



‘The Power of Purpose’: The Significance of a B Corp Certification for Attracting and Retaining Employees in a Tight Labor Market

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Abstract

Today, the unemployment rate is at its lowest level in many developed countries. Specifically, The Netherlands is now experiencing a major shortage of labor. Businesses in many sectors face difficulties filling open positions. This study explores the significance of a B Corp certification for employees at different stages of the employee journey in the Dutch food industry. A B Corp certification, representing Benefit Corporation, is voluntarily pursued by companies committed to high social and environmental standards. Sustainability is a key aspect of a B Corp certification. Components covered by sustainability are ethical governance, circular economy, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), employee well-being, corporate social responsibility (CSR), green and socially responsible supply chains, and environmental footprints. The results of this study indicated that employees value sustainability and social responsibility throughout their employee journey, emphasizing the importance of these factors in attracting and retaining talent. This study indicated a lack of communication both internally and externally about the B Corp certification, highlighting the need for effective communication through various channels such as social media, the government, training, journals, and B Corp-certified businesses to attract and retain employees in a tight labor market. This research serves as a foundation for further research into the relationship between the B Corp certification and human resource management. Future studies could explore the significance of B Corp certification in other industries, such as the fashion industry, and investigate the awareness of this certification among individuals in the Netherlands or other countries. The findings highlighted the importance of integrating the B Corp mission into human resource management practices to attract and retain employees in a tight labor market.

Keywords: B Corp certification, human resource management, sustainability, communication, social responsibility, tight labor market, food industry.

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The labor market in the Netherlands currently experiences an extreme shortage. Several companies across all industries experience problems filling vacancies (UWV, 2023). The labor market's tension in The Netherlands increased in the second quarter of 2022 because of a further rise in open vacancies and a subsequent drop in the unemployment rate. The number of open vacancies increased by 16.000, while the average number of unemployed decreased by 11.000. Furthermore, in 2022 94.000 extra jobs were created (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). That is why organizations need a strong employer reputation to attract and retain employees more than ever.

According to earlier research, the desire to give full meaning to the experience of work is progressively growing with an increasing understanding of economic, social, and environmental challenges. Employees are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful when an organization takes on these challenges and when they positively impact these factors. Meaningful work is seen as a job quality that organization members particularly value (Frémeaux & Pavageau, 2020). Organizations that provide meaningful work are more likely to attract and retain employees than those that do not (Lysova et al., 2019).

A B Corp certification is one way to attract and bind individuals to a company (Borden & Mead, 2022). A B Corp certification is *“a designation that a business is meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials.”* (B Lab Global Site, 2023). Businesses that have chosen to become B Corp-certified voluntarily pursue the highest standards of social and environmental performance, responsibility, and transparency (B Lab Global Site, 2023). The application process for this certification is open for every organization, it is up to them to apply for this certification. Furthermore, a

certification can help employers find and keep high-performing employees. According to a study by Nicholas and Sacco (2017), students, many of whom are millennials and Gen Ze's who frequently look for employment with socially responsible businesses, expressed a strong desire to work for a B Corp-certified company (62.5%; Borden & Mead, 2022). According to previous research among B Corp-certified companies, whose treatment of employees is acknowledged as an "area of excellence", employee productivity is substantially larger (Diez-Busto et al., 2021).

An increasing number of Dutch businesses are B Corp-certified (*B Lab Global Site*, 2023). B Corp stands for Benefit Corporation. A B Corp certification is granted to businesses that have proven their dedication to ethical and sustainable business practices. They must meet high standards for social and environmental performance. Companies that received this certification have proven that they meet verified performance, accountability, and transparency standards in all areas of their operations, including employee benefits, charitable giving, supply chain operations, and input materials (*B Corp Certification Demonstrates a Company's Entire Social and Environmental Impact.*, 2023). The non-profit organization B Lab, which was founded in America in 2007, has accredited more than 5000 businesses in different nations worldwide since its foundation. To receive this certification, a business must go through several bureaucratic processes to verify that a company meets certain B Corp standards (*B Lab Global Site*, 2023). The B Corp certification covers the business' operations and evaluates its beneficial practices in areas like governance, human resources, customer service, community involvement, the environment, and sales of goods and services. Organizations that obtain the B Corp Certification agree to “*give the same rigor to their social and environmental impact as they do to their financial returns*” (Villela et al., 2021, p. 344).

The significance of sustainability is highlighted by the B Corp certification. *Sustainable development* is defined by the Brundtland Report from the United Nations 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). Components covered by sustainability are ethical governance, circular economy, SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals), employee well-being, corporate social responsibility (CSR), green and socially responsible supply chains, and environmental footprints (Ivanova et al., 2018). The importance of sustainability has grown in today's complicated and dynamic corporate world (Pereira et al., 2021). Furthermore, a sustainable and healthy environment is valued by an increasing number of individuals (Orîndaru et al., 2021). An increasing number of people consider their contributions to the world. Employees increasingly focus on a purpose, for example, the urge to contribute to a more sustainable and healthier world (Williams, 2019).

One of the key objectives of the food industry is sustainability. The food industry is already quite dynamic, and sustainability accelerates this dynamic even further. Sustainability-related standards have increased. Organic, Fairtrade, and animal well-being are crucial components of these new standards (Trauger, 2022). In this industry, sustainability is considered an essential strategic factor that addresses sector-specific problems and attains goals for global competitiveness (Arcese et al., 2015). To fulfill the rising demand for food, resulting from the growing population, food production must be increased even though it is currently one of the industries that contribute most significantly to climate change. As a result, it is essential for companies that operate in food production to implement a variety of sustainable technologies (Hassoun et al., 2022). Within the food industry, consumers increasingly request fair and environmentally friendly products (Arcese et al., 2015). Nowadays, sustainability and social responsibility are not only valued when individuals

consume food but are also becoming increasingly important in people's work environments (Nazir & Islam, 2020).

