a negative impact, for example through assessing the SDG areas and improving performance on the basis of this mapping.

Sustainable development requires radical and systematic innovations, which can be created most effectively when using the concept of business models (Boons et al., 2013). Moreover, it requires the transformation of systems, such as production and consumption systems (Boons & Wagner, 2009). As Cramer-Montes said (2017, p. 3): "sustainability can drive innovation by reconceiving products and services for low-income consumers, opening new lines of business and boosting revenue in the process". To achieve sustainable development, the SDGs need a structural reform of global institutions, and for this a greater effort of governments is also needed (Pogge & Sengupta, 2015a).

2.4.5 Shared Value Creation

Even though many companies have not yet used the SDGs for their corporate goals or for their CSR strategies, there are also companies with an even higher level of ambition. The Business and Sustainable Development Commission says several companies in their commission have made the SDGs not just part of their CSR, but part of their corporate strategic agenda (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). Porter and Kramer (2011) coined this step further as creating shared value (CSV). "To advance CSR, we must root it in a broad understanding of interrelationship between a corporation and society while at the same time anchoring it in the strategies and activities of specific companies", said Porter and Kramer (2006, p. 5). This is at the root of what CSV is. Successful organisations need a successful society, in the form of health care, education, equal opportunity, etc. Therefore, putting society's needs at the centre of a corporation is a strategic, long-term business solution, thus it elevates societal goals to the strategic corporate level (Crane, Pallazzo, Spence, & Matten, 2014). Companies such as Nestlé – which corporate motto is 'creating shared value' – and Unilever are companies that recognize that constructive engagement with important stakeholders is needed to bring about systematic change and to work towards mutual goals, such as the SDGs (van Tulder et al., 2014). Moreover, as Porter and Kramer (2006) conclude, in a quest for a sustainable competitive advantage, the CSV ambition is the key. Overall, CSV brings together diverse concepts and works towards "conscious capitalism", as well as creating a term that appeals to both practitioners and scholars (Crane et al., 2014).The SDGs could be the driver to take companies beyond CSR, through their new framework. The SDGs aim to move away from the traditional triple bottom line of people, planet and profit (Elkington, 1998). Instead the network proposes a five P's: people and planet are still in there, but profit is change to prosperity, and peace and partnership are added (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). This fits in with the extended ambition as set out by CSV.

However, there is also criticism about whether CSV is the solution. CSV is said to be the next version of CSR, or so Porter and Kramer (2011) pose it to be, however it may also be seen as a combination of CSR, a more advanced version of stakeholder management and social innovation (Crane et al., 2014). It is a highly hyped topic in the business dialogue, putting older notions of a similar concept in the shadow, through which it resembles a buzzword (Dembek, Singh, & Bhakoo, 2016). Moreover, CSV overlooks the pressures between social and economic goals that evidently exist (Crane et al., 2014). Next to lots of cases where a win-win situation can be found, there are also lots of cases where the outcomes are not well aligned for all stakeholders involved. CSV does not provide a solution to this problem. Contrary to the expectation that for CSV to work companies are expected

to go beyond focusing on shareholder value and focus on stakeholder investment, CSV takes a shallow conception of the corporation's role in society as purely to have economic gain (Crane et al., 2014). If companies are expected to completely transform their way of doing business, just changing CSR and the notion of capitalism will probably not be enough to challenge the legitimacy crisis that underlies the needed switch to transform business thinking.

The extended version of the traditional business model, the business model canvas plus, is especially relevant with companies that aim to contribute to sustainable development (van Tulder, 2017a). This canvas not only looks at the value capturing, through costs and revenue, but includes the impact, or the shared value. The impact through sharing value is assess through both environmental and social costs and benefits, on top of the basic cost and revenue value capturing. In this way, the CSV can be included in the value proposition, creating a proactive business case for sustainability. Another way of coining the sustainable business model is the fourth business model archetypes as coined by van Tulder et al. (2014), the proactive or societal business case. This relates to the concept of CSV, going beyond the traditional sense of CSR. Again, the business model plus aims to capture the complexity of the current sustainability challenges, needed in order for companies to create a strategy in which companies are proactively aiming to solve the challenges.

2.5 Conclusion literature research

From the literature, it seems there are a large number of frontrunner companies that can be classified as active, with a clear CSR strategy. Moreover, it appeared that generally companies have a different reasoning behind having a CSR strategy. The business model archetype identifies the different corporate attitudes to sustainability, and difference types of CSR strategies. What is clear is that companies have yet to fully start communicating around their contribution towards the SDGs. This research aims to see whether companies are linking their CSR strategies to the SDGs. Moreover, the paper aims to find the reasoning behind these choices. From this the research aims to draw general conclusions and managerial recommendations. The same is to be said about corporate communication on CSR, and again the link with the SDGs.

Linking the SDGs to CSR strategies could be a way for companies to expand from just doing good, next to the economic purpose, into adding more focus on corporate contributions. The SDGs are an overview of what type of positive impacts a company can make, or to check whether the company does not have a negative impact on these topics. Moreover, companies may contribute more to themes of sustainable development with which the companies relate well (van Zanten, 2017). In this sense the SDGs could also be very beneficial, because of the 169 sub-targets. These sub-targets can create clarity in how the company can contribute to sustainable development and enhance the impact of their CSR strategies. The SDGs can therefore form a tool for businesses to look at their strategies and assess where they are now and in what way they have an impact, be it positive or negative. Although, the SDGs are not the only way of assessing the impacts of the company. Linking the SDGs to the CSR strategies can be used to map in what way the company is impacting its surroundings. Moreover, the SDGs could also form a basic starting point from where the company could create its strategies, putting the contribution to society at the centre and create the business model surrounding that.

However, the SDGs may also be too broad to truly help companies. As mentioned earlier, the SDGs are very ambitious and it is impossible for one company to contribute to all the SDGs at once. Choices must be made on which SDGs the company should focus. It is unclear to organisations how to make these choices right. It is also not necessarily the case that proactive companies, that aim to do good, are better able to contribute to the SDGs, as Van Zanten (2017) showed that companies aimed at avoiding harm, which can be classified as reactive, could be more effective in their contributions to the SDGs. Moreover, as the critiques on CSV show, how to create a truly multi-purpose venture is still an unresolved problem as well (Crane et al., 2014). Therefore, it is unclear whether this theoretical effect will actually be able to be brought into practice.

There are also the companies that want to go beyond this and/or those that aim to have a CSV strategy. This could in theory be done by embracing the SDGs in their strategies, as the SDGs grasp the complexity of the challenges this world is facing. The SDGs need an inclusive approach to succeed by 2030 (Stafford-Smith et al., 2016). As Stafford-Smith et al. (2016, p. 2) concludes "if the SDGs are to succeed [....] and mobilize innovative sources of funding while phasing out investment in unsustainable activities in all countries". Moreover, Page and Sengupta (2015b) call for the new SDGs to make for a structural reforms of global institutional orders and systems. This can be linked to the ambitions as set out by CSV. CSV requires a systems shift, where the companies work from creating economic and societal benefits and working to create stakeholder investments, instead of doing good next to making profit and doing business as usual. These shifts in paradigms are complementary to each other. CSV should be able to create a major transformation of business thinking (Porter & Kramer, 2011). The overlap between CSV and the SDGs is that they both are aimed at creating a sustainably developed world, where entities first contribute to the welfare of society. Therefore, the two could be complementary in achieving the transformational shift society calls for.

To conclude, the main research question is:

> **Are companies in the UN Global Compact embracing the Sustainable Development Goals in their corporate (social responsibility) strategies?**

What the research aims to find out is whether member companies of UNGC are implementing the SDGs in their businesses. This could be through different means of implementation: communicating, reporting, mapping or strategic. This research aims to find out what means of implementation companies use to implement the SDGs in their business.

Next to that, it aims to find out whether being a part of the UNGC network can predict corporate involvement with sustainability, and the SDGs in particular. Moreover, it will be analysed whether the sample is indeed different from companies that are not a part of UNGC. If companies communicate that they do in fact aim to contribute to the SDGs, it is interesting to know in what way they do this: through their CSR strategies, or in their core strategies. Companies could have different reasons or drivers to contribute to the SDGs, and if so, in what way. Finally, if companies are in fact communicating about their contributions to the SDGs, it is interesting to see whether this actually is an accurate reflection of the businesses' contribution.

3. Methodology

Before discussing the data analysis and elaboration of the findings of this qualitative research, the organization of this research was reflected upon. The methodology of a research explains what the the research has done, how this has been done and why in this particular way (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The rule for (qualitative) academic research is that the research needs to be consistently repeatable. Therefore, the features of the research context and a reflection on its conduct are in the parts below.

3.1 Qualitative Research Design

In order to find an answer to the research question '*Are companies in the UN Global Compact embracing the Sustainable Development Goals in their corporate (social responsibility) strategies?*' a qualitative research was carried out. The research aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of corporate decisions on implementation of the SDGs. The structure of the research was based on the qualitative research cycle, as proposed by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011). The first part of qualitative research is the design cycle. In this cycle, the research question was formulated, secondary data analysis was conducted and a conceptual or theoretical framework was designed. This research was designed between February 2017 and July 2017. To get accustomed to the dynamics on the concepts, a secondary data collection has been done. The literature review in the earlier chapter explains this. Afterwards, the theoretical framework was designed based on the literature.

The second part in qualitative research is the ethnographic cycle. This cycle can be seen as a practical follow-up to the design cycle (Hennink et al., 2011). The key elements for data collection were determined during this phase, for example deciding on the research instruments, recruitment of participants and the data collection. The primary data analysis in the research was based on the conduct of eight semi-structured interviews. This will be elaborated upon later.

The third and last part of qualitative research is the analytic cycle. This last part analyses the data and eventually leads to theory development. (Hennink et al., 2011) This last analysis connected itself with the design cycle as the findings were discussed, through explanations and comparisons with the theoretical framework as put together in the literature review.

In the design cycle the theoretical framework is designed and the research question was formulated. The research question is '*are companies in the UN Global Compact embracing the Sustainable Development Goals in their corporate (social responsibility) strategies?*'. With this question in mind, there several sub-research questions were identified.

> *Sub-research question #1: Does being a part of the UN Global Compact network make a difference for the attitude towards sustainability and the SDGs?*

Companies within the UN Global Compact Network support the principles as set out by UNGC, on the sustainability topics of human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption. Seeing as most if not all the SDGs can be put under one of these pillars, it could be expected that companies already are working on the SDGs even if not explicitly mentioned or realised by the company. This

question aimed to uncover whether companies within the network are indeed more likely to embrace the SDGs.

Sub-research question #2: Are the SDGs mostly linked to corporate social responsibility strategies or core strategies?

This question uncovered whether companies link the SDGs to their CSR strategy, or perhaps to their overall corporate strategy. Perhaps they had other means of implementing the SDGs into the corporation. Moreover, this sub-research question aimed to uncover whether companies are truly embracing the SDGs in their core business, or whether it was some sort of add-on.

Sub-research question #3: What are drivers to link corporate contributions to sustainability through the SDGs?

The main research question assumed that companies know about the SDGs and want to contribute in some way. However, companies would have specific reasons, if aware of the SDGs, as to why they do or perhaps explicitly do not make the link between their strategies and the SDGs.

Sub-research question #4: How advanced is the communication in contributions to the SDGs with companies within the network: is it window dressing or transparency?

In a similar reasoning as with sub-research question #2, companies can choose to either explicitly do or do not communicate on their contributions to the SDGs. Effective stakeholder management is a key part of corporate contributions to sustainable development, as they are in part integral to one another. Therefore, companies could choose to use the SDGs in their corporate communication to engage with stakeholders and show the positive impacts the company is ensuring.

This research had three goals. First, the research aimed to uncover whether companies in the network are embracing the SDGs. Second, the research intended to identify the approaches and strategies of implementing the SDGs into corporate strategies, and what determines these approaches. Third and finally, the study aimed to explore in what ways companies communicate their contribution to the the realisation of the SDGs to their stakeholders. All of these questions are explorative, meaning they tried to uncover the reasoning or drivers for decision-making within corporations. Therefore, to reach the goals of this research and to answer these explorative questions, a qualitative research was conducted.

The specific qualitative research design chosen for the research was a taxonomy of indicators. In order to find out what companies were communicating, a taxonomy of indicators was created (van Tulder, 2017b). Taxonomies are a tool to classify complex, multi-faceted issues by creating a set of common conceptual domains and dimensions (Patton, 2002). Moreover, taxonomies are way to create a clear picture of the diverse and complex interventions, and the differences between them (Sofaer, 1999). This type of research can be classified as a qualitative content analysis, where data is categorized using categories (Morgan, 1993). The categories are derived from the data in part, but mostly on the basis of the literature, and are applied through close reading. Qualitative content analysis of used for analysing textual data and understanding a phenomenon, instead of creating generalizations of the sample based on statistical inference (Foreman & Damschroder, 2007). Therefore, this research can be identified as conventional content analysis, as its aim to create theory on the phenomenon as only limited theory and academic research on the corporate

implementation of the SDGs exists as of now (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This type of qualitative methods provides a refined approach to the specification of the complexity, as opposed to often quantitative interventions in relation to treatment or control (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). This taxonomy was a requisite to identify and describe different approaches of companies towards the implementation of the SDGs. To measure the approaches of implementation of the SDGs by companies, certain indicators were formulated. The indicators were used to assess performance to the implementation of the SDGs. The indicators were created on the basis of the literature. Based on the indicators, it was calculated whether a company took an inactive, reactive, active or proactive approach towards implementation of the SDGs, or whether they were somewhere between these stages.

In addition to the taxonomy, a case study was also carried out. The case study research design was chosen on top of the desk research on the indicators for several reasons. The indicators were meant to give a rough image of the information available for external stakeholders on the way companies were embracing the SDGs. The indicators however only give information that was available at the surface. Cases studies allowed for a lot more detail, and information that was richer and of greater depth than through desk research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Yin (2003) identified several moments at which a case study design is right. The first is when the focus of a research is questions such as 'how' and 'why'. The research aimed to find out if and in what way companies within the network embrace the SDGs, and in addition the reasoning for this. Case study is also suitable when the aim is to uncover contextual conditions, which was also the case, as the indicators could only uncover so much. The in-depth interviews were the suitable qualitative research method, as it allowed the researchers to assess and learn about the context and reflections of the interviewees (McCracken, 1988).

To be able to formulate practical implications and suggestions for businesses, and because this research is of exploratory nature, the case study method was right. The study aimed to identify whether companies link their corporate strategies to the SDGS, in what ways they do this and the underlying reasons for this. There was no expectation that could be proven false or true, but the aim was rather to explore what companies were experiencing and what may help them in the future. Hence, first, the research was of an explorative nature. Moreover, these case studies could serve as a way to either confirm or contradict what has been concluded about the company based on the indicators.

3.2 List of indicators

In this section the list of indicators that was used in the research is presented (table 3, 4, 5 and 6). The indicators were set up on the basis of the four business cases for sustainability as identified by Van Tulder et al. (2014), the implementation likelihood framework (van den Brule, 2008) and the literature review on CSR and the SDGs, including adaptations from Horzum (2014). As concluded in the literature review, the indicators were predictions of a company's involvement in the SDGs based on their business case archetype. To apply to all companies in the network, be it large of small and other factors, the indicators were relatively rough. This rough image of the companies was later checked for some cases. However, they gave a good first idea of what the company's attitude towards the SDGs was. To make the indicators more precise, some indicators took these kind of

factors into account. The indicators are presented in the order from inactive to proactive. There is a short description for every indicator and they are explained generally below.

The first 4 indicators in all the 4 approaches was based on the SDGs in general. First, the indicator checks whether there was a statement on the SDGs, either in the reports or on the website, and how advanced this statement was. Next, the partnerships and networks related to the SDGs were evaluated, where zero to two was considered inactive or reactive, and three and more was considered active or proactive. However, with the partnerships, there was a distinction between whether the company was rather small or rather large, as this would have an effect on the total number of partnerships the company could handle. Next to that, the nature of the partnership was of importance. Following, the internationalization score of each company was assessed by the transparency benchmark 2016 (The Crystal, 2016), set out by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Transparency benchmark is an annual research, aimed at assessing the content and quality of CSR reports published by Dutch companies (Transparantiebenchmark, 2017). It was assessed by criteria, which are revised each year to be representative of the context each year. Following the ladders as identified by The Crystal, there are 5 groups: leaders, followers, peloton, laggards and companies with zero scores. The leaders could be expected to be proactive, because of their high scores on being transparent and of high quality. The followers were to be seen as active companies, even though their name may suggest it to were reactive. However, they were still farther than the pack on their CSR communications. Next, there was the peloton, the middle and a rather large group. These companies were reactive, because they were involved mildly in sustainability, but did not want to be frontrunner on the subject per se. Finally, the laggards and the companies with zero scores were to be considered inactive companies, which was a very large group. They were expected not be truly embracing sustainability. When companies were not included in the transparency benchmark at all, they were also considered inactive on this indicator.

Finally, it was assessed whether the SDGs were linked to corporate strategies, be it CSR or core strategies, and how elaborate this relation was. With this, there were several functional areas of management which could be identified as being linked to the SDGs, because the more strategic the area the SDGs were linked to, the more important the link was. Van Tulder (van Tulder et al., 2014) identified four different management disciplines in accordance with the four attitudes: the management discipline related to the inactive attitude was functional areas, with the reactive attitude general or international management, with the active attitude strategic management or international business, and with the proactive attitude leadership or business-society management. Moreover, it is more generally accepted that sustainability must be integrated into the functional areas of management (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005). Next to that, van Tulder & van der Zwart (2005) identified different functional orientation to Public Affairs as well.

At the first stage, the inactive phase, companies were expected to do nothing related to the SDGs. The way companies communicate about their contributions to CSR was another important factor in what a companies' attitude to sustainability was. In the inactive attitude, companies at most saw CSR as a public relations tool. The reactive business tool, would not view CSR as a business case either, and would probably see CSR as corporate philanthropy related to the SDGs. Same with the inactive attitude, the reactive attitude identified no business case in sustainability, and therefore saw their contributions to sustainability as a completely separate business activity resulting from external pressure to contribute in some way to sustainability, thus philanthropy. Next to that,

corporate reputation could be affected when companies do not have proper CSR policies in place and did not wish to add these, thus reputation management was of importance here. Next, in the active business case, companies were trying to incorporate sustainability contributions in different functional management areas: one of these was corporate communication, but also other areas such as human resources, marketing, supply and innovation. Most importantly, companies with a CSR strategy in place where the SDGs were being addressed can be seen as active companies. Companies with an active attitude tended to use public affairs to show stakeholders how their company was contributing to sustainability. Finally, companies with a proactive attitude went that step further: they did not just incorporate it into different functional areas, but embraced sustainability in the strategy and let this flow into the company from there onwards. Public affairs were therefore addressed rather strategic, assessing whether communicating on something was necessary or useful, for stakeholders and the company. These different types of embracement of the SDGs was incorporated into the indicators.

As for specific SDGs, there were also 4 indicators. First, a general check on contributions to one or more specific SDGs. Next, in a similar sense as the partnerships and networks on the SDGs in general, there was also a check for partnerships related to specific SDGs. Again, when a company had zero to two partnerships it was considered inactive or reactive, and three and more was considered active or proactive. Than it was checked whether the company has performed a materiality assessment on the SDGs, and it what way this played a role within the business. Finally, it was checked whether the work on the individual SDGs fits within either one, two or all three of the triple bottom line pillars, as found by Elkington (1998).

A company was considered as fully inactive/reactive/active/proactive, when at least 5 out of 9 total indicators per stage were present. When 3 to 5 inactive indicators were present, and 4 to 5 reactive, active or proactive indicators were present, the company was moving from inactive to reactive. In a similar way, when 3 to 5 reactive indicators were present, and 3 to 5 active or proactive indicators were present, the company was moving from reactive to active. And finally, when 3 to 5 active indicators were present, and 3 to 5 proactive indicators were present, the company was moving from active to proactive.

Table 3: List of indicators for inactive approaches towards the SDGs

INDICATORS FOR INACTIVE APPROACHES	
A.I.	**GENERAL APPROACHES**
A.I.1.	**No explicit statements on the SDGs** The company has no statement on the SDGs
A.I.2.	**No partnerships on the SDGs** The company is not engaged in any partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle the SDGs
A.I.3.	**Not involved in any network or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs** The company is not involved in a network or initiative surrounding sustainable development, or more specific, the SDGs

A.I.4.	**No mention of the SDGs in corporate management areas** The company has no mention of the SDGS in any functional areas of management, nor in other policies or strategies.
A.I.5.	**Companies with no scores, zero scores or laggards in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder** The companies have zero scores or are identified as laggards in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder 2016.
A.II.	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
A.II.1.	**No explicit statements on a specific SDG** The company has no statements on a contribution to a specific SDG.
A.II.2.	**No partnerships on a specific SDG** The company is not engaged in any partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle a specific SDG
A.II.3.	**No materiality matrix on the importance of specific SDGs** The company does not relate their materiality index to specific SDGs
A.II.4.	**No specific SDGs on either one of the triple bottom line pillars** The company mentions no explicit contributions to SDGs related to either the environmental, the social or the economic pillar of sustainability

Table 4: List of indicators for reactive approaches towards the SDGs

	INDICATORS FOR REACTIVE APPROACHES
B.I.	**GENERAL APPROACHES**
B.I.1.	**Small statement declaring support for the SDGs** The company has a simple, single statement that it wants to contribute to the realization of the SDGs
B.I.2.	**A relatively small amount of rather straightforward partnerships on the SDGs** The company is engaged in a relatively small amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle the SDGs: with SMEs one partnership, and with large companies one or two partnerships. The partnerships are rather straightforward, with for example an NGO, or a firm within the supply chain.
B.I.3.	**Involved in one or two networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs** The company is involved in one or two networks or initiatives surrounding sustainable development, or more specific, the SDGs
B.I.4.	**Statement that the SDGs are addressed in philanthropy or communication/reputation management** The company mentions that the SDGs are addressed through their philanthropy or communications management, mostly aimed at reputation management.

B.I.5.	**Company is identified as peloton in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder** The companies identified as peloton in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder 2016.
B.II.	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
B.II.1.	**Small statement declaring support for a specific SDG** The company a simple, single statement that it wants to contribute to the realization of a specific SDG.
B.II.2.	**A relatively small amount of rather straightforward partnerships on a specific SDG** The company is engaged in a relatively small amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle a specific SDG: with SMEs one partnership, and with large companies one or two partnerships. The partnerships are rather straightforward, with for example an NGO, or a firm within the supply chain.
B.II.3.	**The company has a materiality matrix involving sustainability issues related to the SDGs** The company has a materiality matrix, in which the company aims to work on SDG-related sustainability issues
B.II.4.	**Contributions to specific SDGs on one of the triple bottom line pillars** The company mentions explicit contributions to SDGs related to either the environmental, the social or the economic pillar of sustainability

Table 5: List of indicators for active approaches towards the SDGs

	INDICATORS FOR ACTIVE APPROACHES
C.I.	**GENERAL APPROACHES**
C.I.1.	**Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of the SDGs** The company has an explicit statement in which it explains its support and wish to contribute to the realization of the SDGs
C.I.2.	**A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on the SDGs** The company is engaged in a relatively moderate amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle the SDGs: with SMEs two partnership, and with large companies three or four partnerships. The partnerships are well thought out and a little more complex, meaning public-private partnerships or profit-non-profit partnerships.
C.I.3.	**Involved in three or four networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs** The company is involved in three or four networks or initiatives surrounding sustainable development, or more specific, the SDGs

C.I.4.	**Statement and elaboration that the SDGs are addressed in corporate social responsibility strategies, and/or other functional areas of management** The company embraces the SDGs in their CSR strategy and/or explains in what way the SDGs are addressed in their functional areas of management.
C.I.5.	**Company is identified as followers in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder** The companies identified as followers in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder 2016.
C.II.	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
C.II.1.	**Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of a specific SDG** The company has an explicit statement in which it explains it support and wish to contribute to the realization of a specific SDG.
C.II.2.	**A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on a specific SDG** The company is engaged in a relatively moderate amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle a specific SDG: with SMEs two partnership, and with large companies three or four partnerships. The partnerships are well thought out and a little more complex, meaning public-private partnerships or profit-non-profit partnerships.
C.II.3.	**The company has a materiality matrix on the SDGs** The company has a materiality matrix that focuses on how material the specific SDGs are for the company
C.II.4.	**Contributions to specific SDGs on two of the triple bottom line pillars** The company mentions explicit contributions to SDGs related to two pillars out of the environmental, the social and the economic pillars of sustainability

Table 6: List of indicators for proactive approaches towards the SDGs

	INDICATORS FOR PROACTIVE APPROACHES
D.I.	**GENERAL APPROACHES**
D.I.1.	**Strategic statements on the SDGs, with an elaborate explanation of the concrete way in which the SDGs are embraced in corporate strategies** The company has strategic statements on the SDGs and has multiple, explicit and concrete explanations of the way in which the company embraces the SDGs
D.I.2.	**A relatively large amount of complex partnerships on the SDGs** The company is engaged in a relatively large amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle the SDGs: with SMEs three or more partnership, and with large companies five or more partnerships. The partnerships are well thought out and quite complex, meaning public-private partnerships or profit-non-profit partnerships, and the partnerships are of a strategic nature.

D.I.3.	**Involved in a five or more networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs** The company is involved in five or more networks or initiatives surrounding sustainable development, or more specific, the SDGs
D.I.4.	**The SDGs are fully embraced in corporate core strategies** The SDGs are a part of the core business strategies, not as a separate CSR strategy, but embraced in the entire company through its core strategies.
D.I.5.	**Company is identified as leaders in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder** The companies identified as leaders in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder 2016.
D.II.	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
D.II.1.	**Strategic statements on a specific SDG, with an elaborate explanation of the concrete way in which this SDG is embraced in corporate strategies** The company has strategic statements on a specific SDG and has multiple, explicit and concrete explanations of the way in which the company embraces the SDG
D.II.2.	**A relatively large amount of complex partnerships on a specific SDG** The company is engaged in a relatively large amount of partnerships (with suppliers, NGOs, firms, government) to tackle a specific SDG: with SMEs three or more partnership, and with large companies five or more partnerships. The partnerships are well thought out and quite complex, meaning public-private partnerships or profit-non-profit partnerships, and the partnerships are of a strategic nature.
D.II.3.	**The materiality matrix of specific SDGs is integral to the company** The company mentions specific SDG in their materiality matrix and constructs their corporate strategies on the basis of this assessment
D.II.4.	**Contributions to specific SDGs on all three of the triple bottom line pillars** The company mentions explicit contributions to SDGs related to the environmental, the social and the economic pillars of sustainability

3.3 Sampling

The businesses for the case study method were chosen from the members of the Global Compact Network Netherlands. The reason for this was that the member companies within GCNL were expected to be interested in contributing to sustainable development, by undersigning the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. Moreover, the members were expected to have heard about the SDGs and the need for the implementation through communication on the SDGs by amongst others GCNL. Therefore, the expectation was that these companies have already heard about it, and therefore also thought about what it means for their organisation. Companies could therefore logically be inquired about their ambitions, ideas and implementations efforts. The efforts of the member companies are likely to go beyond 'low hanging fruit', or in more exact terms, the businesses which were included in the sample were expected to be active (or pro-active) in the typology of four CSR-approaches by Van Tulder et al. (2014). However, what was important to

mention is that from now on, members of UNGC are not in any way required or explicitly expected to report or communicate on their contributions to the SDGs.

3.3.1 Background information on Global Compact Network Netherlands

The Global Compact Network Netherlands was set up in 2007 as a local Global Compact network (Global Compact Network Netherlands, 2017). The network brings Netherlands-based organisations together, to further the Global Compact's 10 principles and, since the introduction of the SDGs, also the realization of the SDGs. One of the larger projects was the "Doing business with respect for human rights", a guide based on case studies and experiences of large Dutch multinationals on how corporates can conduct business while respecting human rights (Global Compact Network Netherlands, Oxfam, & Shift, 2017).

Global Compact Network Netherlands (GCNL) has several project related to the SDGs, such as a Webinar on implementation of the SDG's and it is currently writing a booklet about the SDGS with examples and other information (Global Compact Network Netherlands, 2017). It shows businesses are interested in learning about how to implement the SDGs or how other organisations go about it. Next to that, the network organizes events that are about the SDGs and how business can implement them. The SDGs do not just need governments and business to become active, civil society is also needed to ensure the realization of the SDGs by 2030 through for example partnerships with governments or businesses (Hajer et al., 2015). The network also facilitates this, by also having participants from civil society.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the responsibility of implementing the SDGs (Rijksoverheid, 2017). For this aim, they have appointed a special coordinator. Based on agreements on monitoring and measuring progress on the implementation of the SDGs, countries will report in the coming years. The Dutch Government emphasizes the need for close cooperation between ministries, companies and civil society. The Dutch Governments has started by making a base-line measurement of how far the SDGs are currently implemented in the Netherlands. The Central Statistical Office has set out this report (CBS, 2016). It shows that implementation of some SDGs was easier and already at a further stage than some other SDGs. This also shows what still needs to be done. Moreover, the Dutch Government has reported to the UN on what the progress of the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands is (Rijksoverheid et al., 2017). With a similar conclusion of the Central Statistical Office report, there is lots of progress in the Netherlands and there are some areas that need attention. Moreover, the goals are an inspiration to accelerate progress. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs invites businesses, knowledge institutes, civil society organizations, (local) governments and citizens were invited to give their opinion on how the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands is going (SDG Charter, 2017a). This information will be used in the report that the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs will send to the UN.

Moreover, the SDG Charter was set up in September 2014, with over seventy signatory organisations from both business and civil society, to work together to achieve the SDG's by 2030 (SDG Charter Netherlands, 2015). The SDG Charter is active on social media as well, to get the SDG's well-known with organisations in the Netherlands, through their "SDG Nederland" project, or "SDGs Netherlands" (SDG Charter, 2017b). The Charter works on creating awareness, and organises conferences such as the Transform Your World event on the 8th of December, to influence businesses and policy makers to work towards achieving the SDGs (SDG Charter, 2016).

3.3.2 Information on the sample

This research focused on Dutch-based companies. This limitation was also a benefit, seeing as the companies were subject to a similar environment and were therefore more comparable. The companies have gone through to similar economic cycles, have received the same information about sustainable development and the SDGs through UNGC and GCNL communication, which means the differences in activity surrounding the SDGs could be explained by other factors than the economic circumstances or communication towards the organisation. These other factors could for example be intrinsic motivations such as the want to fulfil corporate social responsibilities, or extrinsic motivation such as customers asking for information about how the organisation is contributing to sustainable development.

For the taxonomy, the total list of 106 companies that were enrolled with the UN Global Compact that were based in the Netherlands was assessed (UN Global Compact, 2017c). The members and the indicators were all checked for a last time on the 20th of July 2017. Of these 106 companies, there were 9 companies that were not registered with UN Global Compact in the Netherlands, however these companies also have Dutch quarters, with which they were actively involved in the Dutch Global Compact network. Therefore, they were included in the final sample. It would not be representative of GCNL without also including the results of these companies.

As of June 2017, there were 23 NGOs, foundations and other type of institutions in GCNL in total. However, they were not included in the sample. There was 1 academic, 5 foundations, 2 local business associations, 2 cities, 11 global NGOs and 2 local NGOs. For the scope of this research only the larger and SME companies were used, because the aim was to find out how corporations especially implement the SDGs in their business processes. As for the used sample of 106 companies, there were 70 large companies, meaning with 250 employees or more, and 36 SMEs, with 250 employees or less. In the figure below there is information on the employee amounts (figure 5).
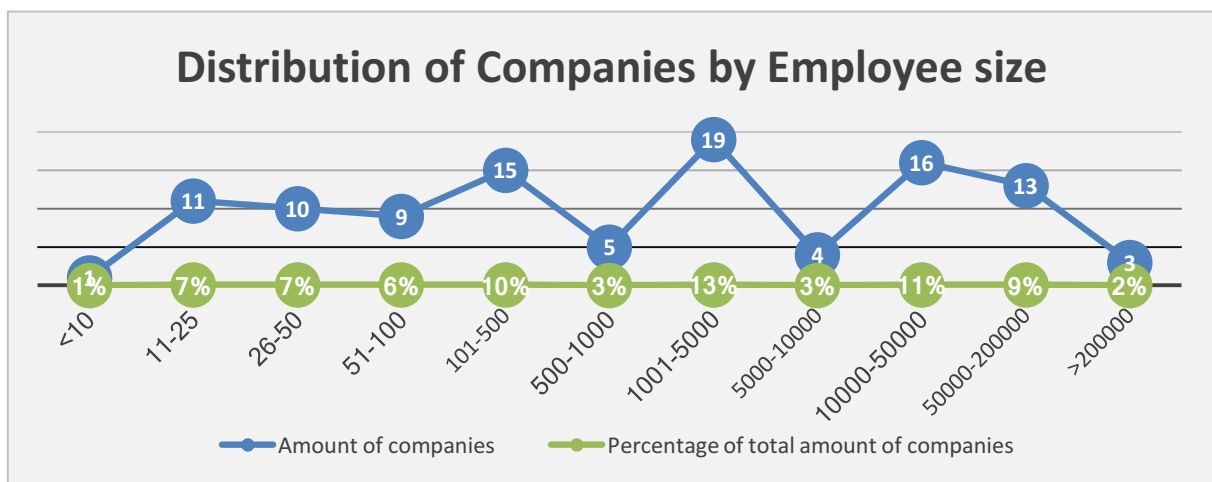

Figure 5: Distribution of Companies by Employee size

In the figure below the different sectors are shown, with the amount of company each and the corresponding percentage (see figure 6). The largest sectors are financial services, support services and general industrials. The other sectors can be found in the figure.
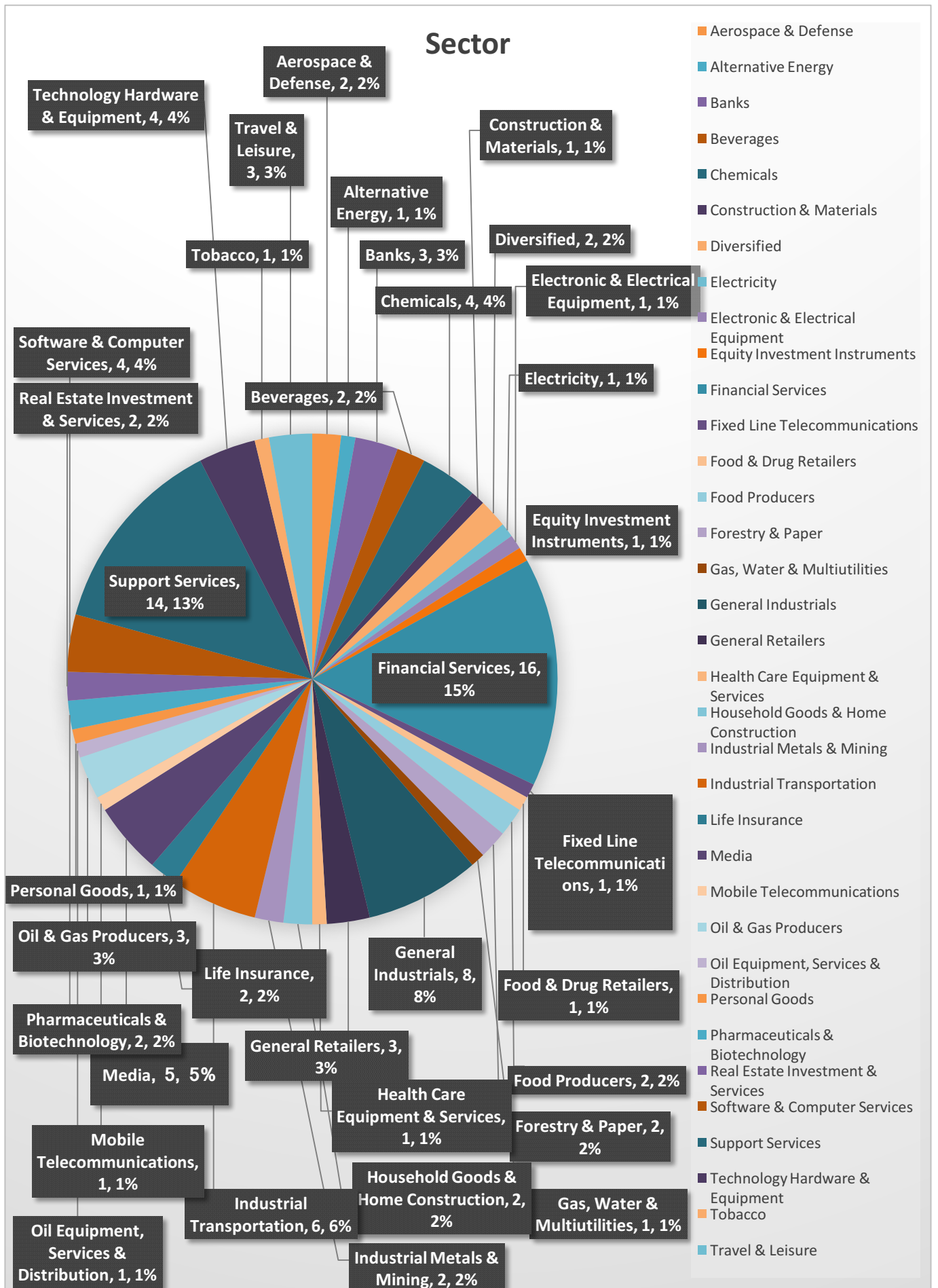
Figure 6: Sectors of UN Global Compact Network Netherlands

3.3.3 Companies selected for case study

The indicators were checked for the entire group of Dutch companies. The final sample of the case study was decided based upon information and characteristics of all the member companies of GCNL, the information on the basis of the indicators. For the research, the final sample consisted of five member companies of GCNL. Eight is the number of cases suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) as an adequate number for theory-development, however due to feasibility and the extensive taxonomy created, five was adequate in this case. The case selection of these cases was made on the basis of the results of the taxonomy of indicators. There had to be cases from different industries, different company sizes and difference in attitudes towards the SDGs, as based on the taxonomy. The findings of the research were to be generalizable. The choice of the sample ultimately limited the generalizability; however, the aim was still to cover the entire network as such to make claims that were relevant for the network. Moreover, as Marshall (1996) found, a truly random sample is applicable when complete generalizability is aimed for, where in this case it is mostly the aim to create a deeper understanding of a complex issue.

The final sample consisted of 106 companies. Of this sample, 5 cases of business within the network were chosen for the next step in the research: an in-depth interview. Based on the found indicators and attitudes, the suggestion was to interview five cases. Of these five cases, there were companies with different attitudes towards sustainability identified through the indicators. After assessing the indicators for all the companies in the sample, interviews could provide some in-depth information. The companies that were chosen represent different sectors, sizes and attitudes towards sustainability. The five businesses were called A, B, C, D, and E. All of the names of the business have been changed into letters to protect the businesses. As for the eventual case selection, a combination between the convenience and judgement sample was used (Marshall, 1996). Since there was a limited amount of time and resources available, not every company in the sample was an option for the case study, leading to a convenience sample. The information based on the indicators was mostly used for the eventual decision of the cases, therefore it was also a judgement sample.

The cases that were eventually chosen were three companies in the active phase, one company in the inactive phase, and one company in the inactive to reactive phase. Thus, there were two companies in the inactive/reactive side towards the SDGs, where a triggering event and internal alignment is needed to progress towards an active attitude towards the SDGs, and three companies in the active phase, where external alignment is needed to progress to a proactive attitude (van Tulder et al., 2014). The reasoning behind the choices for these companies was to be able to find out what the differences were for companies that are struggling with the internal alignment, and companies that are struggling with the external alignment. Next to that, the inactive and inactive to reactive companies were both small and the active companies were all large, to be able to compare the two. Moreover, the amount of companies within the inactive/reactive groups that were SME was relatively larger than the amount of companies within the active/proactive groups that were SME, and vice versa.

Finally, there were companies from different sectors. Three companies were based in the financial services, support services and the general industrials sectors, which were the most represented sectors in the sample. Two companies in the financial services were interviewed, as they are the most represented sector in the sample in total, however one of these companies was large and

identified as active, and the other was SME and identified as inactive to reactive. This way, there could also be made a comparison between these two companies, on the basis of the sector. The fixed line tele-communications sector was represented only once, both in the total sample as well as in the case study. This was to see whether there was a difference between the sectors that were highly represented and those that were not.

3.3.4 Control group

The research is of qualitative nature, which means there is no intervention or clean control group as is usual with quantitative research for testing the hypothesis (Muldoon, Manuck, & Matthews, 1990). However, to be able to conclude that companies in the network are actively embracing the SDGs, it was important to see whether companies outside the network are behaving differently. Therefore, there were some so-called control groups identified, even though this is not a standard characteristic of qualitative research. The comparison was not of statistical measure, as the studies to which the results from this research was compared to were also similar researches based on qualitative data.

First, the sample was be compared to the study by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2016), which gave a first glance on the progress of the SDGs in the Netherlands. This way, it could be evaluated whether the companies are working on individual SDGs which are at a good point already in the Netherlands, or those at which the Netherlands is lacking.

Next to that comparison, the sample was also compared to another sample of companies working on individual SDGs. Being a part of the UNGC should qualify the company as a sustainability frontrunner, if there is no window dressing, greenwashing or bluewashing present. The sample was therefore compared to a study by PwC (PwC, 2016), scoring corporate reporting on the SDGs. For this research, PwC decided on 25 Dutch based companies of different sector and sizes, listed and non-listed, and government-owned and privately held companies. Even though the sample was not statistically representative, the study strived to give an overall pictures of the relevance of the SDGs in corporate reporting. The sample gave an idea of reporting on the SDGs as done by companies in the Netherlands, rather large and already reporting on the SDGs. Therefore, they were considered frontrunners in sustainability in the Netherlands, meaning there were also companies in the study that are part of GCNL. The study however gave an idea of the average reporting on the SDGs by frontrunners on sustainability in the Netherlands. To be able to compare the two samples, for each company that reported on contributions on individual SDGs, it was marked down which SDGs these are.