Employees of socially conscious businesses are more dedicated and passionate about improving the organization's environmental performance (Raza et al., 2021). The need for sustainability and corporate social responsibility among employees is noted in a variety of studies (Onkila, 2015). Nevertheless, not everyone values sustainability and social responsibility as highly as others do. For example, not everyone places the same emphasis on sustainability, and some may even be quite skeptical about the sustainability claims of organizations (Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Many people resist sustainability because things are changing so fast and, as a result, their sense of credibility is declining. They do not consider sustainability to be a factor that improves employer attractiveness. In today's world, "greenwashing" has become more common, which has reduced the credibility of employees (Mateo-Márquez et al., 2022).

Research by Paelman et al. (2022) suggest that a B Corp certification assists in embedding the mission into human resource management, in both the hiring and employee engagement processes. However, a B Corp certification may serve different purposes for employees in the different stages of the employee journey. Companies, as opposed to candidates, are more knowledgeable about the specifications of an open position and their own company in general (Falk et al., 2013). Research on B Corp certification has failed to explain how current employees, future employees, and former employees appreciate and make sense of a B Corp certification. What employees' motivations are to work for this specific company, or whether this certification increases employee loyalty. Spreading knowledge about the company's operations to potential employees can be achieved by having a B Corp certification.

Not every individual is aware of what a B Corp certificate includes, what B Lab measures, or how to obtain this certification. There is information asymmetry when people want to add sustainability as a criterion for working for a specific company but lack the knowledge and information to make a judgment. It is challenging for people to estimate sustainability accurately. Information asymmetry may exist because, for example, new employees still have limited information and knowledge to assess the employer's sustainability. However, this is less applicable to employees who work for a company for a longer period of time, they can more easily make their judgments and are less likely to use the certificate for this reasoning (Gupta & Saini, 2020). Therefore, employees in one stage of the employee journey may interpret the term "B Corp" differently than individuals from another stage (Falk et al., 2013). Companies and internal applicants have an informational advantage about several job qualities that are not visible to external applicants. The accuracy and reliability of the information available affect people's decision-making processes, as demonstrated by Akerlof (1970). Nowadays, there are knowledge asymmetries, meaning that some people know more than others about the factors that influence decisions (Falk et al., 2013).

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by examining the significance that B Corp certification may have for employees in different stages of the employee journey, in the food business in The Netherlands. Therefore, the research question of this study is: *What significance does B Corp certification have for employees in different stages of the employee journey in the Dutch food industry?*

Theoretical Framework

In the present labor market, employers must increase their employer attractiveness to retain and attract employees. Therefore, employers need to increase employee loyalty. A strategy for attracting new employees as well as retaining existing employees may be sustainability associated with a B Corp certification (Casey & Sieber, 2016; Williams, 2019). The B Corp certification, which is based on sustainability, innovative product-driven differentiated production, and organizational interchange, has significantly contributed to the importance of understanding employees' needs. This is an important factor in developing new added value for business operations, and attracting and retaining employees (Poponi et al., 2019). Businesses pay more attention to sustainability, and many businesses have realized that they can no longer solely focus on profit (Ivanova et al., 2018). Sustainable business practices could increase employee loyalty. Sustainability, information asymmetry, sustainability communication, the B Corp certification, meaningful work, employee loyalty, and the employee journey are significant variables in this research. The theoretical framework will provide a detailed explanation of these variables.

Sustainability (sustainable development)

In the Brundtland Report from the United Nations "*sustainable development*" was 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). It argues that the only form of progress that can be fully sustained is one that concurrently addresses the interrelated issues of economics, environment, and social well-being (Santillo, 2007). "*Corporate social responsibility*" (CSR) is defined by the European Commission (2009) as "*a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis*". Companies face a variety of challenges, for example,

resource depletion, social inequity, and climate change, which forces them to adapt their business models to sustainable business models (Kirchherr et al., 2017). According to a study from Nielson (2012), two-thirds of customers worldwide stated they prefer to buy from businesses that give back to society, and nearly half are prepared to pay more for products from these businesses. According to 66% of the surveyed participants in the study from Nielson (2012), the environment is the most crucial issue that businesses should pay attention to (Romero-Hernandez & Romero, 2018). Companies could be sustainable and socially responsible, not just economically, to achieve the integration of social and environmental concerns in corporate operations. To improve economic, environmental, and social performance, businesses could concentrate on the triple bottom line, often known as "people, planet, and profit" (Elkington, 1994).

Information asymmetry

Stakeholders, particularly new employees, and job seekers, frequently lack the knowledge and experience necessary to evaluate sustainability. According to Jensen and Meckling (1976), *information asymmetry* occurs when one party has more information than the other, in this case, potential employees generally have less information about business practices than the organization. Prior studies have shown that job and organizational variables play a significant role in determining application decisions. It indicates that these factors will become more significant as employee demands increase, which is the situation right now, in the tight labor market of today (Falk et al., 2013). Many job requirements are not visible to external candidates, giving internal candidates and businesses a knowledge advantage over them. As a result, information asymmetry differs within the different stages of the employee journey, the information asymmetry may be stronger for job seekers and recent hires than for those who have worked for a company for a while. The information asymmetry will decrease

if an individual gains knowledge from a company, for instance, about sustainability in relation to business operations.