In a similar way, the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) performed an assessment on the companies in the benchmark, and what their view on the SDGs was. Questions in the assessment are meant to find out whether companies have heard about the SDGs, if so if they have ambitions to work on them or not. If they have already taken steps, this could also be answered. These results on attitudes towards the SDGs and ways of implementing the SDGs of the group of companies was compared to the attitudes of the GCNL sample as well.

3.4 Conceptual model and hypothesis

The sample consisted of companies that are part of the UN Global Compact Network Netherlands. These companies became a member of the UNGC because of their want to contribute to sustainable development, and therefore they were expected to go beyond the traditional sense of CSR. This sample was thus the independent variable. The dependent variable was what this predicts for companies involved in the SDGs. Because the members of Global Compact became a member because of their want to contribute to sustainable development, it could be concluded that, if aware of the SDGs, they would want to contribute to the SDGs as well. Moreover, the sample was compared to the control group, consisting of other sustainability frontrunner companies in the Netherlands.

This research aimed to close theoretical gaps, answering several questions. Do companies in the network indeed embrace the SDGs; does being a member of UNGC predict corporate involvement with the SDGs? Another related question was what other factors influence this prediction. Therefore, as intervening variable to the relation between the sample and the corporate involvement with the SDGs was the company characteristics, such as the sector and the company size. Another question was whether the representation of the company as found by desk research is correct of the real embracement of the SDGs.

The conceptual model could therefore be summarized as followed (figure 7):
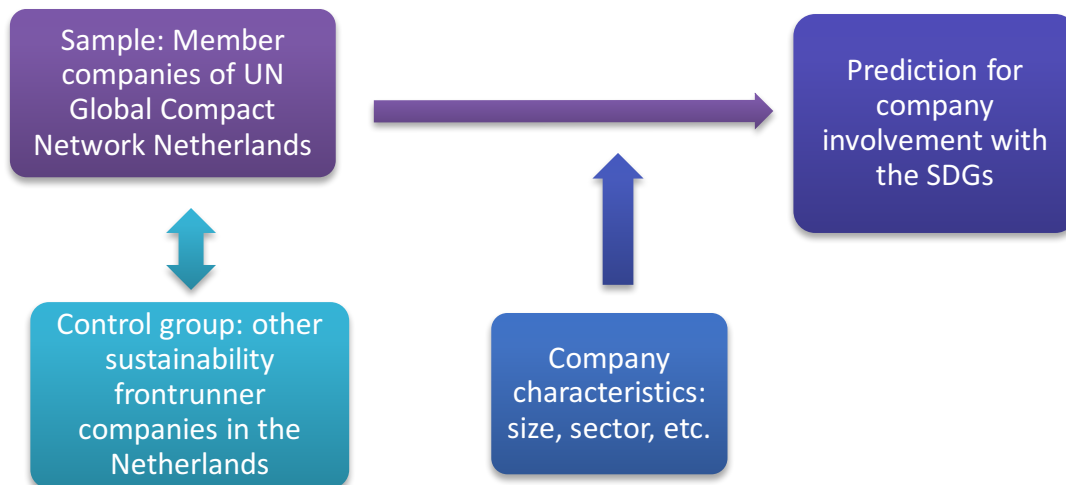

Figure 7: Conceptual Model

3.5 Data collection & Analysis

3.5.1 Data collection through desk research

A list of indicators was developed to be able to identify and classify approaches of companies towards implementation of the SDGs. Qualitative data was gathered for the companies in the entire sample to be able to fill in the list of indicators. The qualitative data was gathered through document analysis and interview, and thus was text-based, as there are other possible methods of qualitative data collection, such as group discussions and observations (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002).

The qualitative technique to facilitate the task was a content analysis, a systematic technique that compresses larger amounts of texts into a smaller amount of categories based coding (Stemler, 2001). When conducting a content analysis, first there had to be determined which data had to be analysed. As for the taxonomy of indicators, internal communication was used to gather data on a company's CSR activities and contributions to the SDGs. This included official documents, company websites and the annual Communications on Progress for the UN Global Compact. All companies' CSR reports and corporate websites were retrieved and investigated. Next, based on the indicators as mentioned earlier the data was categorised and the indicators were assessed. The data assessed was not used to derive the indicators, which is a prerequisite for content analysis (Foreman & Damschroder, 2007). Content analysis could be used to analyse textual data and not make generalizations from the data, but to understand a phenomenon.

On the basis of the individual's indicators, the companies were classified under one of the four attitudes towards the SDGs, or as being underway towards a next stage. This was defined based on where the most indicators fit. Seeing as the attitudes are not fixed and can be a bit more fluid, this diminished the reliability of the resulting attitude. Therefore, the in-between stages were also used.

For the case studies, the data collection method was interviews. The interviews were all with sustainability, CSR or similar type of managers. These managers were expected to have knowledge on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and projects the company has in place and how this was communicated to the outside world. Moreover, if there had been thought about if and how to link the corporate strategies with the SDGs, her or she was most likely the person to do this. Next to that, these managers were the ones that are actively involved in activities of GCNL, and they will have seen, read or heard about the SDGs through Global Compact communications.

3.5.2 Data collection through interviews

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The managers have received questions on how they have put together their corporate strategy and how they chose to communicate about it, especially linked to the SDGs. Next, they were asked about how they work towards the realisation of the SDGs and whether this was linked to corporate strategy, and why. Moreover, they were asked why they chose the earlier given answers, what were drivers for their decisions. Partnerships and network participating may be of influence as well, so there were also questions on this topic. Important issues for a company are often uncovered in a materiality assessment. Consequently, there were questions on whether the company performed a materiality assessment on the basis of the SDGs. Finally, the managers received questions on what were lessons learned in the process of implementing the SDGs. An overview of the structure of the interviews and the scope of the questions can be found in appendix B. Through in-depth interviews, detailed and perhaps non-public information could be obtained about the company and its strategy. The interviews were semi-structured to get the most

information to answer the research question, and to be able to gain extra information that allows for a deeper understanding of the difficulties with embracing the SDGs in corporate strategies.

The goal was to find information and drivers on how companies design their CSR strategy and how they aim to contribute to sustainable development through their business. Moreover, the goal was to find out why and how companies can link their corporate strategies to the SDGs, and what may be to added value of this. With this information, practical implications and suggestions for businesses that are unsure if and how to contribute to the realization of the SDGS could be concluded. This was found through the exploratory level of the interviews.

The interview guide (to be found in appendix B) was based on the elements of the theoretical framework. The interview guide was semi-structured with opening questions, key questions on the different elements and closing questions. The interviews were performed whilst finalizing the literature study, however due to the explorative nature of the research there was also an interactive element in the interviews in which the sharing of other views was encouraged. Moreover, some topical probes were added to adhere to certain subjects found in the literature. A weakness of this type of data collection is that there was a need to be flexible and change the topic order and to adapt ad hoc to participant input. The questions were therefore mostly open-ended and aimed to limit researcher's bias. In the interview request the topic of the interview was given and the participant confirmed to be aware of the existence of the SDGs. Therefore, this was not taken into the interview guide.

The interviews were conducted between the 4th and the 13th of July, and took place at the office of the participant, coincidentally all in The Hague, the Netherlands. The conversation took on average forty-five minutes. All interviews were taken by the author of this research. They were all recorded after consent of the participant, which audios and notes functioned as the basis for the transcription of the interviews. The interviews took place in Dutch, as all interviewees were most comfortable with the conversation being in Dutch, ensuring that the answers given were most valuable and realistic as possible.

3.6 Validity & Reliability

The validity was improved by checking the websites of the business whether it was able to confirm the interview data. The information on the websites was also used to improve the interpretation of the interview results. Voss et al. (Voss et al., 2002) concludes that multiples sources of evidence increases the validity of the research. Moreover, multiples case studies have higher external validity than single case studies.

The findings from the case study are specific to the cases being studied and are therefore not to be generalized. The relationships which were observed can provide however a basis for hypothesis which could be at the basis of future research. The findings were of main value to companies aiming to contribute to the realisation of SDGs, who can use the information to make better informed decisions about possible changes to their (CSR) strategies. The qualitative method allowed for the results to be interpreted and for the context of the results to be judged by whomever reading the research.

4. Results from desk research: the indicators

After creating the list of indicators, data was collected from all members of GCNL. The anonymized results can be found in Appendix A. Moreover, some cases were explored in-depth through interviews. In this chapter, the most important findings will be presented of what was found in the indicators. In the next chapter, the results from the interviews will be explored. As explained in the methodology, companies were classified in one of the attitudes towards sustainability, or more specifically the SDGs.

After a first analysis of the results of the indicators, some interesting first observations were found. However, due to the qualitative nature of the study, some iteration based on the literature was required and some adjustments to the indicators and following results were made. Specific examples for results on the indicators are explored in detail for the cases that were interviewed.

4.1 General findings
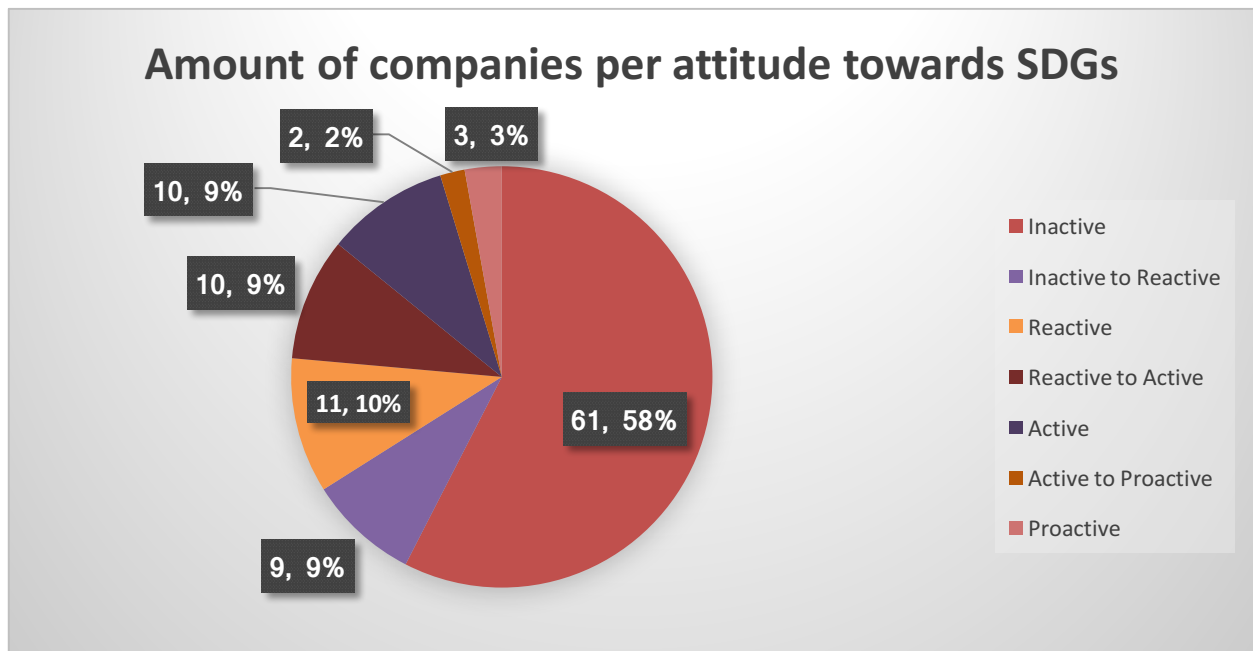
Figure 8: Amount of companies per attitude towards the SDGs

After this process, the first observation is that most of the companies in the network are classified as inactive, meaning they are not yet communicating on their contributions to the SDGs (figure 8). 61 companies, meaning about 58% of total companies has been identified with an inactive attitude towards the SDGs. The majority of these companies did not make explicit statements on the SDGs, any contributions or partnerships on the SDGs. Some of these companies did communicate in a small statement indicating their support for the SDGs, but most reported nothing at all. None of these companies reported on contributions to individual SDGs. 9 companies, or about 9% of the total companies, are in the inactive to reactive phase, showing some more enthusiasm for the SDGs. They often did report on overall contributions to the SDGs, but without an explanation or elaboration. The majority did not set out in what way and to which individual SDGs the company contributed at all. They are in transition towards becoming reactive, due to for example their partnerships, Transparency Benchmark ladder score, or by being involved in lots of networks. However, the indicators are still too sparse for them to be recognized as reactive. There are 11 companies that are

identified as reactive, about 10% of the total companies. These companies have simple statements ensuring their want to help realize the SDGs. Some mention that they believe they have impact on some individual SDGs, but they do not elaborate how this impact works or in what way they work towards realising them. Without the elaborations, it often seems the company is responding to outside questions on the SDGs. However, some companies make simple statements, saying the company wants to work on the SDGs and will report on how to do this in the future, showing that for some companies the SDGs are still too new. There are thus 81 companies out of total 106 companies, meaning 76%, with an inactive or reactive attitude towards the SDGs. Thus, these results show that about three quarters of the GCNL network has yet to become active towards contributing to the SDGs.

On the other side, ranging from the reactive to active phase until the proactive phase, there are 25 companies, or 24% of the total companies. Of these 25, there are both 10 companies in the reactive to active and in the active attitude towards the SDGs, both 9% of the total. The companies with a reactive to active attitude towards the SDGs often show a very sparse result, with some even showing indicators in all the four attitudes. It seems these companies aim to be active, but have yet to fully embrace the SDGs in all of its facets, meaning embracing the SDGs as a whole, but next to that also individual contributions to specific SDGs. The companies in the active phase tend not to have any indicators in the inactive phase, and all the indicators are either reactive, active or proactive. They have partnerships, on either the SDGs as a whole, or individually, are involved in lots of networks, etc. The most important facet of the companies in the active attitude towards the SDGs, is that they tend to describe their contributions to the SDGs with either their CSR department, their sustainability reporting, or other functional management areas. Finally, there are 2 companies (2%) progressing from active to proactive and 3 companies (3%) in the proactive phase. These companies show an aim to embrace the SDGs fully in their core business and core strategies, not just in the CSR department or separate functional areas of management. Moreover, they seem to have a lot of partnerships and are involved in lots of networks, showing the real embracement of the SDGs into the daily business conduct. The two companies in the active to proactive attitude towards the SDGs have about equal amounts of indicators in both categories, again showing the aim to really become proactive about to the SDGs, but are not quite there yet.

4.2 Company size

As for the company size, the results are rather typical, yet also expected on the basis of the literature (figure 9). In the total sample, there are 36 SMEs and 70 large companies. As for the relation between the size of the company and the attitude towards the SDGs, it seems that companies are more likely to become active, or even proactive, when they are large. In the inactive attitude towards the SDGs, there are a similar amount of SME and large companies, but as the attitudes become more active, the percentage of SMEs becomes smaller. In this sample, there is no SME in the active, active to proactive or proactive phase, and only one in the reactive and one in the reactive to active attitude towards the SDGs. It therefore seems as though larger companies are more equipped to activate themselves and embrace the SDGs sooner. Of the SMEs, about 86% is inactive, and the other about 14% is between inactive to reactive, and reactive to active. About 43% of large companies however is inactive as well. In total, 66% of large companies is between inactive and reactive, with 34% from reactive to active to proactive attitudes towards the SDGs.
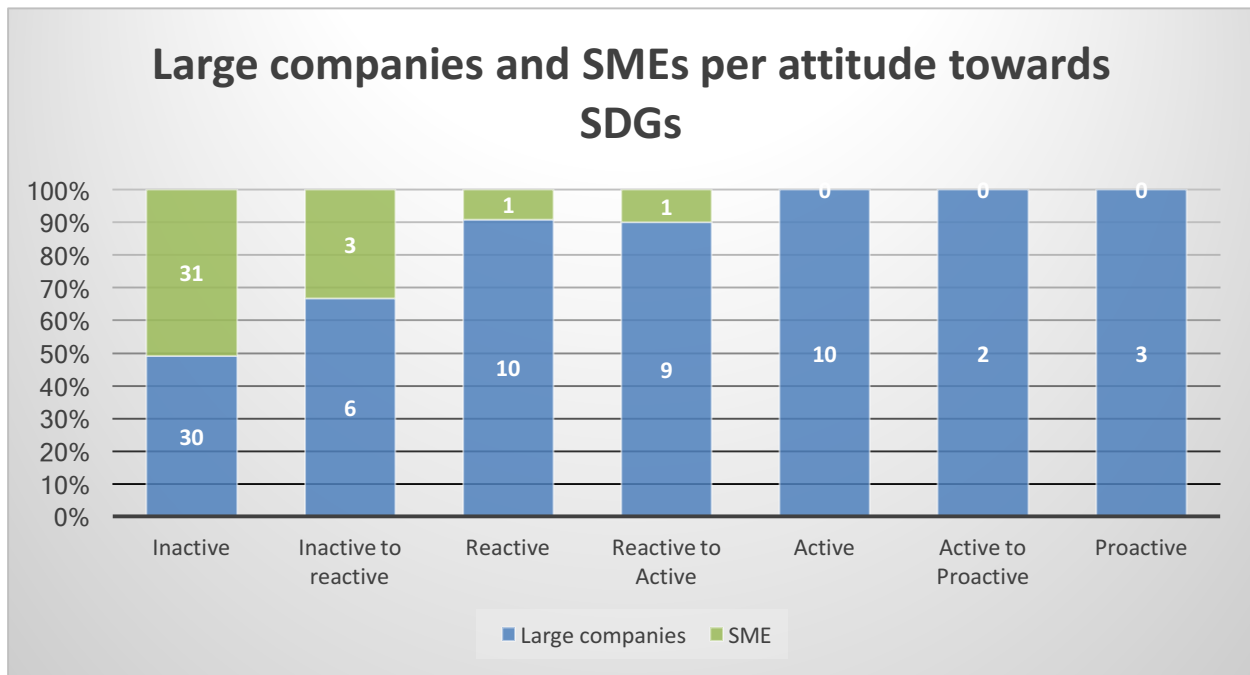
Figure 9: Large companies and SMEs per attitude towards SDGs

4.3 Attitudes towards the SDGs per sector

The most represented sectors in the sample are the support services, the general industrials, and the financial services (figure 10 & 11). Within the support services and financial services, the range of different attitudes is similar to the overall range of attitudes in the sample. The support services ranges from inactive to active, meaning nog active to proactive or proactive attitudes are present. However, about 45% is inactive. The financial services sector consists of half inactive and inactive to reactive companies, and the other half ranges between reactive to active and proactive. However, the general industrials sector has 7 inactive companies and 1 inactive to reactive company, and that is all. There are no reactive or more active companies in the sample in the general industrials sector, even though it is the third largest sector in the group.

Most of the smaller sectors only have companies with inactive attitudes towards the SDGs. There are of course exceptions, such as the alternative energy, banks, electricity, fixed-line tele communications, mobile telecommunications and tobacco. These sectors have companies ranging from reactive to active. Finally, the proactive companies are in the chemicals, financial services and the food producers' sectors. The other company in the food producers sector is inactive, and the other companies in the chemicals sector are inactive, reactive, active and proactive, showing a complete range of the attitudes to the SDGs.
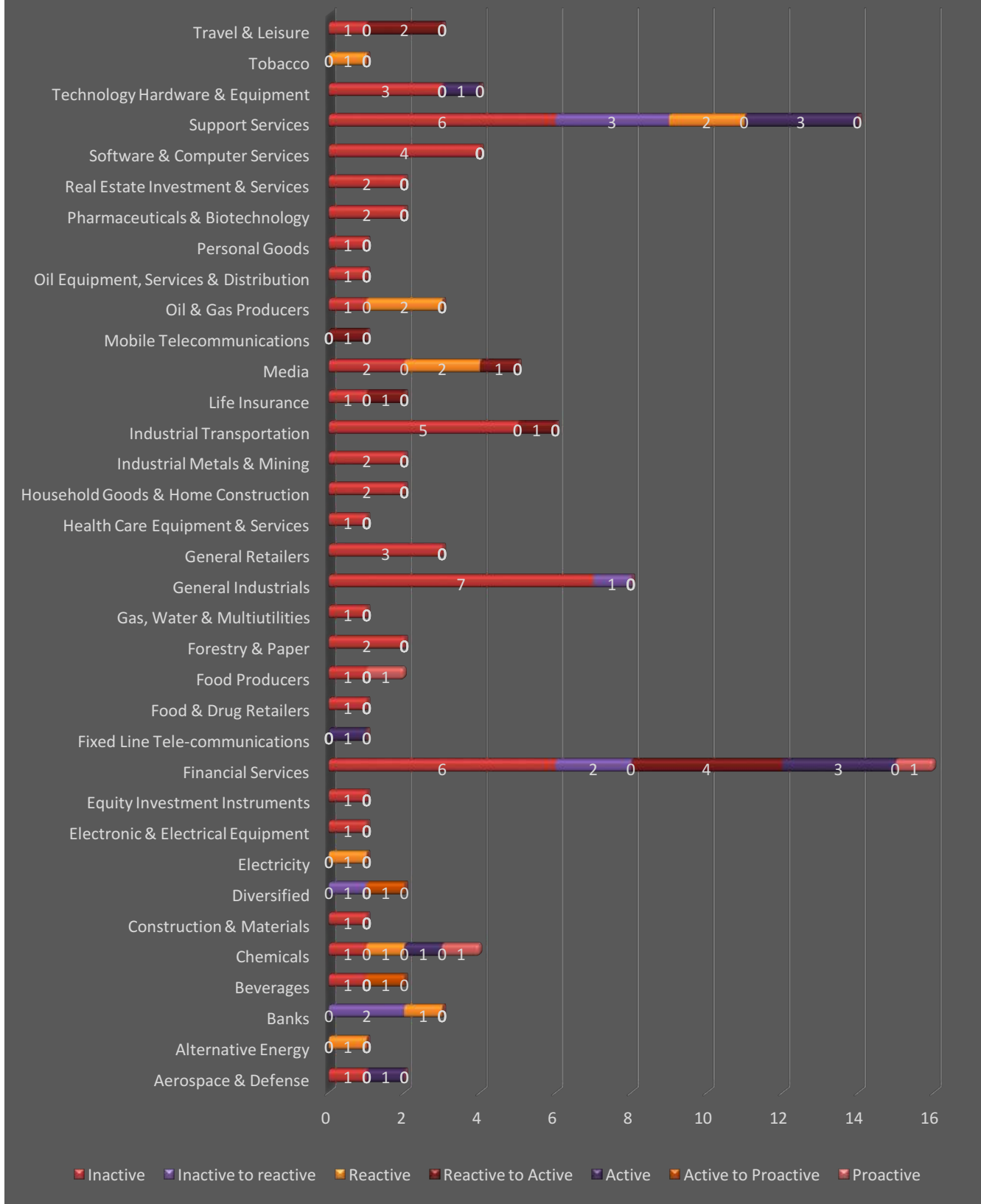
Figure 10: Attitudes towards the SDGs per sector

Figure 11: Attitudes towards the SDGs in percentage by sector

4.4 Communication on individual SDGs
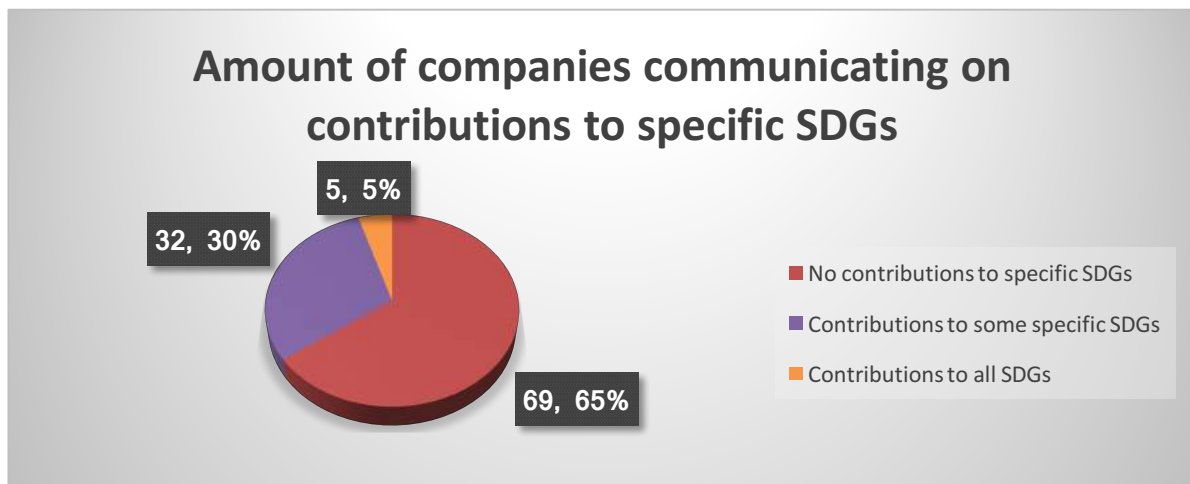
Figure 12: Amount of companies communicating on contributions to specific SDGs

Of the total 106 companies in the GCNL network, 69 of them, which is about 65%, do not communicate on contributions towards individual SDGs (figure 12). Of these 69 companies, there are 7 companies progressing from inactive to reactive, there is 1 reactive company, and the majority of the group consists of 61 inactive companies. In total, 37 out of 106 companies do indeed report on their contributions to individual SDGs, which is about 35% of the total. There are 5 companies that report to contribute to all the SDGs, with (short) explanations on how they contribute to these goals.

The SDG that companies mentioned most which they contribute is SDG 8, decent growth and economic growth. 27 companies of 37 companies say they contribute to SDG 8 (figure 13). Looking ahead to the results of the interviews suggests that companies believe all companies contribute to the SDGs, and SDG 8 is the easy target, because companies add to economic growth of the city of region they are a part of due to employment opportunities, investments in the area, etc. After that, climate change (SDG 13), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) follow closely. SDG 17 is also often mentioned in combination with the Global Compact Network, where the company can work with other companies on SDGs, thus relating to SDG 17. The

Figure 13: Amount of companies communicating their contribution to specific SDGs

ones that were least mentioned were no poverty (1), zero hunger (2) and life below water (14). Reasons for not contributing to goals 1 and 2 were related to them being mostly an issue in non-developed countries, thus countries do not feel like it is their responsibility.

4.5 Contributions to individual SDGs by attitude

In the inactive attitude, none of the companies reported on contributing to individual SDGs (figure 14). In the next phase, the active to reactive attitude towards the SDGs, there are only 2 out of 9 companies reporting on contributions to individual SDGs. One of these companies reported contributing to all the SDGs, and the other to SDG 5 on gender equality & SDG 7 on clean water and sanitation. This is rather typical, because SDG 7 is at the bottom of the companies contributing to it. An average amount of companies communicates on SDG 5.
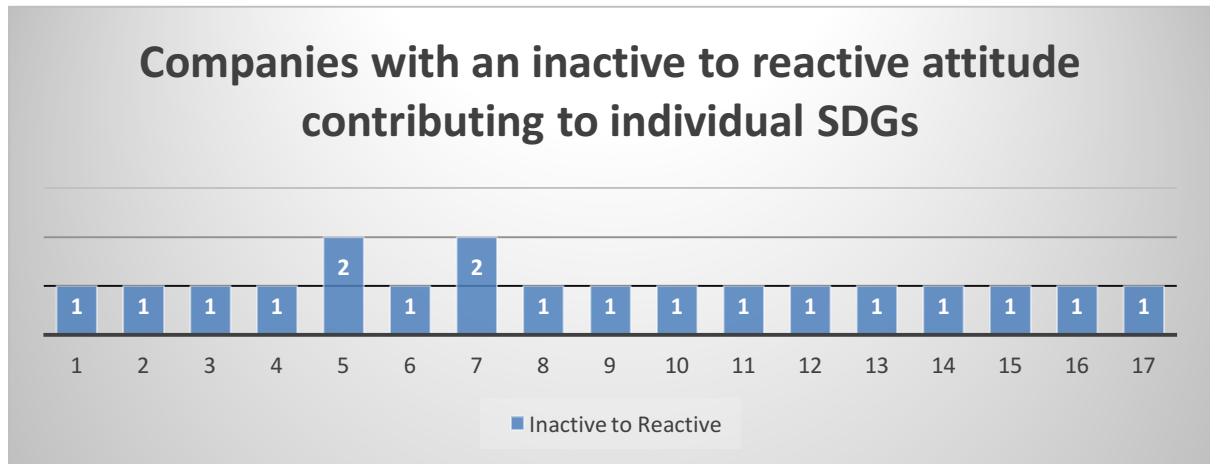
Figure 14: Companies with an inactive to reactive attitude contributing to individual SDGs

Quite some companies in the reactive attitude towards the SDGs reported on contributions to individual SDGs (figure 15). The range of SDGs contributions is similar to the overall range of SDG contributions in the entire sample, with there being little contributions to SDG 1 and 2, and the largest amount to SDG 8. There are 11 companies in the reactive attitude towards the SDGs, of which thus about half of them communicate on individual SDGs. This is however in line with the fact that the companies are in the reactive phase, as most do not yet communicate on individual SDGs at all.
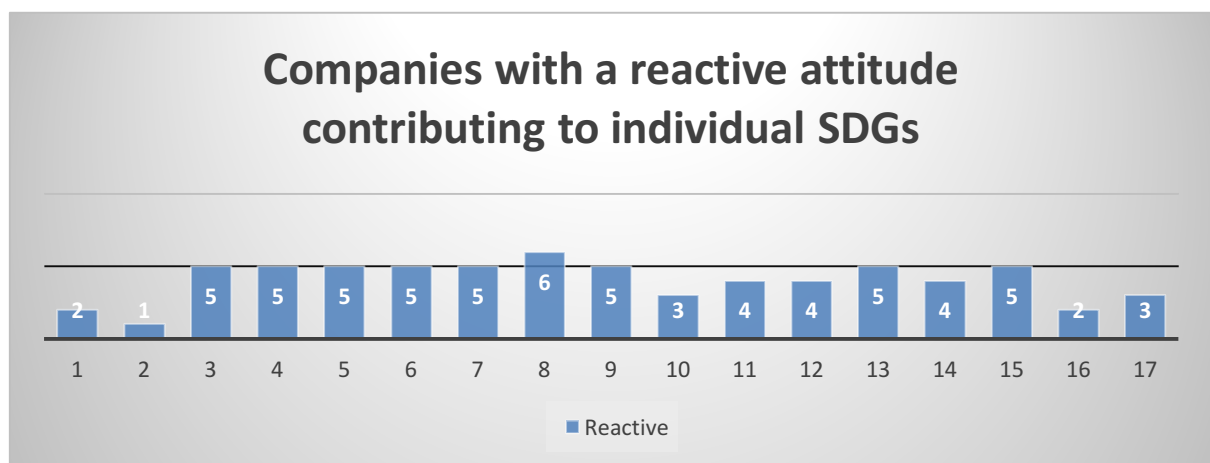
Figure 15: Companies with a reactive attitude contributing to individual SDGs
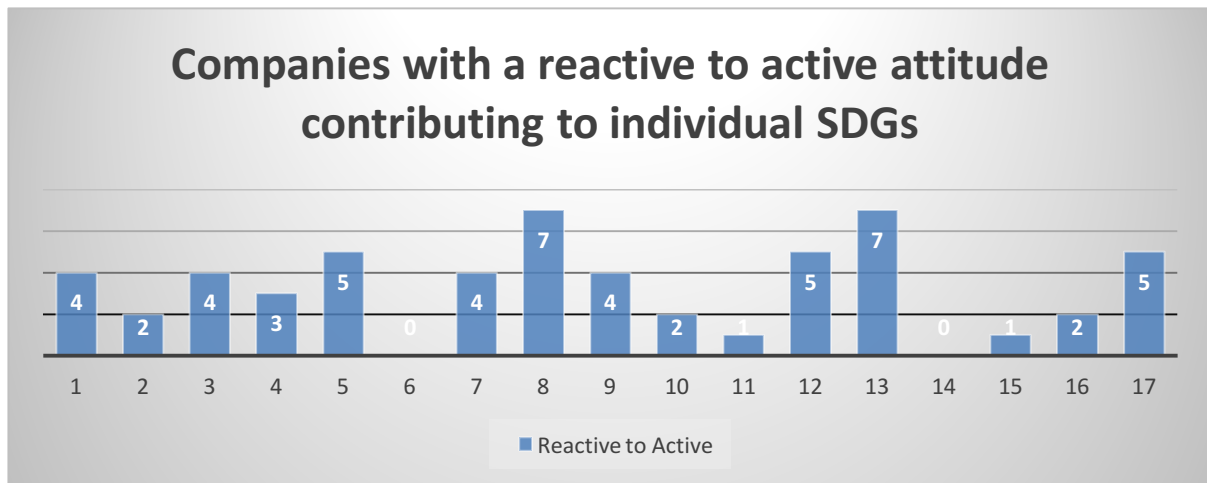
Figure 16: Companies with a reactive to active attitude contributing to individual SDGs

10 companies are in the reactive to active attitude towards the SDGs (figure 16). These companies show very sparse results, with no contributions to SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation and 14 on life below water, similar to the little contributions to these SDGs in the entire sample. The most contributions are for SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 13 on climate action, again in line with the overall contributions in the sample. It seems the larger part of the 10 companies in the reactive to active attitude do indeed communicate on SDG 8 and SDG 13 communicate on individual SDGs, but the other SDGs have average or below average amount of companies contributing to them.

The companies in the active attitude towards the SDGs show most contributions to SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 on climate action and SDG 17 on partnerships (figure 17). These SDGs are also a part of the most contributions in the total sample. The least contributions are to SDG 1 on ending poverty, SDG 14 on life below water and SDG 15 on life on land – again in line with the overall sample. There are 10 companies in total, and there are 7 or 8 companies communicating on the top 4 SDGs in this group, however there are no or only 1 companies communicating on the lowest 4 SDGs, showing a difference in results.
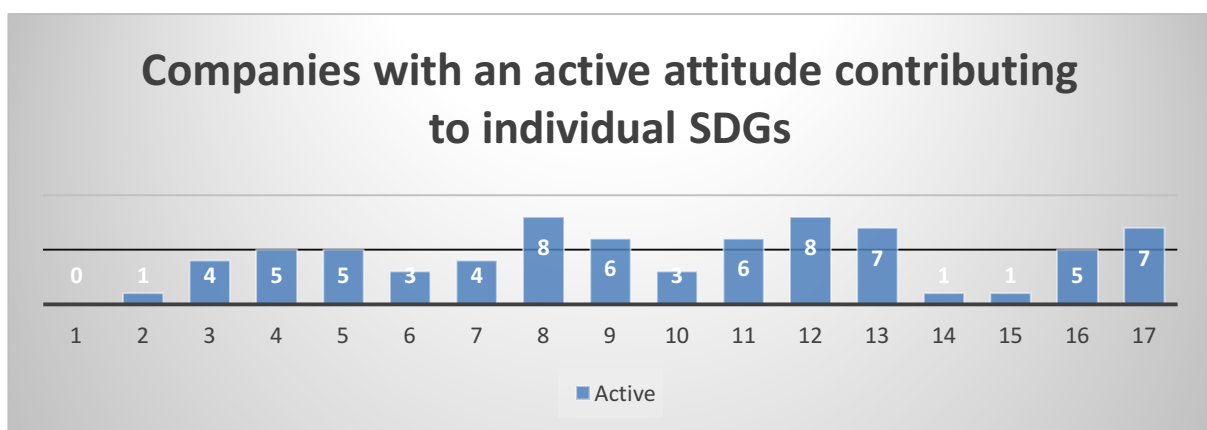
Figure 17: Companies with an active attitude contributing to individual SDGs

The group of companies in the active to proactive attitude towards the SDGs is not very large, it consists of 2 companies, but shows different results than the other groups (figure 18). There are 5 SDGs for which no company in this group reports contributions, which is SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 9 on industry innovation and infrastructure, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and finally SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. SDG 9 and 11 are all interestingly moderately communicated on in the total sample. SDG 5 and SDG 10 are in the bottom in the total sample as well. The others have only one or two contributions, in one or two companies, thus there is not much to be said about this.
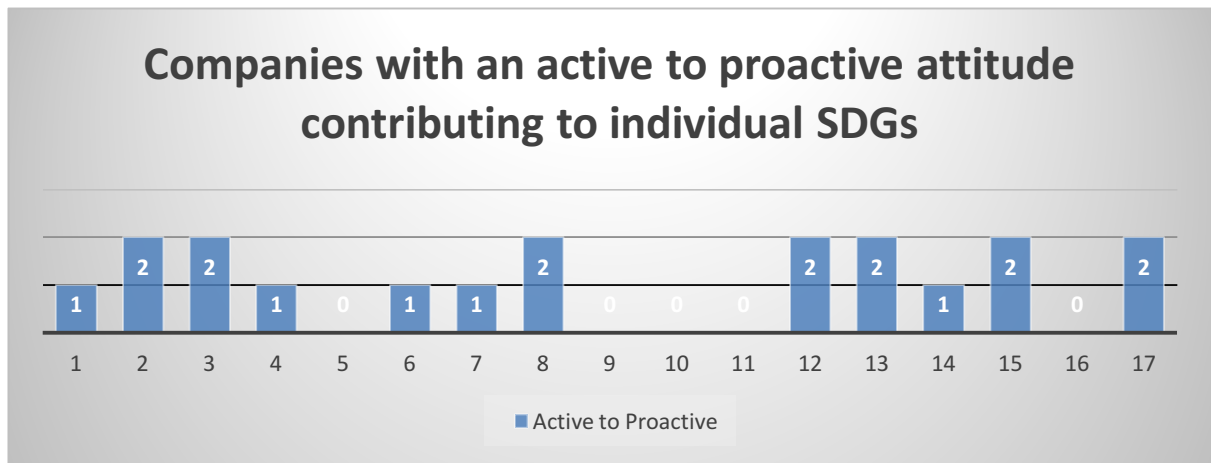
Figure 18: Companies with an active to proactive attitude contributing to individual SDGs

Finally, there are only 3 companies in the proactive attitude towards the SDGs in this sample, and they all report individual contributions to each of the 17 SDGs (figure 19). The other two companies reporting on all the SDGs are in the inactive to reactive, and the reactive attitude towards the SDGs. The difference between the two phases is rather large: is it an interesting result that least proactive and the most proactive attitudes towards the SDGs contribute on all the SDGs.
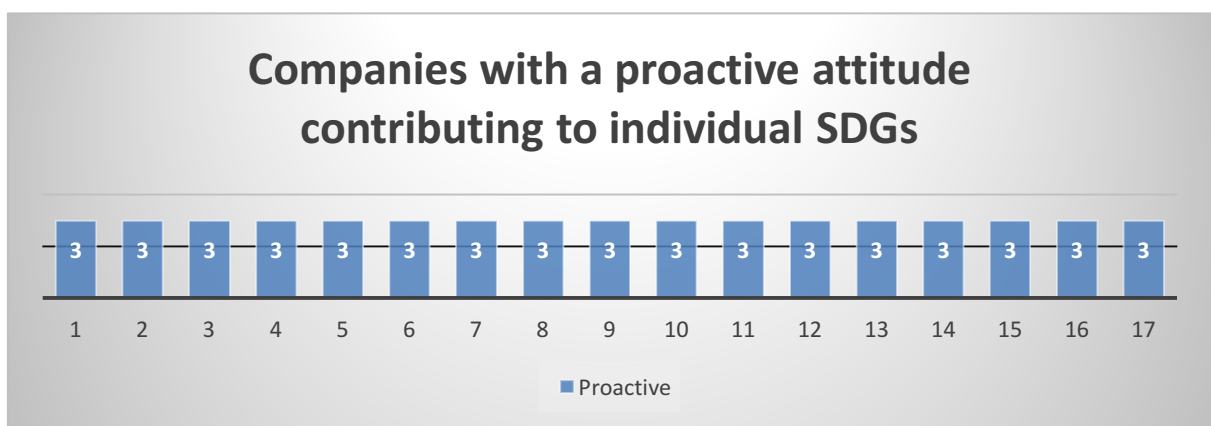
Figure 19: Companies with a proactive attitude contributing to individual SDGs

4.6 Compared to CBS study

The Central Bureau of Statistics (2016) in the Netherlands found that the Netherlands is doing very well on a lot of the SDGs. The first area the Netherlands is doing well on is economics and work, related to SDG 8. The working conditions are very well, the gross domestic product (GDP) is high, and unemployment rates are very low. This is in accordance with the SDG on which companies within the sample are working on the most. Same counts for SDG 17, partnerships for the goals, or in this case especially aid to development countries. What is important to note is that aid from the government has decreased, but private party aid has increased so much, that overall aid is relatively high compared to other countries internationally.

Next, good health and well-being, SDG 3, scores rather well in the Netherlands. This is in line with contributions by companies in the GCNL. Healthy life expectancy is high, overall well-being scores are high and stable, etc. Another SDG, SDG 4 on quality education, has a high score in the Netherlands, and is highly contributed on by the companies in the sample. Lifelong learning has high scores and the Netherlands scores high on skills compared to other EU-countries. However, due to the results being relatively unstable, there is a chance that the other EU-countries will catch up, so attention is definitely required here.

SDG 16, which is on peace, justice and strong institutions, also scores high in the Netherlands. People in the Netherlands feel safe, there are a low amount of murders and registered offences, and relative political stability. In the same line, there is little corruption and the overall trust in the institutions in the Netherlands is high. On the other hand, the countries in the sample have not expressed much concern for SDG 16.

The companies in the sample work the least on SDG 14, which is life below water. This is part of the relatively large environmental pressure the Netherlands puts on other countries, which gives a negative score for the Netherlands on nature and the environment, next to a low score on climate and energy due to its extensive use of fossil fuels and not enough renewable energy yet. Relating to this is also SDG 6, clean water and sanitation, SDG 15, life on land, and the obvious one, SDG 13 on climate action. Moreover, other SDGs that are not yet scoring high in the Netherlands are SDG 1 and SDG 10, with regard to the inequality in relation to income and inequality between men and women. Finally, SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure score low, because of the highly changing world, which requires vast developing education, skills and knowledge development and –diffusion. On these two SDGs, corporate contributions within the network score average.