Individuals from one stage may interpret the term "B Corp" differently than individuals from another stage. Individuals who are working at a company for a longer period are becoming more knowledgeable about an organization. Individuals who are not working at a B Corp-certified company sometimes assume that because a company received a certification, their decisions and operations are correct. The certification might be less significant to experienced employees because they are more familiar with the company and have probably already gathered more information independently that enables them to create their own opinion independent of a B Corp certification (Ehnert et al., 2013). Information asymmetry could be addressed by a B Corp certification. This certification could help employees make better sustainability estimations. However, within the food industry, in situations involving information asymmetry, the presence of quality characteristics like organic farming, animal welfare, or Fairtrade gives rise to concerns regarding the accuracy of labeling (Jahn et al., 2005).

Sustainability communication

The idea that modern businesses have responsibilities to their stakeholders, community, and society is a topic that has received a lot of attention in recent years. Nowadays, stakeholders, e.g. employees are increasingly looking to non-financial considerations (such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), natural resources, and human capital) to help them make the best possible business decisions (Hoang, 2018). Organizations share sustainability-related information (annual reports, sustainability reports) with stakeholders to help them assess and understand how their actions affect the social and ecological environment (Hoang, 2018).

B Corp certification

Stakeholders place a high value on sustainability, however, its meaning is quite challenging for internal and external stakeholders to define and assess, as it requires knowledge and expertise. The B Corp certification can make it easier to define and assess sustainability. *The B Corp certification* covers the business' operations and evaluates its beneficial practices in areas like governance, human resources, customer service, community involvement, the environment, and sales of goods and services. The non-profit organization, B Lab, was founded in the US in 2007 to promote the growth of more morally correct businesses (Villela et al., 2021). B Lab is the organization that assigns the B Corp certification to businesses.

Businesses that obtain the B Corp certification agree to “*give the same rigor to their social and environmental impact as they do to their financial returns*” (Villela et al., 2021). As a result, B Corp-certified businesses are frequently cited as examples of hybrid businesses (Villela et al., 2021). A B Corp certification provides a lot of emphasis on the environment (planet) and the employees within an organization, these are crucial aspects of this certification (B Lab Global Site, 2022). A business must adhere to three criteria in order to be certified as a B Corp. (Diez-Busto et al., 2021). The business must first fulfill performance standards. First, the B Impact Assessment (BIA), a free online instrument that assesses a company's positive impact across the following five domains - governance, workers, community, environment, and customers - must be completed by the business in order to achieve this (*B Lab Global Site, 2022*). Second, the business needs to adhere to all legal obligations. Finally, the business must demonstrate transparency by permitting the B Corp website to publish its B Impact Report, which includes the organization's (sub)ratings in each of the five domains (*B Lab Global Site, 2022*).

Individuals must give the B Corp certification significance before it may have any impact. Once they have been given the certification meaning, individuals could be able to evaluate sustainability due to the B Corp certification. It also gives the company more credibility when recruiting new employees by making it more likely that they will support its social and sustainable mission (Paelman et al., 2022).

Certifications in general

The usage of certifications, which are displayed through logos in communications and on products, communicates trade claims for unobservable quality characteristics. Greenwashing results in consumer skepticism regarding a certification (Szabo & Webster, 2020).

Employee sense-making/meaningful work

Many businesses realize that encouraging meaningful work is essential for keeping employees engaged and being able to retain them. That is because people want their employment to be more than just a source of income (Lysova et al., 2019). Work engagement, job satisfaction, career advancement, and other critical individual work and career outcomes are all positively correlated with meaningful work, which is broadly defined as work that is personally significant and worthwhile (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, e.g., Duffy & Dik, 2013). Work engagement is crucial for organizational performance, and finding meaning in one's work increases productivity and benefits the organization's results (Heyns et al., 2021). Prior studies have found a favorable relationship between meaningfulness at work, internal organizational dynamics, and employee engagement (May et al., 2004). This could be due to an increase in employees' motivation for self-actualization, which is directly related to having a higher purpose, feeling accomplished in one's work and life, and positively influencing society (Fairlie, 2011). However, some people value these aspects differently than others (Schäfer & Painter, 2021).

Due to how quickly things are changing, many individuals are becoming more and more skeptical about, for example, sustainability (greenwashing), and their perception of credibility regarding a B Corp certification decreases (Mateo-Márquez et al., 2022). The B Corp certification might be interpreted in various ways by individuals. It is challenging to define sustainability. Since this is technical, it is difficult to understand how an organization affects the world. It considers aspects like the impact that suppliers have, how much garbage a firm produces, CO2 emissions, and how much and what kind of energy a company uses. When individuals don't fully know an organization, this is already difficult, but even when someone does, environmental impact is often invisible (Jaeger & Upadhyay, 2020). This is why individuals base their judgments on cues and certifications.

Greenwashing

If individuals perceive sustainability as insincere or lacking authenticity, it is commonly referred to as *greenwashing*. *Greenwashing* is defined as “*the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance*” (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). The phenomenon of greenwashing follows the expansion of the green market. Many stakeholders are more aware of environmental concerns because of the expansion of environmental issues and the ensuing increase in public awareness. Stakeholders, including investors, consumers, governments, and corporate clients, have been putting more pressure on businesses to publish information about their environmental performance and to produce environmentally friendly goods during the past ten years (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

Employee loyalty

Prior studies have gathered statistical evidence that CSR initiatives have a major impact on employee loyalty, which results in more dedication from employees to the organization. Furthermore, the results indicate that a company's performance and

competitiveness increase in direct correlation to employee loyalty (Stojanović et al., 2020). According to a different study, employee loyalty is significantly influenced by job performance and the quality of human resources has a meaningful impact on work performance, and employee loyalty (Darmawan, 2020).

Employee journey

The motivations and experiences of employees might be impacted by the different stages of their *employee journey* in which employees may be. This is due to information asymmetry. The term "employee experience" refers to a person's overall perceptions of their relationship with their employer organization as a result of all of their interactions at different times throughout their employee journey. As this is personal, everyone's experience will be unique (Plaskoff, 2017). The quality of employee experiences directly influences employee satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and, ultimately, performance. The employee journey is filled with many significant moments and interactions (Plaskoff, 2017). Table 1 provides a description of the different stages of the employee journey in this study.

Table 1
Stages employee journey

| Stage | Explanation |
|----------------|--|
| Stage 1 | Someone interested in working at Wessanen Benelux. A participant who is not currently employed at Wessanen Benelux may respond differently due to information asymmetry. |
| Stage 2 | Someone who is recently employed at Wessanen Benelux. The same reasoning as in stage 1 applies to this stage. |
| Stage 3 | An employee who is employed at Wessanen Benelux for 1-5 years. Employees who are employed by a company for a longer period and who like sharing information about the B Corp certification can take on the role of ambassadors. These employees can spread a company's mission and vision to other people. If an employee values this certification, B Corp can have a significant impact on this communication about a company's mission and vision, to other people outside the organization. A person can relate the characteristics of this certification to themselves. |

Stage 4 An employee who is employed at Wessanen Benelux for more than 5 years. The same reasoning as in stage 3 applies to this stage.

Former employee of Wessanen Benelux. In this stage, information was retrieved about if previous employees are still employed at a B Corp-certified company; if not, it is important to understand why they are not, as well as the differences in the operations of businesses with and without a B Corp certification.

Method

Design

In this study, qualitative research was conducted to investigate the significance of the B Corp certification within the different stages of the employee journey for attracting and retaining potential, current, and former employees in the food industry in The Netherlands. Thirteen semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted in Dutch. An in-depth interview seeks to fully understand the attitudes, motivations, beliefs, experiences, and values of the participant (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The interview guide can be found in Appendix 4.

Participants

Case description

Based on a very recent recertification of a Dutch food company, this research will focus on companies within the Dutch food industry. The B Corp-certified company selected for this research was Wessanen Benelux. Wessanen Benelux is a subsidiary of Ecotone, which was formerly known as Royal Wessanen NV. Wessanen Benelux includes brands like Zonnatura (e.g. tea, cereals, and spreads), Clipper (tea), Piramide (tea), De Rit (biscuits), Alter Eco (chocolate), and Whole Earth (peanut butter). Wessanen Benelux has been B Corp certified for three years, aiming to reconnect people with nature through food. Wessanen Benelux has recently been recertified and is the world's first largest B Corp-certified food business with the highest score (116,5) (*Ecotone – Food for Biodiversity, 2023*). They communicate both internally and externally about sustainability, biodiversity, and the B Corp certification. For this reason, Wessanen Benelux was an appropriate research environment for this study. Wessanen Benelux is constantly recruiting employees.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The researcher specifically searched for former, current (three groups, based on tenure; recent hires, 1-5 years, 5 years or

longer), and potential employees who are throughout the five stages (Table 1) of the employee journey. The participants' ages range from 25 to 58 years old. All participants were Dutch or Belgium citizens. Participants were sampled based on the different stages in the employee journey. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants.

Table 2
Overview participants

| | <i>Age</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Job title</i> | <i>Stage</i> |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|--|--------------|
| Participant 1 | 29 | Woman | R&D Manager | Stage 3 |
| Participant 2 | 25 | Woman | Brand Manager | Stage 3 |
| Participant 3 | 40 | Woman | Marketing Manager (Interim) | Stage 3 |
| Participant 4 | 50 | Men | Country Accountant (Interim) | Stage 4 |
| Participant 5 | 33 | Woman | Key Account Manager | Stage 2 |
| Participant 6 | 23 | Woman | Cleaning Specialist | Stage 1 |
| Participant 7 | 22 | Men | Delivery Person | Stage 1 |
| Participant 8 | 58 | Woman | Price Promotion and Data Officer | Stage 4 |
| Participant 9 | 27 | Men | Regional Sales Manager | Stage 5 |
| Participant 10 | 43 | Men | OOH Key Account Manager | Stage 4 |
| Participant 11 | 42 | Woman | Marketing Manager (Interim) | Stage 5 |
| Participant 12 | 40 | Men | Supply Chain Planner and Logistics Lead | Stage 2 |
| Participant 13 | 32 | Men | Key Account Manager | Stage 2 |

Procedure

The study's participants were contacted by email to request their participation. Then, an appointment was scheduled for the interview. The interviews took place at the office of Wessanen Benelux in Amsterdam and at an external location in Amsterdam. Prior to the interviews, each participant was required to read the information letter (Appendix 3) and sign the informed consent form (Appendix 2). In the interview, various subjects were covered:

meaning and employee engagement, external communication, and internal communication.

All interviews were recorded and lasted between thirty and forty minutes.

Data analysis

To analyze the data, all interviews were transcribed and encoded. Flexible coding was used (Appendix 5). All interviews were transcribed by the program, Cockatoo, and analyzed by the researcher.