4.7 Compared to PwC study

PwC (2016) performed a study to assess in what way companies are making a positive contribution to the SDGs, meaning increasing positive and/or decreasing negative impacts on the SDGs. To assess this, PwC scored the quality of corporate reporting on the SDGs on 34 indicators, meaning 2 for each SDG. Five different sectors with each five different companies were assessed. The sector are the financial services – which is also highly represented in the sample of this research, thus 4 out of 5 are companies in this sector are also part of the network -, the retail & consumer sector – also 4 out of 5 companies within this sector are part of the GCNL network -, energy & chemicals, the transport &

logistics sector and others – of these last three groups 3 out of 5 companies is part of the GCNL network. The companies were not to be seen as a representative sample. The companies are all large, well-known companies, which is not very similar to the GCNL network. The GCNL consists of about one-third of smaller, lesser known companies. This diminishes the validity of the comparison between the two studies. PwC expresses they aimed to create an overall picture of how companies in the Netherlands perform on the SDGs, therefore the comparison is interesting for the scope of this research.

What the study found is that of the reports they assessed, about 44% included at least one explicitly statement on the SDGs. In the GCNL sample, 61 companies were identified as inactive, which is about 58% of the total, however in this group there are 6 companies that did include one simple statement on the SDGs, but they did not meet the requirements of enough indicators not to be marked as inactive. Thus, 55 companies are inactive and do not make a statement on the SDGs at all, meaning 51 do at least make one statement on the SDGs, resulting in about 48% of the companies. This is thus quite similar to the results of PwC and seeing as the total sample size of this research is four times bigger than that of the PwC study, differences are bound to exist. What PwC also found is that 64% discusses the topics on the SDGs without necessarily making the link with them, and 13% reported on specific SDG related indicators or targets, meaning the translation to corporate metrics is still a challenge. These to analyses were not made for this research, so they cannot be compared.

The top 3 reported indicators were in relation to SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy and SDG 5 on gender equality. SDG 13 was also in the top 3 for most reported SDG within the GCNL network, however SDG 7 and SDG 5 are somewhere in the middle of the group. As for the bottom 3 reported indicators, they related to SDG 14 on life below water, SDG 15 on life on land and, surprisingly, SDG 5 on gender equality, but on a different indicator. Again, SDG 14 and 15 were also among the least mentioned SDGs within the GCNL network, and SDG 5 was somewhere in the middle of the group.

The study by PwC (2016) also stressed that simply mentioning the SDGs is not enough. For there to be real systematic change, the status quo needs to be challenged and companies need to take a truly long term view on integrating the SDGs into corporate strategies. They found that so far, the companies that put together concrete actions and goals for themselves show strong leadership and find ways to truly increase positive and decrease the negative impact, and thus contribute to the SDGs.

4.8 Compared to Transparency Benchmark
The Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) performed an analysis of the SDGs last year as well. They asked their respondents to fill out a self-assessment, which in the year of 2016 also contained a question on the SDGs. They found that of the 127 companies that responded to this question, a hundred different companies indicated to at least know about the SDGs. About half of this, thus 50 out of 127 companies, have taken first steps to embracing the SDGs or have the ambition to do this. This is relatively similar to the amount of companies in the GCNL sample that are already naming the SDGs at some point in their communications, which is 45 companies out of 106 companies or 42% of the total companies that is at least inactive to reactive, compared to 50 out of 127 or 39%. In fact, a

larger amount of companies is inactive to reactive or a higher activity level towards the SDGs. Of course, it is a self-assessment on both cases, so "taking steps to adopt them" is hard to define. But because both are self-assessment, either by stating they have taken steps or by publicly communicating the company aims to work on them, the results can be compared. The research also found that mostly frontrunners are able to make a practical and concrete translation of the SDGs into business strategies, where other companies still find this very difficult.

Of the group of leaders in the company of 20, none indicated to not know about the SDGs. Of this group 40% indicated to be familiar with and have ambitions to start working on the, however 47% have already taken first steps into adopting them. This is a rather large group of companies, as compared to the 42% in the Global Compact sample, however not that far away to be considered incomparable. This group is the frontrunners, thus they are already further than most, but still the percentages are not too far away from each other.

Another very interesting find is that companies obtained a higher average score when they are aware of the SDGs and at the very least have ambition to work on the SDGs, than when they were not familiar with them at all. However, even more remarkable is that companies scored even higher when they indicated to have ambition to adopt the SDGs, then when they had already adopted the SDGs. This is not in line with our indicators, in which we assume that companies more active when they have not just given the SDGs a thought, but embraced the SDGs already.

They found that the best examples have material themes linked to the SDGs. It is important here that companies do not just link it to all SDGs, but to those that the company has a material link with. Moreover, some SDGs, such as SDG 8, are linked to multiple material topics. Another good example is linking the SDGs to different business unites, allowing the companies that are spread across geographical regions to create individually based SDG agenda, and allow the different locations to zoom in on their local impact on the SDGs. The last best practice found by the Transparency Benchmark is companies that identify relevant indicators, below the most important SDGs. This way, it creates clear, concrete goals to be incorporated into business strategies.

4.9 Findings based on indicators summarized

The indicators found very different results. Based on the indicators, it seems that less than half of the companies are at the moment communicating on the SDGs. Seeing as there are no facts and figures on all companies in the Netherlands communicating on the SDGs at the moment, it is hard to compare this to other companies in the Netherlands. However, compared to the PwC study (2016) this amount is not too far from the other sustainability frontrunner companies in the Netherlands. 14% of the companies in the sample is either active, active to proactive or proactive. It is not the same measure, however PwC found that 13% of the company is at a point where the SDGs play a specific role in indicators and targets, as reported. Thus, this is also a similar amount of companies that embrace the SDGs in a rather advanced way.

Another main finding is that larger companies seem more equipped to become more active with regard to the SDGs. The companies that are part of the PwC study (2016) and the top 20 in the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) can be considered frontrunners in sustainability as well,

and it seems these companies are also all rather large companies. Therefore, this founding also seems to correspond with the other companies outside of the GCNL network.

As for the sectors, it seems hard to draw conclusions on the basis of the indicators. It seems that the results for the specific sectors, especially the larger represented sectors, show similar ranges of attitudes towards the SDGs. With the smaller represented sectors very different results are found, but with only a couple of companies that represent the sector in the total sample, it is impossible to find all the attitudes within the sector.

Table 7: Amount of companies, large and SME, per attitude towards the SDGs

Attitude	Amount of companies and Percentage of total	Amount of large companies and percentage of total	Amount of SMEs and percentage of total
Inactive	61, 58%	30, 49%	31, 51%
Inactive to Reactive	9, 9%	6, 67%	3, 33%
Reactive	11, 10%	10, 91%	1, 9%
Reactive to Active	10, 9%	9, 90%	1, 10%
Active	10, 9%	10, 100%	0, 0%
Active to Proactive	2, 2%	2, 100%	0, 0%
Proactive	3, 3%	3, 100%	0, 0%

Table 8: Amount of companies communicating on contributions to individual SDGs

SDG	Amount of companies communicating on this SDG
1	11
2	10
3	19
4	18
5	20
6	13
7	19
8	27
9	19
10	12
11	15
12	23
13	25
14	10
15	13
16	13
17	21

Based on the comparison with the CBS (2016), there are several areas to which companies within the network could give more attention, because the Netherlands has to give more attention to these areas in general. The companies within the network, and companies in general, could also contribute to this. As compared to the PwC (2016) study, similar results for reporting on individual SDGs were found. The reporting on individual SDGs is most mature on familiar themes, such as the GHG emission reduction (SDG 13), energy efficiency (SDG 7) and women in management positions (SDG 5), the three top reported indicators within the SDGs. On the other hand, themes as revenue at risk from marine ecosystem services (SDG 14), from terrestrial ecosystem services (SDG 15), and the ratio of salary payment of women to men (SDG 5), are reported on a lesser note in the PwC study. These lesser reported SDGs are similar to the lesser reported SDGs within the GCNL network.

It seems overall the indicators give a rough image of the way in which the companies within the sample are currently embracing the SDGs (table 7 and 8). Some of the companies are truly well on their way in embracing the SDGs, but most are still at the front stage of this. A lot of companies that have only a short, simple statement on the SDGs refer to future reports, in which the aim is to expand the communications on the SDGs, when the internal implementation process is further developed. This shows that the intentions are there, but it is still too early to find a majority of companies communicating on the SDGs yet.

5. Results from field research: the interviews

Based on the indicators that were assessed for the companies in the sample, some case studies were done. The results of the interviews are discussed in this chapter. First, the answers by the different cases to the topics in the interview guide will be analysed and compared. Thereafter, there will also be a comparison for each company what was analysed through the indicators and what was found in the interviews, and see whether these results for each indicator are similar to what answers were given in the interviews.

5.1 General characteristics of the cases

The companies were all of different sizes, sectors and attitudes towards the SDGs based on the indicators (table 9). The first interview was with company A. This company is a large company of 680 employees in the support services sector. Based on the indicators, this company is an active company. They have some statements on the SDGs and how they embraced them in their CSR strategies. Moreover, they have a materiality assessment based on the SDGs which they made together with both internal and external stakeholders. There is only one other company in the sample that communicated a materiality assessment based on the SDGs. Finally, they have a good amount of partnerships and networks surrounding the SDGs. They were however not included in the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016).

Table 9: General characteristics interview cases

Case	Number of employees	SME or large company	Sector	Attitude towards the SDGs on the basis of the indicators
A	680	Large	Support Services	Active
B	40	SME	General Industrials	Inactive
C	3600	Large	Fixed Line Tele-communications	Active
D	90	SME	Financial Services	Inactive to Reactive
E	12400	Large	Financial Services	Active

The next interview was with company B, which is a small company with 40 employees in the general industrials services. Based on the indicators, this company is inactive towards the SDGs at the moment. There is no information to be found online, on the website or in their COP, on the SDGs. They are however a rather active member of GCNL network. They were also not included in the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016).

After that, an interview took place with the largest company in the group, company C with around 36000 employees, in the fixed line tele-communications industry. Based on the information found online, this company is in the active phase. They emphasize their commitment to the SDGs, and their want to connect to the SDGs where applicable, and have compared their CSR goals with the SDGs targets and indicators. Moreover, they are identified as one of the top leaders in the Transparency Benchmark, which made them a very interesting candidate for the interviews (The Crystal, 2016).

The fourth interview was with company D, the first company in the financial services, which is small with 90 employees. This company was assessed to be inactive to reactive, but with very sparse results. The SDGs were said to be fully embraced in corporate strategies, but no real explanation or

elaboration on this is presented in public communications. They were also not included in the Transparency benchmark (The Crystal, 2016).

Finally, there was an interview with company E, the other company in the financial sector, which is a large company with 12400 employees. Based on the indicators, this company is considered an active company. They are assessed as leaders in the Transparency benchmark (The Crystal, 2016). This company did not have any indicators in the reactive or proactive phase, however some in the inactive phase. However, the most were indeed in the active attitude towards sustainability, including specific SDG contributions and embracement of SDGs in CSR strategies.

5.2 Results indicators versus interviews

Some of the interviews confirmed the idea of the company that was created through the indicators and the resulting attitude towards the SDGs. However, some seemed to be either more active or maybe more inactive. The interviews were a way to test whether what was found in the indicators gave a correct image of the company's efforts towards the SDGs. Moreover, the interviews were able to bring above ideas and reasoning that is not publicly communicated. For each of the companies this will be explored below.

5.3.1 Company A

Company A was found to be active based on the indicators. First of all, the reports and the websites showed ample information on the SDGs and the company's aim to contribute to them. This is also what came across from the interview. The company is indeed involved in several partnerships and networks focusing on issues about sustainability, but GCNL is the main network which focuses on progressing the results of the SDGs. From the interview, it became even more clear that the SDGs are truly put at the centre of the business conduct and business strategies, even if not every employee is entirely aware of this. The individual SDGs are in fact of more importance than the SDGs as such, as the individual SDGs that were classified as important in the materiality assessment were used in the development of the sustainable design principles. The individual SDGs that company A contributes to are however part of the triple bottom line pillars, of people, planet and profit. As came forward from the interview, the SDGs at the time formed some sort of basis for the draft of the business conduct.

On the other hand, there are no partnerships which are based on (individual) SDGs. It is quite advanced in the way the SDGs play a role in corporate core strategies and business conduct, but the company does not make use of partnerships and networks for the SDGs and is not included in the Transparency Benchmark yet. The interview confirmed that indeed the partnerships are not based on SDGs, however, as more and more for example government bodies are asking for proof for sustainable business, the company sees the possibility that in the future the SDGs may form the question that will be asked as a way for the company to show its contributions to sustainability. At the time, the SDGs were put at the centre of the business conduct. Thus, the company indirectly works on the SDGs on a daily basis and the company believes that they do not need a new analysis or assessment in the near future about how the company contributes.

Overall, the idea that company A is active is correct. There are still steps to make to become a proactive company. In addition, company A should ensure that the embracement of the SDGs is not

a one-time only thing through the materiality assessment, but that, similar to sustainability, the SDGs and the needs to realise the SDGs keep evolving. The interview in some way confirmed what was found online, in that the company believes that for now, the company does not need a new analysis of how to contribute to the SDGs. This could be the case, if it is truly ensured that the SDGs are a part of the business conduct, which is what the company finds. However, where the company shows online that the SDGs are a truly integral part of the business, the interview showed that the company is not assessing this at the moment anymore. Therefore, it is indeed the case that the attitude towards the SDGs is active, where it would be proactive if the company would have more partnerships and a more continuous attitude towards the implementation of the SDGs.

5.3.2 Company B

There is little to tell about what was found on the basis of the indicators: company B, a rather small company, has no online information on the SDGs. They are an active member of GCNL, which is the only link that can be found to the SDGs. The interviews told us the same: at the moment, they do not contribute to the SDGs. The interview confirmed that indeed the company has no partnerships on the SDGs, not materiality assessment, was not working on the MDGs at the time, however they do aim to embrace sustainability in their business strategies. The word "aim" was used, because the company does express in the interview that even though the CSR team in the company reports to the general manager of the company, it is still an explicitly different team within the company, and it is not truly at the core of the company as of yet.

As of recently, the management of the company decided that indeed for next year's sustainability report, the company aims to report on the basis of the SDGs. What is interesting to note here is that direct reason for this is that the director of the company decided that they needed to do something about the SDGs after attending a GCNL event about the SDGs on the 20th of June 2017. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this case, being a part of GCNL is most definitely a driver to become active with regard to the SDGs. Of course, this was the tipping point, because they were aware of them already for a longer time. However, due to among other factors, the size of the company and the relatively little capacity to pick up new sustainability initiatives like these, company B had yet to start the process of embracing the SDGs.

Therefore, even though the company intentions are to become more active, it is at the moment and will probably be at least until next year until these intentions are turned into action visible for stakeholders. The interview helped to dig up internal information which is not publicly available yet about the company's attitude towards the SDGs, in that their aim is to start reporting on the basis of the SDGs. Moreover, it shows that publicly available information cannot give a complete reputation of a company's true intentions on sustainability and more specifically the SDGs.

5.3.3 Company C

Company C, a rather large company alone in its sector in the GCNL network, is identified as active through the indicators. It explicitly linked its sustainability Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to the SDGs, and more specific to which SDG each CSR goal contributes to. In the interview they expressed that the SDGs are not linked to a CSR strategy, but to the corporate strategy. However, it seems that the link is not made from the SDGs onwards, but from the already existing KPIs onwards. They do however elaborate and explain what they do rather profusely and express the difficulty in doing this

the other way around for a large company like company C. They have a materiality matrix, not on the SDGs, but involving sustainability challenges none the less.

What makes company C different from the rest, is that they are involved in two large sector-related networks, that are really actively asking companies to contribute to and communicate about the SDGs, next to the fact that they are a part of GCNL, which also encourages companies to work on the SDGs. Moreover, they are identified as one of the top leaders in the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016). Based on this information, there are more networks than expected, and the SDGs are linked to the corporate strategy, not just the CSR strategy. However, the elaboration and explanation of this link is not that the SDGs are at the core and the strategy is created from this point onwards.

The interview confirmed that the intention is to contribute to the SDGs, however, the extent of the importance of the SDGs for the company seemed different from what was found through the indicators. In a similar way to company A, it seems that company C has found the links between sustainability KPIs and the SDGs, reported on it, and has since left them relatively at the side. The publicly available information suggested a rather far embracement of the SDGs, where the interview brought up that the company is struggling to keep the SDGs aa hot a topic as they were when published and first internalized. Therefore, the company is therefore still considered to be active, as they still have some activities to make to become truly proactive, however they do already link their CSR goals to them at the moment, in addition to loads of networks encouraging the SDGs. The interview brought up some questions and dilemmas surrounding the SDGs with which the company is struggling, such as how to continuously work and communicate on the SDGs.

5.3.4 Company D
Company D, a small company in the financial sector, is considered to be inactive to reactive based on the indicators. However, during the interview suspicion is raised that this is in fact not the case. The company publicly mentions the SDGs, their support for them, plus a statement on the fact that through their sustainable service provision, they are fundamentally at the core of the business. However, there was no further elaboration published on how this happens, information on contributions to individual SDGs or a materiality matrix on sustainability. Next to that, they are not in the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016).

During the interview, the company expresses that they have worked on the topics of the SDGs ever since the start of the company, and that is in line with why companies can easily say that they work on the SDGs, by linking the SDGs to existing contributions. This begs the question for company D whether the SDGs will lead to the change that is required. This is in line with the way the SDGs were put together: through a top-down operation involving high-level people only. The SDGs are therefore not a transition agenda; which company D believes is what needed to create a truly sustainable society. For example, the SDGs propose a more efficient way of using fossil fuels, instead of not using fossil fuels at all, and they do not even mention anything about investing in controversial weapons. Therefore, company D believes the SDGs are still somewhat of a mainstream agenda, which company D aims to go beyond even. This may therefore be a reason not to explicitly communicate on its contributions to the SDGs, which is in line with what was found in the literature about companies communicating on sustainability in different ways. Choosing not to communicate is

in fact in line with a proactive attitude towards the sustainability and in this case the SDGs (van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2005).

The company is indirectly contributing to most if not all the SDGs through their extensive and long-time building of the sustainability strategy. The company only communicates on their contributions to the SDGs limitedly, but it admits in the interview it does want to, to prevent misunderstanding about what the company does in the external stakeholder's eye. Even though the company's ambitions may not be in line with the ambitions of the SDGs, the company recognizes the SDGs form a common language, explaining the external stakeholders that the company is indeed ambitious when it comes to sustainability. The results from the interview suggest a proactive attitude towards sustainability, but a practically deliberate reactive approach to the SDGs specifically.

5.3.5 Company E

Company E is the largest company in the group and is in the financial services. Based on the indicators, the company seems active towards the SDGs. They score as followers in the Transparency benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) and active on their contributions to the SDGs, as well as their elaborations on individual SDGs. The company does not have partnerships on the SDGs yet, however some networks. On the other hand, they do not report on having partnerships on the SDGs, nor on SDGs specifically. They also do not have a materiality assessment.

At the moment, they are still busy making the true link between the SDGs and business strategies, as elaborated upon in the interview. Moreover, the choice for the two individual SDGs have not been decided on indefinitely yet, as the real mapping still needs to be done. Therefore, based on these results, the company may be in transition from reactive to active. But true embracement of the SDGs is what the company is busy with at the moment. On the other hand, the company emphasizes that it does not think communicating extensively on the SDGs at this time is wise, because it should first make sure it knows exactly what the SDGs mean for their company before communicating to external stakeholders. Next to that, the company expresses that they believe it is important that companies do not just look at the positive impacts of the company and ignore the possible negative impacts, where company E does try to look at both.

The score of active based on the indicators is rather optimistic perhaps, as compared to the results from the interview. The company may at the moment be in transition from reactive to active, but its aim is definitely to progress to proactive once the extensive mapping is finished. The company expressed a want to move away from just communicating about links that can be made to the SDGs, and move towards a true corporate embracement of the SDGs after a more meaningful and profounder assessment of what the SDGs mean for the company. The aim is then also to move away from only the CSR team, the board and the communications to external stakeholders, but to involve the employees within the company with the contributions to the SDGs as well. Thus, they would have considered themselves active, but it seems they chose to take step back and only move forward if they can do so in a structured way of true integration of the SDGs, aiming to be truly active, and eventually progress towards proactive.

5.3 Initial introduction of the SDGs to the company

The first introduction of the SDGs with the companies went differently for most. Where company A, B, C and E did not do anything regarding the MDGs at the time, company D was definitely already working on the themes of the MDGs. Company C and E expressed that the themes of MDGs and the countries the MDGs aimed to work on are very different from the SDGs, which is indeed the case, and that therefore the need for business contributions to the MDGs at the time was not necessarily clear.