Results

Based on the interview data, this chapter explains the significance of the B Corp certification for employees within the different stages of the employee journey in the Dutch food industry. Overall, all participants had positive associations with the B Corp certification, they interpret it as a sign that a business is contributing to a better world. The data analysis revealed three themes that are connected to the research question: (1) the overall perspective from the participants of the B Corp certification, (2) the differences in outcomes between the stages of the employee journey, and (3) generational differences in the significance of the B Corp certification.

Overall perspective

In general, participants were aware of what a B Corp certification entails and had mainly a positive association with this certification. Additionally, some people expressed some skepticism regarding the certification. Participants' levels of knowledge varied.

The majority of the participants mentioned that they are aware of what this certification includes since they had previously worked for or were currently working for a B Corp: *“That is basically that a company meets a number of requirements about people, environment, and sustainability within a company.”* (Participant 1). Although they could list the certification's elements, they frequently lacked an understanding of how those elements were measured and how the resulting scores were determined. Prior to working for a B Corp, some of the participants were unaware of what this B Corp certification entails, but they generally learned about the certification soon after organizational entry, by attending an onboarding training. At this moment, a small number of participants are partially unaware of the elements of the B Corp certification: *“I have to tell you very honestly, I don't know exactly what this certification entails. Since you end up getting a score, and that score can be higher or lower, I assume, the better the score, the more points you receive, and the more*

beneficial your business is to the planet.” (Participant 2). A small number of participants believe that the main concern is sustainability, and make no mention, for instance, of the organization's employees: *“It is about companies that are very focused on what is good for their environment.”* (Participant 4).

All participants suggest that a significant majority of individuals are unaware of the content that this certification covers. Participants indicated that there is little information available and there is little to no communication about this B Corp certification from companies, and for example, from the government. Many participants suggested that the government might assist in communicating information about this certification. One participant mentioned that information about this certification must also be provided by B Lab: *“There is not enough communication about B Corp. Because many people are completely unaware of it. However, I think that communication should have to come from B Corp itself or from the government.”* (Participant 6). Other participants referred to additional platforms that can be used to share information about the B Corp certification with a global audience, including television journals, social media, B Corp-certified companies, and journalists.

The majority of participants mentioned that if a B Corp certification will help with employment and retention, more information about it should be made available to job seekers. One participant mentioned: *“Maybe in a few years when absolutely everyone will be aware of what it is. I don't believe there is enough information among people right now about what it truly actually means for you as a person and employee. Therefore, I don't think it's attracting or retaining people now. I'm not really sure if B Corps are particularly common in the food industry either. However, that again indicates that it's not being communicated very clearly at this time.”* (Participant 2). Everyone who participated who currently works or formerly worked at Wessanen Benelux concluded that there is not much internal

communication at Wessanen Benelux about the B Corp certification. One participant mentioned: *“That score came, and since then we were extremely happy, and after this, we don't talk about it anymore. So, no, there is absolutely no communication about it.”* (Participant 1). Most participants do not feel like they are B Corp ambassadors. Some participants indicated that they are Wessanen ambassadors rather than B Corp ambassadors. One participant mentioned: *“A Wessanen ambassador, though, because I talk proudly about the work we accomplish. So, in Peru and things like that. So, I do talk about that, and I enthusiastically tell everybody about how good our tea is and how good our chocolate is. So, a Wessanen ambassador, not a B Corp ambassador. I've never actually communicated that to the outside world.”* (Participant 2).

The majority of the participants had a positive feeling associated with the B Corp certification: *“I feel as though I am being duped a little less, at least, personally. It does provide a pleasant, reassuring feeling that I can trust this brand.”* (Participant 6). Some of the participants had some reservations about the B Corp certification. They mentioned that there is a lot of greenwashing and connected this to the B Corp certification. One participant mentioned: *“However, I also noticed Boska. Boska is a cheese company. They sell cheese slicers and knives. My next thought was, “Yeah, then it really turns into greenwashing. Why on earth are you going to turn a company that sells cheese knives into a B Corp? Why? But how?”* (Participant 11). This quote demonstrates that the participant is also unaware of the exact meaning of the B Corp certification.

Stages employee journey

Interviews were conducted with former, current (three groups, based on tenure; recent hires, 1-5 years, 5 years or longer), and potential employees from the different stages of the employee journey. Results from participants within the various stages of the employee journey varied, there were similarities but also differences. According to earlier research, the

longer a person works for an organization, the less information asymmetry there is. According to this study, there is more information asymmetry within the first two stages of the employee journey. However, participants from stages 4 and 5 also admitted that they were unfamiliar with the details of the B Corp certification. Participants from stage 2 mentioned they knew too little about the B Corp certification within Wessanen Benelux and the food industry. One participant questioned how the B Corp certification implemented the ratio between people, planet, and profit. When this is unclear, it is challenging for him to determine whether a food industry brand is actually sustainably produced on a number of levels (Participant 12). Participants in stages 4 and 5 acknowledged that they did not have an in-depth comprehension of the B-Corp certification. Compared to individuals who participated in earlier stages, some participants in these stages had even less knowledge of the certification. This might also relate to interest, contract type, and generation. All participants believe that the majority of individuals in The Netherlands are unaware of what a B Corp certification entails. Participants believe that as a result, outsiders are more impacted by information asymmetry.