The initial pick-up of the SDGs was in most cases by the person already involved in sustainability, either through networks, or through CSR/corporate citizenship departments or teams at companies. For companies A and B, it was the CSR team comprised of several employees from different departments, but also from different hierarchical levels within the company. At company A, this team is responsible for sustainability reporting and follows the developments in sustainability. Similarly, at company B the interviewee is responsible for the marketing and communication of company B, is also a part of the CSR team, and is therefore responsible for the annual sustainability reporting. They have recently decided to start assessing to what SDGs they are already contributing to and to which they want to contribute more, and use this as a base for next year's reports on sustainability. The corporate citizenship team within company E also picked up the SDGs.

Company A was already working from the RIO principles when creating their sustainable design principles, from which they design all their services. In 2014, the new director set course towards a sustainable world, in which it was made a priority that the company would be a contribution to this sustainable world. A year later, the company performed a materiality assessment on the basis of the SDGs, from which the most important SDGs were chosen with both internal and external stakeholders, and these were then also incorporated into these sustainability design principles. Thus, the step to working on the SDGs was not that far from where they were already working on.

At company C it was the manager sustainability that eventually worked with the communications department to work on the SDGs. Other than that, it is the managers' job to ensure that it flows through the organisation. Company C is also an active part of a European sector association, which also works actively on pursuing the SDGs and recently published a report on the ways in which the sector could work on the SDGs. Next to that, the worldwide sector trade body asked companies to work on the SDGs and communicate the importance of the SDGs to their customers as early as their starting date in September 2015. Company C did this and communicated about the SDGs to each customer. They produced a website with the contributions to individual SDGs and used the Intranet of the company to raise awareness within the company. The same thing happened in 2016.

Company D has a different story. Even though they are currently not working on the SDGs as such, or back the working on the MDGs, they are working on these themes ever since the start of the company in the '70s. The company explained that the sustainability manager at company D does not see implementing the SDGs as part of the job, although this does not mean that they do nothing on the SDGs. Societal responsibility was already a part of the company in the '70s before sustainability became known after 1987 through the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). A little after that, the company developed investment criteria, to ensure the company's investments contribute to sustainability. Therefore, once the MDGs and the SDGs came about, company D did not change its sustainability contributions, because they were already

present. Around 2007/2008, the company revised its investment criteria on the basis of three pillars on human rights, climate and biodiversity, similar to the themes as used by the UN and in the SDGs. These pillars give a pathway for the company's investments. The indicators therefore fit with existing strategies, resulting in company D saying "there is no company that does not work on the SDGs" (personal communication, 12 July 2017).

Company E started with a stakeholder dialogue on the SDGs in January 2017, resulting in a focus on two specific SDGs to which the company could make a positive impact: SDG 8 and 12. The company is currently busy making this mapping more accurate, linking them to specific targets. They came up in the first place through networks such as GCNL and through a sector-related UN organisation. The corporate citizenship team then started to assess and discuss in what ways they affect the company. They are then linked, where possible, to the value creation model as set out by the company. SDG 8 and SDG 12 were already linked, but they will now reassess the links between the SDGs and the value creation model in a deeper, broader way. This way, the company wants to make the SDG contributions a part of the strategy, not just a separate part of the business.

On the one hand, internal drivers to work on the SDGs were mentioned with company A, B, C and D in the sense that they feel it is their mission to work on or to contribute to sustainability and a sustainable world, and the SDGs form a clear way to structure what needs to be done. For company B it was similar, in that it creates a structure in the company's contributions to sustainability, as opposed to ad hoc projects. Company C expressed that they achieved their long-term goal to become climate neutral by 2020 in 2015, and the SDGs helped them to find their new long-term goal, which is to become a circular company. Company D has no new internal drivers to work on the SDGs, as they have already been working on the themes. Company E finds that the SDGs bring purpose to sustainability within companies and create a clear, concrete dot in the horizon for what companies can do and what goals they have, thus even though they have not explicitly mentioned internal drivers, this can be seen as one. Companies B, C and E mentioned that it creates a common language, which is both beneficial internally and externally, also for stakeholders not necessarily involved in sustainability because of its simplicity.

On the other hand, external drivers are also important with company A. If company A wants to work with some external stakeholders, they are asked to show their contribution to sustainability more and more, and thus also on the SDGs more and more. Company D also expresses external stakeholders asking for what they do with regard to the SDGs, therefore they want to start communicating more on the SDGs. Therefore, implementing the SDGs means for company D that they have to get their communications in order, not their real strategies. Because they are not communicating their contributions to the SDGs, even though it is already part of the strategies, stakeholders may believe they do not contribute at all. Company E were also driven by the sheer force in which the SDGs were blasted into the world in September 2015.

A discouragement for working on the SDGs is in company B's case that there are so many, and that the company felt like they could not have a contribution to all of them. Then again, it wonders whether it should, or whether it can indeed make a prioritisation of the logical SDGs and contribute to these especially.

5.4 Implementing the SDGs

The next step after the initial introduction, is making sure the SDGs are truly embraced in the business. Every service company A provides, is developed by the sustainable design principles, which again are devised in part on the basis of the SDGs. Therefore, with the exception of those that work in general affairs, legal affairs or human resources, every employee has come in contact with sustainability and these principles. Therefore, all internal stakeholders are some way involved with the SDGs. Moreover, Company A expresses that they see the SDGs as the goals that they are, but as a company it is your own responsibility to translate what this concretely means for your company and how to contribute to the realization of these goals through your business conduct and business strategies, as they did. By creating ways in which employees within the company make the sustainable choices, eventually this will lead to sustainable services, leading to larger contributions to sustainability. Company A also expresses that sustainability should not be seen as vague, it should be made concrete for the business by the business itself. Moreover, sustainability is not just focusing on the quick wins or obvious targets on for example CO_2-emissions, it is much broader than that.

In order to decide on which SDGs are most relevant for company A, external stakeholders were involved. Company B and C have not involved external stakeholders in their efforts to contribute to the SDGs. Moreover, external stakeholders ask about whether the company does indeed to something about the SDGs with company A. Company C did not experience external stakeholders asking about the SDGs, other than the networks they are a part of. However, company C did experience that the SDGs, again, form a common language in talking to suppliers about their wish to become a circular company, to contribute to the SDGs. Thus, some external suppliers are indeed aware of the SDGs. The company has not communicated to its customers again after that first initial message in September 2015. Company D will not change its policies or strategies around the SDGs, but will need to find out how to make it clear to external stakeholders that they have been working on the SDGs for a long time, as they currently only respond to questions about the SDGs, instead of communicating purposely.

Company B experienced this in a similar way, with companies asking about their sustainability strategies more and more, however not yet the SDGs specifically. In this sense, sustainability is starting to be more and more a part of the business with clients asking for sustainability with the services provided, but the SDGs are still a bit further for employees and external stakeholders as well. To ensure this grows, the CSR team with company B sends updates and gives presentations on what is happening with regard to sustainability in the company.

Company E expressed that both the management and supervisory board have taken the SDGs as part of corporate strategy development. They are part of the reports on sustainability, and linked to value creation targets. However, there has not been an awareness campaign inside of the company as of yet. Thus, the reassessment of the mapping will be an opportunity to make the employees aware more.

The SDGs are internally mostly picked up by the sustainability manager, the communications managers and those active in themes related to the SDGs within company C. Although maybe not all employees are expected to know about the SDGs, there is ample information to be found both within and outside of the company if they wish to know about them. The initial implementation of the SDGs and where this was picked up is not often publicly discussed by the companies; thus it is

hardly possible to say whether the interview confirms or disconfirms the publicly shared information.

5.5 Corporate Social Responsibility

The next step is to assess whether companies see the SDGs, and sustainability as such, as being a part of the core business or with a separate CSR strategy. Where all companies have some sort of CSR team, the companies go about embracing the SDGs in different ways.

Company A has a CSR team, however, due to the sustainable design principles, sustainability is at the core of their business. All the services the company provides have given answer to questions about sustainability and whether it meets the requirements. The CSR team is therefore not the main area where sustainability lives within the company, but it goes beyond this in the core business strategies and mission to contribute to the realization of a better tomorrow.

Company B also has a CSR team which reports to the general manager, and the team is responsible for the implementation of sustainability within the company. They do not view CSR as one of their main business priorities that they communicate externally anymore, because they believe it should not be a separate entity within the business, but it should be a part of regular business conduct. Therefore, something like safety and security, which is highly relevant for this a company like company B, is a business priority that is also communicated externally. Company B does want to start working on the SDGs and plans this means it will be linked to the sustainability report, involving some initiatives/projects that already exist and are related to the SDGs and some new initiatives/projects. Thereafter, they aim to make the link with the core business, but for now that is a step too far.

Company C expresses that they find the idea of bending your strategy in such a way that it fits with and works from the standpoint of the SDGs perhaps too large of a challenge, and questions whether large, longstanding companies are truly able to do that. Sustainability is part of the strategy, and no longer a separate CSR strategy. There are amble sustainability-related goals in the overall strategy of the company, with not just environmental goals, but also goals with regard to the social side of sustainability. Their way to link the SDGs to strategies is by linking the sustainability KPIs to the SDGs, meaning concrete goals. The SDGs were not the starting point here, but links are made between existing KPIs and the SDGs at this point, which does result in clear, concrete measures for the company.

Company D views sustainability as its "reason for existence" (personal communication, 12 July 2017). The company expresses they do not exist due to a lack of financial services; they exist due to a lack of sustainable financial services. The company's mission is to make society sustainable, and thus realise the SDGs. Therefore, the company sees itself as a catalyst and encourage other companies in the sector to become more sustainable. Therefore, even though the SDGs are not specifically a part of the core strategies, the themes of the SDGs are.

Company E expresses that CSR has always been a part of their businesses, with five focused pillars. Specifically, the company has two priorities on CSR: enlarge and enhance financial well-being, and responsible investments. Moreover, the company has an integrated report, making sustainability

integral to the company. The company does not want to position or communicate a separate sustainability strategy, but make a part of the purpose and values of the company. The concrete way in which the SDGs are linked to corporate strategies is on the agenda for the next while to decide on. They are currently looking for the link, to strengthen it and make it measurable, and possibly to link it to specific targets. However, they emphasize that the link must have a purpose, other than just to market the company as sustainable.

Again, as companies do not often explain in publicly shared information where the SDGs are picked up within a company, it is hard to say whether this is similar to what was found in the interviews. During the interviews, the companies were able to discuss this matter, and it can be concluded that true proactive embracement of the SDGs is rather difficult for companies, and none are truly there yet. Most have picked up the SDGs in their CSR strategies, or linked them to their own sustainability goals or KPIs. The interviews confirmed the findings from the results that companies often still link the SDGs to these parts of the companies, even though the ambition is there to implement them within their core strategies. The companies in the interviews confirmed that it is very difficult for them to do this, with the exception of companies like company D, that have built their initial strategy around sustainability.

5.6 Partnerships and networks surrounding the SDGs

Then it is important to assess whether partnerships and networks play a part with the companies in the network with regard to the SDGs. Company A has a lot of networks, mostly sector-related networks. Company B is mostly active with GCNL, and sector-related networks. Company C is part of GCNL, reports based on GRI, UNGC and ISO 26000, and is also part of sector-related networks. Company D is part of sector-related networks, next to MVO Nederland (CSR Netherlands), PRI, GRI and more. Company E is part of SDGI, sector-related networks, GRI and in other sector-related work groups.

Company A expresses that they are a part of lots of networks and partnerships, but the SDGs are not playing a role with these (yet). Similarly, company B sees possible connections to the many existing networks and partnerships, but this link is not made at the moment. Company C sees it the other way around, in which they suggest to make partnerships, and if possible, link that to the SDGs. Company D has a lot of partnerships, which are all based on working towards sustainability and meet the long term goals the company has set for itself on the three pillars of human rights, climate and biodiversity. However, again, none are directly linked to the SDGs, even though the link can always be found if wanted. Company E is part of SDGI, which is the only real SDG-related network, next to the SDG charter, however no company is a part of that other than through GCNL. They do express that it would be beneficial to talk to partners about the SDGs to bring them forward together.

One of the positives of partnerships and networks is creating a network that hopefully ends up creating work opportunities for the company, as was mentioned by company A. Company B said that (small) companies need each other to truly achieve the SDGs, as every company has its own expertise and especially on topics as the SDGs companies have to work together. Company D agrees, and also finds the idea of sharing knowledge and expertise through the SDGs a clear advantage, because they do not want to keep it to themselves. Next to that, putting ambitious, long-term goals

for themselves may spark companies to also put these type of goals for themselves and partner up to achieve them. Company E also sees the dependability as a positive, because it enhances learning effects. In order to do partner truly effectively, company E emphasizes the need to work with peers, as they may have similar experiences. However, they also emphasize that to work well together, each company must know its own strengths, and company E is not quite there yet on the subject of the SDGs.

One of the negative sides of partnerships and networks is that it requires some unpaid time, with which company A explains it has to balance the pro's and the cons to eventually still make money. Company C expresses that there is a need for a business interest and an acceleration of the realisation through the work of the company, if not it will be difficult. Company D expresses, in a similar vein to company B, that there needs to be some form of alignment between all these networks and frameworks in order for them to truly be effective.

Where the amount of networks and partnerships can be found publicly mostly, the importance and depth of these networks and partnerships is more difficult to trace. This is where the interviews were able to shed some light onto. For the companies in the interviews the SDGs often do not play a large part in partnerships. These companies do see the added value of partnerships surrounding sustainability as such, and some see the potential future value of aiming them on the SDGs. On the other hand, the networks the companies are involved in have played a part in encouraging the contribution of the SDGs. This encouragement of networks for the companies is not something that can be easily retrieved from the company's published information, thus the interviews were able to retrieve this on top of the information that was found through the indicators. The GCNL is a good example of the role these types of networks can play: the GCNL network encouraged company B to start working on the SDGs, and played a role in the continuous work on sustainability and the SDGs for companies A, C and E. Company D is mostly looking for working on sustainability with partners, but acknowledges that this could, if wanted, be linked to the SDGs as well.

5.7 Communication on the SDGs
One way of communicating contributions to the SDGs is through annual (sustainability) report, as is the case with company A, C and E. Reasons for communicating about the SDGs for company A is because sustainability, and the SDGs, are very important for the company. It is not about just communicating something; it is about showing what the mission of the company is for them. This is starting to live like this within the company more and more, including results such as more clients due to the company's view on sustainability. Similarly, communicating on the SDGs is a way for company E to express that they are working on them and they want to have a positive impact. They also question whether it is wise to communicate and report on the SDGs at this point, or whether it is better to work on them by themselves first, before spreading the news.

Company B has so far not communicated on the SDGs, but will probably in the future. Company B also emphasizes the confusion with reporting for UNGC on the basis of the principles next to reporting on the basis of the SDGs. If these two would be more streamlined together, it would help encourage businesses to work on the SDGs as well. Company C has communicated directly to customers in the past, however at the moment there is no other communication than through its

annual integrated report. In a similar vein, at the moment, company D communicates about the SDGs when asked. However, in the future they want to create a clear message about the ways in which the company already contributes to the SDGs, to avoid people from thinking the company does nothing at all.

The interviews were able to uncover ideas and reflections on what to communicate, which are not traceable from the information that is already published. All of the companies expressed musings on whether and what to communicate on the SDGs, where the indicators are only able to find the results of these musings. Some of the companies have opted not to communicate on the company's contributions to the SDGs, for reasons such as the want to keep working on the SDGs more before communicating on the SDGs or reasons such as the need to work out the internal implementation of the SDGs first.

5.8 Materiality Assessment on the SDGs

Company A is the only company in this sample with a materiality assessment with regard to the SDGs. The company put together an analysis of which SDGs they as a company could have a large, positive impact on. A selection of the SDGs was made, and this selection was then embraced in the sustainability design principles with which the company works on all their services. The results from this materiality assessment contributed to creating the mission and the vision for the company, including its core business strategies.

Company B has no materiality assessment on either the SDGs or sustainability as such. Company C and D have materiality assessments on sustainability, but not on the SDGs specifically. Company C has the GRI materiality assessment, thus related to sustainable themes in line with the SDGs, but not necessarily linked to SDGs. Company D similarly does a materiality assessment on sustainability for each annual report. This materiality assessment does certainly play a role in creating corporate strategies, but it is not the only determinant. External stakeholders expect the company to invest sustainably, but they do not for example ask for them to create long-term, sustainable goals for themselves. They do this themselves, in order to eventually achieve its mission faster. Finally, company E is not yet at the stage of performing a materiality assessment, at the moment they are busy with mapping the SDGs. They aim to create a deep, concrete mapping, also including the targets and indicators to make it a measurable way of looking at contributions to the SDGs within the company.

Where the indicators were only able to assess the result of one company performing a materiality assessment on the SDGs, the interview found more complex results. The first being that the company that did indeed perform a materiality assessment on the SDGs, company A, does not aim to do a repeat this type of exercise very soon. Where the published information suggests the company is farther than the others, the company should not forget or ignore the continuous aspect of sustainability and the SDGs. Company B is not implementing the SDGs yet, but does not expect themselves to perform a similar assessment in the near future, where company C has implemented the SDGs but does not link the SDGs to their sustainability materiality assessment. Company E sees this type of assessment in the future, after the mapping exercise is expanded and finished. Company D finally has always performed materiality assessment on sustainability, but chooses not to link this

to the SDGs, explicitly. These results were not derived from online information, but brought up through the interviews, showing very different results from companies having done the materiality assessment, to companies that do not plan on performing a materiality assessment on the SDGs.

5.9 Lessons Learned

Company A's first lesson is that a company has to find out where its largest impact can be made. This is often not through daily business operations, but through employees and the services (or products) the company provides. Lesson two is to make sure sustainability is indeed embraced or incorporated in every service the company provides. The last lesson for company A is to ensure that employees are a part of this and knowledge is transferred.

Company B's main lesson is that they would like to create more structure in what they do for sustainability, create SMART goals and focus on specific initiatives and not deciding ad hoc mostly. The SDGs could be a new starting point to do this.

Company C is rather happy with the way they communicated in the past, but it would be good to find a way to keep the high spirit going afterwards.

Company D thinks they should have formulated long-term, sustainable goals for themselves a lot earlier already. Next to that, its needs to focus on its communications more. One example is the SDGs. Another example is the fact that another financial service company recently informed the media that they no longer invest in a rather controversial industry, such like the fossil fuel industry. It was all over the news and the company was publicly praised for it. However, company D has never and will never invest in this industry, however this was not noticed in the media. Company D does not want the credits per se, but by this being more public knowledge, it may inspire more and more companies to do the same, which will help the company's mission.

Company E emphasizes the need to know your company very well, in order to make an effective mapping of the SDGs. Companies can choose to start with the SDGs and adapt strategies accordingly, or you can start with strategies and see in what ways the SDGs match. The former is chosen by company E, realizing that the two may give different results. Therefore, there needs to be several iterations of this process, in order to make sure the company is on the right track. Next to that, not all indicators within the SDGs are meant for businesses, thus it needs some time to truly make your way through them.

What these lessons learned show is that there are indeed a lot of dilemmas the companies face on the SDGs. How to implement them, and how to later communicate on this is still a difficult point for companies. As expressed in the interviews, the companies are unsure what is the right way to truly embrace the SDGs, as the most obvious and manageable form of implementing the SDGs is to incorporate them in their CSR strategies, even though the hope to eventually implement them in the companies' core business strategies is there, the ways to get there are however often unsure.

5.10 Findings based on interviews summarized

The interviews mostly confirmed what was found in the indicators, but it also gave depth to what was found. For example, in the case of company D, it showed that the company is actually rather far on implementing sustainability in the company, although this is not shown through its communications on the SDGs. What is interesting to note is that all companies showed interest in embracing the SDGs in the interviews, also the inactive and the inactive to reactive companies in the case study. It also gave interesting insights into how the company embraces the SDGs, as it is rather difficult to find out through online information whether the company embraces the SDGs in its corporate strategies, in its CSR strategies, or perhaps whether it is just for PR. Even though interviews may make the interviewees give answers that are most desirable, it did allow to get a bit deeper in the reasoning behind these choices. In fact, reasoning behind choices is more often than not undisclosed in company's information on sustainability. The interviews found that companies are indeed struggling with the implementing of the SDGs, even though corporate websites and reports may suggest otherwise. The companies are intending on achieving true embracement of the SDGs, but may have different ideas on how to do this, if any ideas at all. Where networks are an encouragement, concrete tools or tips would be beneficial for companies in the sample.

6. Discussion

Businesses can and should play a large role in realising the SDGs (PwC, 2015). The results show different aspects that are of importance when businesses attempt to do this. These aspects will be explored in more depth in this chapter.

6.1 Corporate embracement of the SDGs within GCNL

On the basis of the findings, in can be concluded that yes, indeed companies within the UN Global Compact network are working on the SDGs. However, not all of them are. This is in line with the expectations, seeing as being a part of the UN Global Compact does not require companies to work on the SDGs from now on. They are informed of their existence by being a part of the UN Global Compact, but companies are only required to communicate their contributions to the Global Compact principles. PwC (PwC, 2015) found that 71% of businesses had already started on the SDGs in 2015, thus compared to that perhaps this percentage rather low. But compared to the research by MKB Netherlands on SME involvement with the SDGs, which found that over 8 out of 10 companies were unaware of the SDGs or what they exactly entail, this result is still rather high (Veenstra, 2017).