Stage 1 – Potential employees

The participants were familiar with the B Corp Certification. That is because one of them wrote a master's thesis about the SDG's and the other was looking for a potential job at a B Corp-certified company. Both participants actively investigated what a B Corp certification entails, one participant when he expressed interest in joining Wessanen Benelux and one participant when she started with her master's thesis about the SDG's. Both interviewed potential employees searched for this information online; one used Google and the other used SDG Nederland to search for information about the B Corp certification, as a result of their interest to work at Wessanen Benelux. The participants in stage 1 had high expectations of Wessanen Benelux in terms of the B Corp certification, both dealing with

employees and business operations. They both indicated that seeing the B Corp logo gave them a positive impression of the company. One participant mentioned: *“I feel as though I am being duped a little less, at least, personally. It does provide a pleasant, reassuring feeling that I can trust this brand.”* (Participant 6). Compared to the other stages, the knowledge the participants in this stage have is still superficial. They are aware of the certification's elements, but they are unaware of how Wessanen Benelux incorporates it into their business practices.

Both participants place a high value on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. One participant would rather work for a B Corp than a non-B Corp: *“If I was going to work for a company, I would be much more likely to work for a B Corp-certified company.”* (Participant 6). One of the participants said she believes there is no greenwashing when she sees a B Corp logo (Participant 6).

Both participants expressed having seen little communication about the B Corp certification. *“I think there is not enough communication, a lot of people don't know anything about it at all. But I think maybe that communication should come more from B Corp itself or from the government. Like they're promoting the Nutri Score. That they just say, know where you're buying. You can use this certification to review because it's also kind of hard to filter it all out, of what can be done and what can't be done. I think if you're a B Corp company, it's important to name it, but the general knowledge about B Corp is the biggest problem and maybe B Corp needs to do this themselves.”* (Participant 6). Both participants rarely or never discuss something about the B Corp certification with others. They both suggest that essentially no one in their immediate surroundings has any idea what it involves. Consequently, they do not feel like B Corp ambassadors, contrary to the fact that if they worked for a B Corp-certified company, they might be.

This certification is a nice addition when looking for a job, not a requirement, but it shows that the organization is doing a good job, according to both participants. The certification strengthens the employer brand (Kivinda et al., 2021). Both participants believe that a B Corp certification can help retain and attract employees. One participant mentioned: *“I believe that Dutch people are generally beginning to think more environmentally friendly. Naturally, that applies to the entire world. That is becoming more and more widely known. And in light of that, I also believe that a B Corp certification for individuals simply provides a little bit more trust, which I just mentioned, and a little bit more satisfaction. And certainly, I believe it is more probable that you will continue working at a company if you are satisfied and enthusiastic about your work.”* (Participant 7). Both participants mentioned that when a company is B Corp-certified, they feel more committed to it. The participants mentioned they are more engaged with a company as a result of increased company transparency and openness about business practices. One of the participants mentioned she would remain more loyal to a company that obtained the B Corp certification: *“B Corp is not only about the planet, it's also about people. And they're transparent and they're also more honest to people. So, but I would also absolutely be more loyal.”* (Participant 6).

When working for a B Corp-certified company, the two participants are willing to accept a lower salary: *“I wouldn't mind that very much, no. But of course, it depends to what extent. If that's really about 2,000 euros a month, then I would think, well, this does hurt. I'm willing to earn less at a B Corp-certified company. I'm quite sure about it. I just don't like to work for a company that breaks even more than has already been broken. And I think, a B Corp-certified company doesn't do that, so, I would be willing to pay a lot for that.”* (Participant 6).

The participants prioritize people and the environment over profit: *“I believe it to be not just crucial but also insurmountable. We must start acting to address the issue. It's*

crucial for a business to survive, but it's as crucial for it to do so without completely destroying the environment or people.” (Participant 6). The alignment of individual values with the assumed values of the organization is the underlying mechanism, the self-congruity theory refers to this (Li et al., 2021). This is similar to the other stages, but the participants who currently work for or have previously worked for Wessanen mentioned that profit is the most crucial factor for Wessanen Benelux and for businesses in general. Therefore, it can be challenging to align their personal values with those of the business.

Both participants agreed that the food industry can benefit from a B Corp certification: *“The B Corp certification indicates it is less destructive and harmful. So, to say, on every level. Therefore, the team members and everyone else involved just suffer less than if you don't have a B Corp certification. And I absolutely believe that at that point, everything is automatically organic. So less garbage, toxins, and other stuff.” (Participant 6).*

“For conscious buying, the B Corp certification can positively contribute to food consumption. Anyone can label a product with the words; We're green and we're good, but anyone can also easily lie about it. That's just totally the reality, and then when you have a certification like the B Corp certification, and people are aware of that, I do think it can be very valuable. For people to just see in one sense of, oh yeah, this is right, this has been checked by B Corp.” (Participant 7).

The two participants indicated that they would be proud to work for a B Corp-certified company: *“In my opinion, it is quite difficult to get a B Corp certification. So, I would be proud of that. I think you're also kind of leading the way as a company if you have that certification.” (Participant 6)*

Stage 2 – Recently employed employees

The participants in this stage were familiar with the B Corp certification: *“A B Corp certification is simply a type of certificate that your business can obtain if you adhere to a*

variety of standards in the interests of sustainability and diversity.” (Participant 5). All participants investigated what a B Corp certification entails, one more than the other. All participants participated in the onboarding program. As part of this onboarding program, they participated in a B Corp training. However, only the basics of the B Corp certification were covered in this training. One participant has worked at Rituals, she mentioned that there was a lot of internal and external communication related to the B Corp certification. Therefore, she knew very well what this certification entails, she already followed courses about the B Corp certification before she started at Wessanen Benelux. The other participants in this stage mentioned that they didn't really understand what a B Corp certification entails until they started working for a B Corp-certified company: *“After I started working at Wessanen, I actually just started learning about it. So, I had no idea what it entails before I started working at Wessanen. I didn't know any companies that had that certification either, just Rituals, because they make it pretty clear in their communication. However, I was unaware of other businesses.”* (Participant 13). These participants indicated that since working for Wessanen Benelux they have become more conscious. Participants within stage 3 mentioned this as well.