The companies are all informed through Global Compact communications of the importance of the SDGs and the need for businesses to embrace them. This is in line with what was found in the interviews, where all companies were in some way busy with the SDGs. Even though the inactive and the inactive to reactive companies gave us doubt about this due that they were not yet communicating on the SDGs publicly yet, all companies have intentions to keep working on the SDGs and to keep on or start communicating on the SDGs. Therefore, it can be concluded that the SDGs are definitely living among the sample.

What can be said for certain, is that the companies do feel the need to work on sustainability, as the companies within the case study are all intent on working on sustainability. This is in line with the need for businesses, if sustainable development is to be achieved (Schaltegger et al., 2012). Even though a large amount of companies is not yet communicating contributions to the SDGs, the majority of companies does express the want to fulfil the need for companies to devote attention to sustainability.

6.2 Factors influencing the prediction

Another related question for the research is whether other factors influence the prediction that companies in the network work on the SDGs. Therefore, as intervening variable to the relation between the sample and the corporate involvement with the SDGs is the company characteristics, such as the sector and the company size. As for company size, it is found that large companies do have an advantage in implementing the SDGs faster. Similarly, it seems that being a large company is an advantage in the ease of embracing sustainability as such, seeing as there are mostly large companies with the UN Global Compact in the Netherlands. Therefore, it seems that larger companies are better equipped to pick up sustainability within the company. This is also what came out of the interviews. Company B expressed that it is indeed difficult for them to pick up new sustainability initiatives, seeing as there is no CSR department, or even a CSR manager. With the

larger companies A, C and E, they expressed that indeed it was the CSR departments or the CSR managers that picked up the SDGs when they were published, and made sure this flowed through the company. Recently, MKB Servicedesk (Veenstra, 2017) published an internal research into whether the SMEs in the Netherlands are picking up the SDGs, with the results in line with what was expected here. They found that over 8 out of 10 SMEs in the Netherlands have not yet heard about the SDGs or are not entirely sure what they entail. Once the SDGs were explained, over 80% wanted to start working on the SDGs, with the aim to contribute to creating a better world. The other 20% expressed they had doubts about whether their company could not make the difference. This is in part in line with what was expresses by company B, which wants to contribute to the SDGs and sustainability more, but does not have enough capacity to grasp it truly. And for there to be real contribution and not just PR, it requires some real thought and time, which is often unavailable for business elements that do not require immediate attention at a small company. This is also in line with what was found by the research into the SDGs by the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016), which found that it is mostly frontrunners that are able to make the concrete translation of the SDGs and truly embrace them in their business strategies, but most companies still find this very difficult.

Company D is not a mainstream, smaller company, in that their corporate aim is to create a sustainable world, thus they do indeed have a CSR manager, even though they are a relatively small company. Thus, another enabler of embracing the SDGs is to have sustainability at the core of your company.

The sectors do seem to make a difference. Company E expressed in the interview that they are slightly envious of companies in the food producer or beverages sector, because it seems easier for them to make the link with the SDGs than for financial services companies. They indeed score rather well, but not necessarily extraordinary: there are in both cases an inactive companies and an either active to proactive or proactive company. Thus, the difference between the two is also very large. The study on SMEs in the Netherlands found similar results: 83% of SMEs in the financial services sector in the Netherlands is unaware of the SDGs. The support services sector on the other hand was at the top for awareness of the SDGs with the SMEs in the Netherlands (Veenstra, 2017). This is not what was found in the GCNL sample, where these two sector were the highest represented, but showed similar results in the amount of inactive/reactive and active/proactive companies.

6.3 What SDGs companies report on working towards

The SDGs that companies work on most are is SDG 8 on decent growth and economic work. It seems that companies are practically automatically contributing to this SDGs, simply by being a business. Company B, which can at the moment be regarded as inactive towards the SDGs, expressed as well that this is the first SDG she thought of as where the company is contributing, due to the fact that their business brings economic growth to the area where their business is situated. In a similar vein, company D expressed that all companies can in some way say they contribute to the SDGs. SDG 8 is therefore an easy target for businesses, because decent growth and economic growth is also a business aim, at it automatically contributes to the economic sustainability of the business. Moreover, the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) found that SDG 8 is linkable to multiple material topics within companies, and is therefore often mentioned as well. Interestingly, SDG 8 is

also the one on which the CBS (CBS, 2016) reports that the Netherlands is doing very well. This could due to the effort the companies are putting in it, or it could be that this extra attention from businesses is in fact not necessary. Of course, this does not mean that the SDG should be neglected, as it entails positive aspects such as good working conditions and low unemployment rates, but perhaps it should not be an area of extra attention.

The next SDG which companies work on most is SDG 13 on climate action. As company A and company E expressed, they see sustainability not just as the environmental part. This implies the assumption that most businesses do indeed view sustainability as "being green" and focusing on the environmental part of sustainability, thus focusing on SDG 13 on climate action.

SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production fits well with a lot of companies' aim to become circular, such as company C. They expressed that since their aim to become climate neutral was already realized, the company now aimed to become circular. Therefore, their KPIs on sustainability will probably be easily linkable to indicators of SDG 12. This is probably in line with lots of companies aiming to reduce waste, etc. Moreover, it is in line with what the UN Global Compact expects companies to do, which is to realise that the SDGs are an opportunity, but companies should not ignore their value chains and their bottom line in the process.

Finally, SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals is mentioned a lot, which is also what came forward from the interviews. Partnerships are needed to truly create a sustainable world. This is also an SDG that scores high in the CBs report (CBS, 2016): aid to development countries especially is high. However, it is unsure whether this is the idea that companies have about this SDG, because during the interviews it seemed that the companies viewed SDG in line with working with other parties through partnerships and networks on the SDGs, and not per se with development aid or helping developing countries per se.

The least communicated SDGs are SDG 1 on achieving zero hunger next to SDG 2 on ending hunger. This is rather striking, because the research by MKB Nederland (Veenstra, 2017) found that if SMEs in the Netherlands aimed to contribute to specific SDGs, SDG 1 and 2 are in the top 3, next to SDG 4 on quality education. The companies in the interviews, such as company B and E, expressed that they believe these kind of topics, especially SDG 1 and 2, relate more to developing countries, and not to well-developed, western countries like the Netherlands, especially if your company works and focuses on the Netherlands only and is a service provider. It is therefore remarkable that the SMEs would want to contribute on these SDGs mostly. The CBS (CBS, 2016) found that indeed there is a work to be done on SDG 1 in the Netherlands as well, focusing on the inequality in relation to income. Therefore, extra attention from businesses would be very welcome. With regard to SDG 4, is it interesting to note that this SDG also scores high in the CBS report (CBS, 2016). Again, this poses the question whether the companies were to thank for these results, or whether the extra attention is not necessarily required from businesses.

The other least communicated on SDG is SDG 10 on life below water. This is perhaps relatable to the outcome of the CBS report (CBS, 2016), which found that the Netherlands scores rather low on this topic. It is also not a topic that came forward in the interviews at all, where the other two low scores were in some way excused for not getting a lot of attention during the interviews. One possible explanation could be that companies are unaware of the work that needs to be done on SDG 10.

Company C expressed that they would like to be aware of how the Netherlands is doing in general, and was unaware of the CBS report on the progress of the SDGs in the Netherlands.

SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions is reported on contributions about average. The CBS found that we score rather high on this point in the Netherlands. The relative political stability and the feeling of safety is, as was given the idea in the interviews as well, often attributed to the government, and it seems businesses do not feel like they are a part of this as much as governments.

Five companies in total communicate that they contribute to all SDGs. One of these companies was in the inactive to reactive phase, one in the reactive phase, and the other three in the proactive phase. This difference is rather strange, seeing as it is unclear whether companies communicating their contributions to all SDGs can be seen as an inactive or a proactive company trait. The Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016) found that the best practices were companies that did not communicate on all SDGs, but those that were material to the company. It could be the case these companies found all the SDGs material to the company, but seeing as the companies in the inactive to reactive and the reactive attitude towards the SDGs did communicate a materiality assessment, it is unlikely that they concluded this. However, in the case of the proactive companies it could in theory be the case. It is however not possible to make conclusions about this on the basis of this research.

6.4 The role of the UN Global Compact in the embracement of the SDGs

It has been found that the companies in the network are indeed busy with sustainability and the SDGs, one more than the other. However, a quite specific sample has been chosen for this research. Compared to the PwC study (PwC, 2016) a similar amount of companies reported on individual SDGs. Moreover, the individual SDGs that most companies report on are also similar. When comparing to the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016), 9 out of 20 companies in the highest category of leaders is part of the GCNL network. However, the total amount of companies in the Transparency Benchmark is over 250 companies. This is about 2.5 times the sample of GCNL. This means that in comparison, a relatively large amount of companies in the highest category of the Transparency Benchmark are part of the GCNL network. Of this top 20, about 47% have taken steps to work on the SDGs, thus of the top frontrunners in the Netherlands, only 47% has started to incorporate the SDGs into the business in whatever way. This is only relatively more than the 42% of companies in the GCNL network that are inactive to reactive or more active. Moreover, the findings on whether the companies are contributing to the SDGs are similar if not smaller amounts than what was found on the basis of the indicators in the GCNL network.

The interviews show a similar result. Companies B and E explicitly expressed the role the GCNL network has played in embracing the SDGs. In the case of company B, the GCNL events sparked the flame that was needed to start the implementation process of the SDGs within the company. However, in company E's case, that flame was already ignited, but the GCNL events helped to gain insights into how the practical adoption of the SDGs could go and provided company E with contacts to discuss this matter further. Therefore, the GCNL network has definitely played a part giving companies the knowledge, insights and examples of how to implement sustainability, which is in line

with the literature that suggests that being a part of UNGC has a positive impact on implementing the UNGC principles, which are sustainability oriented (Schembera, 2016).

The companies within the Global Compact are asked to work on sustainability, by pledging to the principles as set out by the Global Compact, not to the SDGs. This work on sustainability is not checked, in that it is up to the company to voluntarily take responsibility, be transparent and report on it (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Thus, the same eventually probably applies to the SDGs, where companies are asked to also report on their contributions to the SDGs. The role of the Global Compact is to bring companies together to work on sustainability, which it seems to have done with the interviewed companies.

6.5 Desk research representation of truth

Another question is whether the representation of the company as found by desk research is right on the real embracement of the SDGs. This was mostly the case, but not entirely. Companies A and C were identified as active and on the basis of the interviews this was confirmed. Their public information seemed to be in line with what was explained in the interviews.

Company B was identified as inactive, but it should probably be seen as progressing from inactive to reactive. Although this will not be visible for external stakeholders in the next year, the company is busy embracing the SDGs. Therefore, stating that they are inactive would be incorrect. However, on the basis of public information, this conclusion cannot be made.

Company D is considered on the basis of the interview proactive towards sustainability, where it was identified as inactive to reactive towards the SDGs. However, it is difficult to say what their attitude towards the SDGs is, seeing as they are unsure how they stand towards them themselves. It is possible to consider them active, but deliberately not proactive, as they choose to be proactive on sustainability as such. Where for some companies the SDGs can be a pathway or a dot on the horizon, as said by company E, for company D this pathway or dot is not needed.

Company E seemed further than it is: on the basis of the indicators they were considered active, but from the interview it seemed they were progressing from reactive to active. However, this step back was voluntarily, because they had performed a quick, easy mapping to find two SDGs to work on, however now they have decided to deepen and broaden this mapping, in order to truly embrace the SDGs.

It can therefore be concluded that the image as given from publicly communicated information is not entirely right. There can always be steps taken that are not visible for the outside world (yet). However, it is a way of mapping where the companies are at the moment, even though it can only be concluded partly. Unfortunately, there is no real example of a proactive company, deliberately choosing not to communicate on the SDGs. Company D is somewhat of an example of this, however even though they support the work of the SDGs, their aim is even higher.

6.6 Drivers to link CSR contributions through the SDGs

In most cases, the companies were not involved with the MDGs at the time. In fact, only company D expressed they were working on the themes at the time, but not the actual MDGs. Company C and E rightly pointed at that the aim of the MDGs was very different from the SDGs, as the MDGs were mostly aimed at governments working on the developing countries (UN Millennium Project, 2005). It seems therefore that working on the MDGs was not necessary for companies to work on the SDGs. Moreover, as company E confirmed, the publication of the SDGs went farther than the MDGs came and with a very different aim, namely to activate companies all over the world.

Companies A, B, C and D gave internal drivers to work on the SDGs, where they expressed the wish to contribute to realising a sustainable world mostly, not so much as the SDGs as the main goal. This is in line with what Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen (2009) and Graafland & van de Ven (2006) found, which is that companies see the moral perspective in which they believe they have an ethical duty to contribute to sustainability and wish to contribute to a sustainable future. In the case of company E, they expressed that the SDGs were somewhat of a pathway to this final goal of a sustainable world, therefore this can also be seen as an internal driver. Moreover, also in line with what was found in the literature on instrumental motives, company A expressed the economic sustainability that comes with working on sustainability and being involved with the according networks (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Garriga & Melé, 2004). Sustainability is not just a focus on the ethics and morals of business, but also ensuring economic sustainability (WBCSD, 2000). The companies interestingly did not mention drivers such as stronger brand-image or increasing profits for working on the SDGs, which are well-known drivers for companies that work on sustainability (Bryane, 2003). Neither did the companies bring up to need for legitimacy, by being a part of the network (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009).

In line with what PwC (PwC, 2016) found, companies B, C and E expressed that the SDGs can be a common language for everyone wanting to work on the SDGs. Company D expressed it as it gives a number to each of the world's problems, again creating a common language on how to realise a sustainable world. The SDGs are the common denominator where business can meet and contribute to the SDGs, as recognized by businesses (Frost & Sullivan & GlobeScan, 2017). This common language is also an external driver, in that companies expect stakeholders to have an answer on in what way they contribute to the SDGs. Therefore, for example company A found that they had received questions on what they do with sustainability at the moment, but in the future this is likely to be the SDGs, as this again creates a common language for businesses working together.

A common problem that is heard is that companies tend to feel like the SDGs are overwhelming, due to their sheer amount of goals, indicators and targets. A common thread in the interviews was that companies feel unsure as to how to figure out which SDGs they ought to contribute to, how many and why. As van Tulder and Lucht (2016) argue, the SDGs can be this prioritization, in that the SDGs with their indicators can create a way for companies to assess where the company can make a contribution, and from here on decide on the materiality of these possible contributions.

6.7 The SDGs in corporate social responsibility strategies or core strategies

From the results of the indicators, most companies were not yet at the stage of implementing the SDGs into strategies, perhaps other can communicating on them. However, those that did, mostly linked them to CSR strategies. CSR strategy are a way for companies to show to stakeholders what "good" things the company is working on, thus this could also mean for the SDGs (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). Only some seemed to have linked them to their core strategies, which usually made companies either active to proactive or proactive. This is in line with the literature, that suggests that indeed sustainability ambitions tend to be disconnected to main corporate strategies (Porter & Kramer, 2006). In the interview cases, most often the SDGs were picked up by the CSR or corporate citizenship team, or manager. Every company had at least a team or a manager concerned with sustainability, even the two smaller ones. However, the real implementation is very different.

It can be concluded that company A has put the SDGs at the centre of their business strategies, in that every service the company provides is indirectly tested by its contributions to the SDGs. In the case of company B and C, it seems it is mostly a part of communications at this point. As company B expressed, if it will work on the SDGs, it will start by linking them to the reporting mostly. Similarly, company D sees the SDGs as a part of the communications as well, but with different reasoning. For them, the SDGs and the aims they have are not new, thus they only have to provide external stakeholders with information on how the SDGs are a part of the company's strategy, but they are incorporated in the core strategies. Company C expressed that it communicated on the SDGs actively, and linked it to KPIs on sustainability, but it seemed that the SDGs were not a part of the corporate strategies (yet). In the case of company E, it seemed the SDGs are at the moment a part of the CSR strategy, but its aim is to incorporate the SDGs into core strategies, after the remapping of the SDGs is finished. It is therefore to be concluded that currently the majority of companies are indeed still linking the SDGs to their CSR strategies, and perhaps not yet to their core strategies.

Companies reported to the Transparency Benchmark research (The Crystal, 2016) that they found it rather difficult to find the practical translation of the SDGs within the business strategies. They however also found a best practice, which showed a company that chose from the SDGs that were most material to the company a couple indicators to work on. This made the abstract idea of "contributing to the SDGs" a very concrete and implementable organisation.

6.8 The role of networks, partnerships and reporting frameworks

The biggest reason for companies not be identified as a more active attitude towards the SDGs, thus through indicators being identified in lesser active phases, is due to the fact that companies have little partnerships or networks with regard to the SDGs. The interviews showed mixed results. All companies mention they are part of some sector-related network, and in some cases these networks also work on the SDGs.

Moreover, with most companies the SDGs do not yet play a role in their partnership portfolio. Exceptions are company E, which works with a special financial services network on the SDGs. Most, however, mention GCNL as the network their involved with on the SDGs, which again shows the role GCNL plays in companies' embracement of the SDGs. Company B and C see possible connections to the SDGs, based on existing partnerships or networks, which could be explored.

Positive sides of networks, partnerships, etc., is that companies do see partnerships as needed for achieving the SDGs, as mentioned by companies B, D and E. Especially working with peers on the subject enhances the learning effect, which in part explains that companies name their sector related networks many times. The Global Compact network is also meant to be a learning platform, where companies can encourage each other and help each other to better CSR strategies (Ruggie, 2001). However, another main finding is that the amount of networks, partnerships and reporting frameworks is very confusing and discouraging for companies. This is a negative side of the partnerships and networks, where some form of alignment between all the different networks, partnerships and reporting frameworks could truly benefit companies. Another negative is that it requires a lot of time investments, next to the fact that starting new partnerships of the basis of the SDGs still need there to be a business interest before companies can get into them.

Overall, it seems that companies are mentioning partnerships as a needed factor, but on the other hand it seems they are unsure how to go about this exactly. Networks like the GCNL and other sector-related networks have been seen as a moderating factor in the embracement of the SDGs.

6.8 Window dressing or transparency

Communications on the SDGs are very different as found through the indicators. It seems that most companies are not communicating on the SDGs, but the majority of companies that do, are communicating with some explanation or elaboration of in what way the company works on the SDGs. Therefore, it seems that once companies decide on communicating on the SDGs, companies often choose to be quite elaborate with their communication.

What was found through the interviews is that two out of five companies have deliberately not communicated on the SDGs, or in one of these cases very limited. Company B is starting the implementation of the SDGs within the company, before it will decide on communicating this to external stakeholders. Company D expressed the opposite, where they believe that for them the internal implementation of the SDGs, in a sense, has already been achieved, it is for them to communicate this to external stakeholders.

Companies A, C and E have used their website and their integrated/sustainability report to communicate to external stakeholders in what way the company is working on the SDGs and how they are linked to corporate strategies. However, during the interviews it seemed that the real embracement of the SDGs seemed different, even though they communicated in a similar way. Company C made it seem like the SDGs were mostly for communication purposes and giving a pathway to the CSR efforts of the company, eventually in the hope it would trickle through the organisation. Company E saw it differently, in that they had already performed a relatively straightforward mapping, communicated on this, and have now decided to go beyond this first mapping before communicating this again. This shows an understanding that the SDGs are not just for communicating, but to indeed create a pathway for corporate strategies. It seems they want to work from the SDGs and create according strategies from here, where possible. Company A has used the SDGs in creating the new form of business conduct, however from here on there are no new plans for implementation of the SDGs, where the SDGs and sustainability should be seen as a continuous effort.

One of the best practices within the Transparency Benchmark was to link the companies' material issues to the SDGs (The Crystal, 2016). The only company in the interviewed companies that has done this and communicated it, is company A. The other companies expressed they had not, however company C and D do have some sort of sustainability materiality assessment, which in the future could perhaps be linked to the SDGs. In the future after the remapping of the SDGs, company E aims to also perform a materiality assessment. However, none of the interviewed companies have taken steps to reserve materiality and truly put the SDGs at the core of their business strategies (van Tulder & Lucht, 2016).

Companies A, and D have a had dialogue strategy through their materiality assessment, in which case there is two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholders are involved in decision making on CSR strategies (Cornelissen, 2017). These companies have truly taken the advice and contributions from external stakeholders to heart and implemented this in part in their CSR strategies and their materiality assessment. Company C has performed a materiality assessment, but it is unsure whether this was indeed as two-way symmetrical as was the case with company A and D. On the basis of the interview, it is believed this was a persuasive model of communication, which is a two-way model, but it is asymmetrical. The public is asked for feedback, but they are not actively involved in the decision making. This seems more applicable than the dialogue strategy. Company E is also at the persuasive model of communication, where there was a stakeholder dialogue, but the company is working on its own a lot further still. The aim is to progress to a two-way symmetrical communication, through the dialogue strategy. Finally, company B seems to employ an informational strategy at the moment, where they mostly inform the public of what the company is working on regarding sustainability.