All participants place a high value on sustainability and corporate social responsibility: *“Since Rituals is putting so much effort towards sustainability, you start to think about it more and start incorporating it into all aspects of your daily life.”* (Participant 5) This participant would rather work for a B Corp than a non-B Corp company.

A lack of communication regarding the B Corp certification was acknowledged by all participants, both internal and external: *“I believe that as a firm, we should communicate about this and should be proud of this certification. I believe that this should be highlighted more.”* (Participant 5). All participants would like to have more detailed information about business operations and the components related to the B Corp certification, substantive

information. For example, by discussing the B Corp certification while having a lunch meeting with colleagues (*Participant 5*). Transparency is crucial in this (*Participant 12*). This matches the responses given by everyone at every stage of the employee journey. Due to the lack of substantive information, the majority of participants do not feel like B Corp ambassadors. However, one participant does, although she believes she may still reach that level in the future (*Participant 5*).

This certification is a nice addition when looking for a job, not a requirement, but it shows that the organization is doing a good job, according to all participants: *“It's a nice to have, it is not a requirement.”* (*Participant 13*). The majority of participants believe that a B Corp certification could help in hiring and retaining employees (*Participant 12, Participant 13*). However, only when individuals are aware of what this certification involves. The employee well-being aspect is crucial in this, as mentioned by the participants. One participant has doubts about whether a B Corp certification can help with employment and retention: *“I don't believe it helps with staff retention or recruitment. It might be for some people, but there definitely are a lot of other factors that play a role. For instance, enjoying one's work. However, I believe that the B Corp certification only is just a bonus for many people who do consider it to be significant. But is that the only justification for staying with a business? That is a hard decision for me to make. There are several variables that play a role in this.”* (*Participant 5*). One participant mentioned that she is more committed to a company when it is B Corp-certified: *“As a result, I genuinely believe that may foster a sense of community. Yeah. Hey, all for the B Corp.”* (*Participant 5*). The other participants all question the idea that being a B Corp-certified company makes someone feel more committed to it. They believe it is due to a number of variables, including the fact that people who are already engaged with organic food are more likely to be committed to a B Corp-certified company. To be committed to the company, a person must be familiar with the

topics covered by the B Corp certification (*Participant 12*). The majority of the participants mentioned they would remain more loyal to a company that obtained the B Corp certification, this is only applicable if the company is transparent about the certification's details.

When working for a B Corp-certified company, all participants are willing to accept a lower salary: *“I believe you'll also be a little bit more aware of what you're doing. That it makes more sense than seeking only financial gain.”* (*Participant 5*)

All participants in this stage recognize that profit is still the most important aspect of the company. However, they do believe that Wessanen gives people and the environment (planet) enough attention. Participants find it important to be able to identify themselves with the business' values related to people and the planet. This is comparable to the other stages.

One participant believes that a B Corp certification would be advantageous for the food industry: *“I believe we can serve as a great example for other food businesses hoping to join the B Corp movement. Because there is, of course, a lot of competition in the market, not all of which are B Corp-certified companies, if we can demonstrate that, hey, we are a B Corp-certified company and a customer also believes it is important and the company is working on achieving things, then hopefully in the future there will be more and more businesses that will do their best to also obtain that B Corp certification and will also automatically focus more on sustainability.”* (*Participant 5*). The other participants have a different opinion on this: *“It is a risk. I think certifications are always a bit of a risk because you have to be able to communicate this to the consumer. You have to be clear to consumers about what you are doing. And there are now an absurd number of labels.”* (*Participant 13*). People don't know what all those labels indicate since there is a lack of substantive information related to labels. Another participant mentioned he knew too little about the B Corp certification within the food industry, and questioned how the B Corp certification implemented the ratio between people, planet, and profit (*Participant 12*). This participant

wonders if one part is more significant than the other or if they are equally divided. When this is unclear, it is challenging to determine whether a food industry brand is actually sustainably produced on a number of levels. For example, how sustainable is the business, in which way are they sustainable in how they treat their employees, and how sustainable their products are (*Participant 12*). This participant was a little bit skeptical about the certification, specifically within the food industry. In this industry, there is a lot of greenwashing, as mentioned by the participant (*Participant 12*). He does not know which logo/certification he can really trust and what it really means.

All participants mentioned that they are proud to work for a B Corp-certified company: *“I’m very proud to work for this company.”* (*Participant 13*).

Stage 3 - Employees 1-5 years employed

The participants in this stage were, overall, familiar with the B Corp certification. All participants looked into what a B Corp certification entails, one more than the other. One participant was compelled to learn more about this certification since a brand she works for wanted to become B Corp-certified (*Participant 1*). This participant is very familiar with all the elements of this certification. Also in terms of business operations. Another participant had to write an article for LinkedIn regarding the recertification of Wessanen Benelux, she started searching for information about this certification (*Participant 2*). Another participant discovered articles about the B Corp certification on LinkedIn, where she learned the fundamentals of this certification (*Participant 3*).

All participants place a high value on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. For all the participants, the realization of the significance of sustainability and social responsibility did not occur right away; prior to their employment at Wessanen, they did not place the same value on sustainability and social responsibility as they do today:

“Before I started at Wessanen, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility were less

important to me. However, I have realized that I now consider it to be more crucial, and if I were to go on to my next job, I would keep that in the back of my mind as it is a topic that we do discuss a lot here. I don't think we are taught about it or it is explained enough yet, but working for a sustainable organization has made me realize that through your work you can make the planet or the world a little bit better. Preferably, you want to experience this again at a new company. This is not a requirement for me, but it has become more important to me because of the role I am in now.” (Participant 2).