Overall, it seems the companies do aim to be transparent. It seems that the communication efforts of the interviewed companies are a reflection of what the company has done, or the company has even done more in the case of company B and D. Seeing as the companies in the interviews confirm their work on sustainability or the SDGs, it seems that their CSR contributions are up to par and being a part of the UN is not just for disguising the true contributions (Voegtlin & Pless, 2014). On the other hand, corporations tend to claim that sustainability is an integral part of the company already, even though this is a continuous process in which being on a path towards sustainability should probably be applicable (Ihlen & Roper, 2014). Thus, it is difficult to say whether this communication is in fact a true representation.

6.9 Are the SDGs the answer

In order to create structure, SMART and concrete goals, the SDGs and its targets and indicators could be a very useful tool, as expressed by company B and E. This was also found by the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016), in that the SDG indicators can be a specific way of implementation the SDGs into corporate strategies. Even though it requires some true thought and time, the eventual implementation of the SDGs will be more valuable than using the SDGs as a communication tools.

Another important consideration is the way some companies may view the SDGs. For example, with the case of company D, which would be considered at the very least an active to proactive company

towards sustainability, but at the most active towards the SDGs. They have a reasoning for this: they beg the question whether the SDGs are indeed the goals that are needed to bring about systematic change in all systems. If the world really is to become sustainable, investment to unsustainable activities should end (Stafford-Smith et al., 2016). As company D expressed, the SDGs do not address sustainability problems such as controversial weapons, shutting down the fossil fuel industry, etc. Moreover, company D expresses that the SDGs have been drafted in a top-down way, where governments and intergovernmental organizations imply solutions for the world, which is not the way company D thinks the world will become sustainable (Hajer et al., 2015). Thus, for non-mainstream companies such as company D, the SDGs are not the answer to solve all sustainability issues.

Company E expressed doubts about whether the SDGs are the answer, due to companies often focusing on the good side of sustainability through the SDGs, where the aim is to do good. Company E asked itself whether that is the right way to go, as they aim to avoid hard and ensure there are no negative impacts first, before working on contributing to the good and creating positive impacts. However, as Van Zanten (2017) found, avoiding harm eventually creates larger contributions to the SDGs. Thus, it is important to note here that other than company E, none of the companies expressed the intention to avoid harm through the SDGs, even though this eventually is even better for a company bottom line (Bhandari & Javakhadze, 2017).

On the whole, the SDGs can benefit and guide the mainstream companies, be it large or SME, in their pursuits towards realising a sustainable world. As expressed by company C, and perhaps also applicable to company A, there is however the important question on how to keep the SDG-spirit high and continue working on them. Sustainability, and thus the SDGs, ought to be a continuous effort, however this seems rather difficult for companies. This relates to another important question to be asked here, which is whether the SDGs will lead to more results. It seems that for companies A, B, C and E, the SDGs have inspired them to embrace sustainability. As company B and E expressed, before the SDGs, companies could get rather lost in all the initiatives and ideas to be a sustainable company, where the SDGs could guide these efforts. Thus, for them the SDGs are indeed a way to guide companies and to get true results. However, making sure there are not negative impacts anymore is very important with this as well.

7. Conclusion, limitations and suggestions for further research

7.1 How to go forward: true embracement of the SDGs by businesses

In this paper, companies were checked on indicators to assess whether they are active in pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals. Next to that, a multiple case study was conducted which sought out to gain deeper insights into the ways in which companies within GCNL embrace the SDGs. Included in this interview sample were five companies out of the total 106 companies, which were assessed on the basis of the indicators. The interviewed companies formed a range of different sectors, sizes and identified attitudes towards the SDGs on the basis of the indicators, in order to compare them. In this section, the research questions and findings will be discussed one by one.

The main research question is: *'Are companies in the UN Global Compact embracing the Sustainable Development Goals in their corporate (social responsibility) strategies?'.*

On the basis of the findings from the indicators and the interviews, it can be concluded that less than half of the companies are communicating on the SDGs. This is compared to the other companies in the Netherlands, as compared to studies by PwC (2016), CBS (2016) and the Transparency Benchmark (The Crystal, 2016). However, it can also be concluded that there are companies that will be contemplating the implementation of the SDGs, but are not yet communicating about them (a lot), as was the case with two out of the five of the interviewed companies. Therefore, within the total sample, there will also be companies that are not yet publicly communicating about the SDGs, where they are aware of them and wanting to contribute to them. Moreover, in the interviews it became clear that the companies did view being a part of the GCNL network as an enabler for them to either start or continue with communicating their contributions to the SDGs and even embracing them in corporate (core) strategies.

> *Sub-research question #1: Does being a part of the UN Global Compact network make a difference for the attitude towards sustainability and the SDGs?*

Companies within the UN Global Compact Network support the principles as set out by UNGC, on the sustainability topics of human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption. Seeing as most if not all the SDGs can be put under one of these pillars, it can be expected that companies already are working on the SDGs even if not explicitly mentioned or realised by the company. This was also mentioned by company D, which expressed that most if not all companies are in some way already working on the SDGs. Most of the companies were indeed already working on themes that relate to the SDGs, and are now finding a way to structure these activities and link them to the SDGs, or even link the SDGs to core strategies from which new activities will be decided. Again, the GCNL network was also an encouragement for some interviewed companies to embrace the SDGs, through events and tools offered by UNGC.

> *Sub-research question #2: Are the SDGs mostly linked to corporate social responsibility strategies or core strategies?*

From both the indicators and the interviews, it appeared at this point in time the companies are mostly linking the SDGs to CSR strategies, as this is mostly the area within the company where the SDGs enter the company, through CSR teams or the likes. However, the interviews also uncovered

that most of the companies have intentions to put the SDGs at the core of the business and work from the needs and targets of the SDGs onwards in creating corporate strategies. However, this is a rather difficult and time-consuming task, which is something multiple interviewed companies recognise and therefore do not want to rush. Thus, at the moment it can be concluded that the companies are still embracing them mostly in CSR strategies, but often have the intention to go beyond this and incorporate it in core corporate strategies.

> *Sub-research question #3: What are drivers to link corporate contributions to sustainability through the SDGs?*

The SDGs are said to be a dot on the horizon and a pathway to guide companies through the maze that is sustainability, with its many networks, partnerships, tools, reporting frameworks, etc. They provide a common language, which is partly thanks to the sheer force of the publication at the time, and companies can all relate to each other and help each other through this common language. Moreover, it can create structure in the many initiatives or projects companies are often involved in, due to the fact that they aim to contribute to a sustainable world and thus engage themselves in many good projects. The SDGs can form a structure, a route to which companies can link or express all the projects and initiatives, in order for them to increase their positive impacts and decrease their negative impacts to create a sustainable world.

Discouragements are that there are so many goals, indicators and targets, which in turn create confusion, similar to the amount of networks, reporting frameworks, etc. Moreover, for some companies the SDGs are not advanced and far-stretching enough, seeing as for some companies the SDGs are seen as continuing the current system, where they feel the current system is not good enough to create a truly sustainable world.

> *Sub-research question #4: How advanced is the communication in contributions to the SDGs with companies within the network: is it window dressing or transparency?*

For the companies in the interviews it seems that the companies indeed communicate similar to what is truly happening within the company. These companies, in most cases, have given more thought and a deeper analysis of the SDGs within the company than what was published. Thus, for some of the considerations surrounding the SDGs the choice was made not to publicly communicate this. This could be a sign that it is not window dressing, but transparency, which is the idea that was given in the interviews. However, it is impossible to state the same for the companies that were only assessed on the basis of the indicators. In fact, the companies that were the biggest surprise during the interviews, were the companies that were assessed to be inactive or inactive to reactive, and on the basis of the interviews were found to be contemplating the SDGs and what they meant for their company. They had a different reasoning for not communicating these contemplations yet, but it shows that companies do take what is communicated in clear consideration. The same can be said for some of the larger, active companies that were interviewed. Company E for example decided that, even though they already published a mapping of the SDGs, they wanted to make this assessment deeper and better thought out in order for them to truly show in what way the company embraces the SDGs within the company. On the whole, it can be concluded that there are of course some companies in the Network that are using the SDGs for window dressing, but the interviewed companies show that this definitely is not always the case. In fact, both the inactive and active companies in the case study confirmed that it was not window dressing for them.

7.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

The theoretical contribution of the research is that it creates more insight into how companies address the SDGs. Even though it is a specific sample, the UN Global Compact network, it creates an image of the drivers, contemplations and ways in which the companies embrace the SDGs. It adds to the research on the implementation of the SDGs and how far companies are at this point.

This research has provided a practical contribution by identifying and assessing the way in which companies approach the implementation process of the SDGs. Moreover, by understanding the relation between companies and the SDGs, it can help companies develop their own policies or concrete plans to implement the SDGs within their companies. By learning from the findings of other companies in the network, companies can assess their own way of implementing the SDGs and compare them to the others in the network to see what would be most effective.

There are some specific advices for companies within the Global Compact Network that can be drawn from what was found in this research. First of all, it seems the obvious choice to have the CSR team or some similar team be the first to pick up the SDGs. However, this also creates a difficult situation to truly integrate the SDGs within core strategies, as the implementation needs to work its way up to corporate strategies from CSR strategies. Company D put sustainability, not the SDGs, at its core. For this company, the implementation of the SDGs is not as difficult as it is for the other companies, because, as mentioned by the company itself, there is practically no one that needs convincing of the importance of sustainability. The same can be said for the SDGs. Therefore, companies that truly put sustainability and/or the SDGs at the core of their business, by making it a real part of the mission and the purpose of the company, will be better able to contribute to the SDGs. On the other hand, to make a possibly even large impact, the company should not ignore the company's negative impacts. In fact, focusing on these impacts is perhaps even more important for the company as a whole than focusing on the positive impacts the company can make.

Second of all, some companies expressed the difficulty to keep the SDGs alive within the company and to keep them at the top of the agenda. However, they also saw that this is vital, as true embracement requires the SDGs to be a constant topic of conversation within the company. In the interviewed company sample there seems to be no best practice on this yet, other than perhaps company D on sustainability. When sustainability and/or the SDGs are a part of the purpose of the company, it is impossible for them to fade away in the employee's minds.

Next, prioritization is vital as well. The amount of indicators and targets can be very overwhelming for companies. Companies often cannot and should not work on each target and indicator set out by the SDGs. What they should do, is find out which of these targets and indicators are materially related to the company, as advised by the Transparency Benchmark as well (The Crystal, 2016). This relates to both the potential negative and potential positive impacts the company makes.

Successfully implementing the SDGs requires a clear, concrete path for the company. Where the amount of indicators and targets can be overwhelming, they can also be a way for the company to check where the company can make a positive impact or where they should decrease their negative impact. Moreover, as some of the companies expressed, it set clear targets for what needs to be achieved, creating concrete goals for the company. The goal is to take the vagueness of the SDGs out and create a practical way of implementing the SDGs in smaller steps.

Finally, making well thought out choices on communication is of importance as well. As concluded from company D, it seems communicating some information on the company's contributions to the SDGs is important, as external stakeholders are more and more aware of the SDGs and asking for clarification on contributions. Companies however do have a choice on what to communicate. One way is to report on sustainability contributions through the SDGs. Another option is to link the SDGs to already existing sustainability KPIs. Either way, it is important to ensure that what is communicated is a true reflection of what the company is in fact doing.

7.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The research aimed to identify the way companies within the Global Compact address the SDGs. First, this was done by checking the companies against a list of indicators. There was no quantitative, statistical analysis done on the indicators, which is a suggestion for future research. In order to validate the indicators more and generalize the results from the study, this would be needed. The indicators were developed on the basis of the literature review and were constructed from the basis of this only. Therefore, the validity of the indicators is not proven. To ensure validity for the indicators, the indicators were assessed and adapted based on the literature and other findings multiple times. Moreover, the list of indicators was also checked multiple times for the members, to ensure that no information was missed and the right indicators were identified. The data collection of the indicators was rather subjective, as there was only one researcher. Moreover, the indicators were qualitatively assessed, which again allows for subjectivity through the interpretation as made by the researcher. Thus, to ensure validity of the data collection, further research should ensure multiple researchers. Another flaw is that the research was only done at one point in time. Longitudinal data could also show the continuous effort of companies, as each year new reports are published. Finally, due to the fact that the indicators were checked on the basis of information published by the company itself, this allowed for high controllability by the company.

Since the sample for the interviews consisted of only five companies, the image of the entire sample is incomplete. If a large sample of businesses was interviewed and analysed in a deeper sense, the image would be more complete. Moreover, the amount of cases that were interviewed was also limited, since it did not include companies from all attitudes towards the SDGs. For future research, a large sample of interviewed companies consisting of both large and SME companies for the attitudes towards the SDGs would create a more complete image for the total sample. A disadvantage of the small sample is that this research cannot make claims that are representative of the entire sample of companies within GCNL. Moreover, since the sample only focused on Dutch companies, it cannot be seen as representative for companies in the worldwide Global Compact network. On the other hand, the findings found in the interviews were in most cases largely corresponding, making the likelihood of these findings to be generalizable larger. To ensure that companies in the GCNL network are in fact different from other companies, further research could compare the research to different groups. For example, it could compare the GCNL group of companies to other sustainability frontrunner companies, through for example the Dow Jones Sustainability Index or the Transparency Benchmark. Moreover, to see whether the companies are indeed achieving results on the SDGs, further research could look into whether companies have played a part in the progress on specific SDGs as set out by for example the CBS (2016) study.

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9. Appendix

Appendix A: Indicators for members of GCNL

A. Inactive approach
- A.I.1. No explicit statements on the SDGs
- A.I.2 No partnerships on the SDGs
- A.I.3. Not involved in any network or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs
- A.I.4. No mention of the SDGs in corporate management areas
- A.I.5. Company with no scores, zero scores or laggards in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder
- A.II.1. No explicit statements on a specific SDG
- A.II.2 No partnerships on a specific SDG
- A.II.3. No materiality matrix on the importance of specific SDGs
- A.II.4. No specific SDGs on either one of the triple bottom line pillars

B. Reactive Approach
- B.I.1. Small statement declaring support for the SDGs
- B.I.2. A relatively small amount of rather straightforward partnerships on the SDGs
- B.I.3. Involved in one or two networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs
- B.I.4. Statement that the SDGs are addressed in philanthropy or communication/reputation management
- B.I.5. Company is identified as peloton in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder
- B.II.1. Small statement declaring support for a specific SDG
- B.II.2. A relatively small amount of rather straightforward partnerships on a specific SDG
- B.II.3. The company has a materiality matrix involving sustainability issues related to the SDGs
- B.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on one of the triple bottom line pillars

C. Active Approach
- C.I.1. Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of the SDGs
- C.I.2. A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on the SDGs
- C.I.3. Involved in three or four networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs
- C.I.4. Statement and elaboration that the SDGs are addressed in corporate social responsibility strategies, and/or other functional areas of management
- C.I.5. Company is identified as followers in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder
- C.II.1. Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of a specific SDG
- C.II.2. A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on a specific SDG
- C.II.3. The company has a materiality matrix on the SDGs
- C.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on two of the triple bottom line pillars

D. Proactive Approach
- D.I.1. Strategic statements on the SDGs, with an elaborate explanation of the concrete way in which the SDGs are embraced in corporate strategies
- D.I.2. A relatively large amount of complex partnerships on the SDGs
- D.I.3. Involved in a five or more networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs
- D.I.4. The SDGs are fully embraced in corporate core strategies
- D.I.5. Company is identified as leaders in the Transparency Benchmark Ladder
- D.II.1. Strategic statements on a specific SDG, with an elaborate explanation of the concrete way in which this SDG is embraced in corporate strategies
- D.II.2. A relatively large amount of complex partnerships on a specific SDG
- D.II.3. The materiality matrix of specific SDGs is integral to the company
- D.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on all three of the triple bottom line pillars

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- B.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on one of the triple bottom line pillars

C. Active Approach

- C.I.1. Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of the SDGs
- C.I.2. A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on the SDGs
- C.I.3. Involved in three or four networks or other types of initiatives surrounding the SDGs
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	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI	CK	CL	CM	CN	CO	CP	CQ	CR	CS	CT	CU	CV	CW	CX	CY	CZ	DA	DB	DC
	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	4	1	1	1,5	1	2,5	1	1	1	3	1	2	1

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B.II.3. The company has a materiality matrix involving sustainability issues related to the SDGs
B.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on one of the triple bottom line pillars

C. Active Approach

C.I.1. Explicit statement declaring the aim to contribute to the realization of the SDGs
C.I.2. A relatively moderate amount of rather well thought out partnerships on the SDGs
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C.I.4. Statement and elaboration that the SDGs are addressed in corporate social responsibility strategies, and/or other functional areas of management
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D.I.1. Strategic statements on the SDGs, with an elaborate explanation of the concrete way in which the SDGs are embraced in corporate strategies
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D.II.4. Contributions to specific SDGs on all three of the triple bottom line pillars

Appendix B: Interview guide

Qualitative research on businesses' implementation of the SDGs in corporate strategies

1. **Introduction**

- First of all, thank you for your time.
- I am an MSc Global Business and Sustainability student at RSM, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Moreover, I am an intern for the UN Global Compact NL, for which I worked on a Young Professionals Program and conduct this research.
- The research is on corporate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- I selected several businesses in the network for interviews. To create a broad image, the business that were selected roughly represented the businesses in the network. Therefore, the amount of large companies is bigger than the amount of SMEs. The sectors that are highly represented in the network are in the interview sample and some little represented sectors. Finally, the cases were a representation of different levels of implementation of the SDGs, ranging from little to none, to a more advanced implementation.
- The purpose of the interview is to learn more about your experiences, the choices your company made and the reasons behind this.
- The answers will be neutralized for the purpose of the coding. The interview will be recorded and notes will be made. **CHECK CONSENT.**
- Hopefully 45-60 minutes will provide us with enough time. Can I ask for some clarification by e-mail of telephone?
- In the thesis, there will be no quotes as done by you as a company. The different companies will be presented in terms of their size, sector, and advancement level with regard to the SDGs. **CHECK CONSENT.**
- Please try to be brief in your answers.

Q1. Do you have any questions on the format of this interview?

Q2. Could you tell me your name function, responsibilities and role with the implementation of the SDGs within your company?

2. **Initial introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals to the company**

Q3. How did your company contribute to the realization of the MDGs?

Already active in sustainable development or not.

Q4. Could you summarize the history of the SDGs being a topic of conversation in your company?

When and for how long have the SDGs been a topic of conversation in the company, and were you actively involved with these conversations?

Q5. How did your company initially organize the internal implementation of the SDGs?

Responsibility for organizing the implementation of the SDGs within the company.

Q6. What were drivers to contribute to the realization of the SDGs for your company?

Reasons as to why the SDGs were topic of conversation in the first place: ethical, institutional or moral.

3. Implementing the SDGs

Q7. How were employees and other internal stakeholders involved in the companies' efforts to contribute to the realization of the SDGs? Is it specific to certain parts of the company, is it the CSR managers, innovation, etc.?

Implementation of the SDGs to internal stakeholders.

Q8. How were stakeholders outside of the company involved in the companies' efforts to contribute to the realization of the SDGs?

Implementation of the SDGs to external stakeholders.

4. Corporate Social Responsibility

Q9. How does your company work on its corporate social responsibility?

CSR at the core or a separate part of the company.

Q10. How are the SDGs linked to your corporate strategies? How do you envision this connection and how are you making this part of your core business (alone, with others and then with others)?

SDGs linked to the CSR strategy, or core strategies, or not at all.

5. Partnerships

Q11. Does your company engage in partnerships surrounding the SDGs or specific SDGs? Moreover, how are you addressing your current partnership portfolio: are you upgrading this towards the SDGs or are you gaining entirely new partnerships for the SDGs?

If yes, in what way and what are the reasons.

Q12. If yes, are there positive and/or negative aspects to being in partnerships surrounding the SDGs?

What it brings your company.

6. Networks

Q13. Does your company actively engage in networks surrounding the SDGs?

Networks such as GCNL or the SDG Charter.

Q14. What other guidelines or principles does your company work by or adhere to related to sustainability?

GRI, UNGC, OECD Guidelines, ISO 26000, etc.

7. Communication

Q15. How does your company communicate about its contribution to the SDGs, both internally as externally?

In annual reports, sustainability reports, websites, etc., and reasons as to why they do or do not communicate on contributions.

8. Materiality Assessment

Q16. Does your company perform a materiality assessment on the SDGs?

If yes, how has it made this.

Q17. What does your company do with this materiality assessment? How material are the SDGs already for you and how does the current materiality analysis show this?

In what way does the company work according to this assessment.

9. Lessons Learned.

Q18. Are there things you would do differently when you could start the implementation process of the SDGs all over again?

Lessons learned for other companies.

10. Closure

Q19. Do you have the feeling you have shared everything you wanted to share?

Q20. Do you have any further questions on the future process of analysis of your answers?

THANK YOU!