“After a few years, with everything we do at Wessanen, I believe sustainability is more crucial than ever, even outside of the workplace. I'm much more into it now, and I consume less meat and dairy on a regular basis. It did stimulate my mind.” (Participant 1).

“I notice that it is becoming more and more important. I used to pay less attention to it, it was more about the products. Products that I felt good about and that contributed positively to people. I already felt a little less comfortable when I had to sell cookies and chocolates because they make people fat. I felt more comfortable selling coffee and tea. But the older I get, the more I enjoy working for brands that actually contribute something to society.” (Participant 3).

All participants acknowledged that there is a lack of communication regarding the B Corp certification, both internally and externally: *“I think particularly the communication part, that's missing. It is not because we don't have a high score, because it's there. So the content is there. But now, more substantive communication is required.” (Participant 1).* All participants would like to have more substantive information about business operations and the components related to the B Corp certification. All participants suggest that essentially no one in their immediate surroundings has any idea what the B Corp certification involves. Consequently, they do not feel like B Corp ambassadors, but rather Wessanen ambassadors.

All participants agreed that while not a requirement, this certification is a great addition while seeking work and demonstrates that the business is doing a good job: *“In my opinion, it proves that a company is doing a good job.”* (Participant 2). One participant in this stage believes that a B Corp certification could help in hiring and retaining employees (Participant 3). The majority of participants question the effectiveness of a B Corp certification in fostering employment and employee retention: *“No, not right now. Maybe in the future when there is more information and communication. But right now, I don't think so. I think it has more value than a B Corp certification if a company has Organic, Fairtrade, or other logos or things. So, if you are completely Organic, and completely Fairtrade, I think that's more alive to people.”* (Participant 2). All participants mentioned that when a company is B Corp-certified, it does not increase their level of commitment and loyalty to the company. Particularly in this phase, participants pay more attention to decisions and behavior within the organization rather than being loyal to the organization.

When working for a B Corp-certified company, one participant is willing to accept a lower salary, the other participants are not willing to accept a lower salary at a B Corp-certified company.

All participants in this stage recognize that profit is still the most important aspect of the company. However, despite being a profit-driven business, all participants mentioned that Wessanen gives the environment a lot of attention: *“I see that sustainability has a high priority, actually the reason to exist.”* (Participant 3).

“But I do believe that we are not abandoning the planet in this profit-making environment.” (Participant 1). According to two participants, ‘people’ within the company do not receive enough attention: *“The “People” aspect could be improved if you ask me. I discover that you receive a little less support in that as a person, making you more of an employee, not a person with feelings of their own. We are all happy as long as the work we are doing goes*

well. And nothing further than that is truly given any thought.” (Participant 1). One participant, who has worked several times at Wessanen on an interim basis, mentioned that there is enough attention to ‘people’ (*Participant 3*). As evidenced by the results of the other stages, participants find it important to be able to identify themselves with the company's values regarding ‘people’.

The majority of participants believe that a B Corp certification would be advantageous for the food industry: *“I think it's very good for the food industry. I just think that people don't know what the B Corp certification entails. So, for the sales in the food industry, it has no effect at all. But I think from a business point of view it's a very nice addition because I just do think it makes you more conscious of what you produce and sell as a food company, and I think we can all become a little more conscious of that.”* One participant mentioned that the B Corp certification is not just applicable to the food industry because it focuses on business operations rather than products: *“I don't really see it as something specific to the food industry, because you see it actually everywhere now as well. For example, when we talk about Rituals again, because they just communicate hugely about it, I think it also fits very well. So, what does it mean for the food industry? I don't think anything very specific. I also don't actually know if the whole organic aspect plays a role in this. I actually don't know if that does anything to our scores. It is really about business operations and it doesn't really have anything to do, I think, with the product we develop, so whether we sell cars or chicken salads, I don't know if that's taken into account in the B Corp certification, so in that case, I think it could be advantageous in any industry because it's more about the operations and not what you're selling.” (Participant 1).*

All participants are proud to work for Wessanen Benelux. Nevertheless, they are more proud to work for this company than the fact that this company is B Corp-certified: *“It is not the first thing I would tell, oh look I work at a B Corp. No, also because, I kind of come back*

to the same thing, that it's not extremely well-known what it is. I'm more proud of the fact that I work at a company that is committed to sustainability and organic products.” (Participant 1).

“I'm proud to work for this company but I don't know if it's because of the B Corp certification. I think mostly it's because we do really cool projects, we're organic, we're Fairtrade, we're mostly Vegan, we do all those things. And that B Corp is a very nice culmination of that. So, I'm actually thinking, through the ingredients of B Corp I'm proud of where I work. But whether there had been the logo there or not, that doesn't make a difference to me, because we would have done all those great things just as well. So, it's really a crowning achievement for me, but because of those things we do, I'm proud. Not necessarily by that logo/label or certification.” (Participant 2). According to this quote, participants in stage 3 were significantly more knowledgeable about the company's characteristics than those in stages 1 and 2.

Stage 4 – Employees 5 years or more employed

The participants in this stage were, overall, familiar with the B Corp certification. Participants in this stage were employed at Wessanen Benelux prior to its B Corp certification. After obtaining this certification, they didn't notice any changes to their business operations. Employees in stage 4 are a bit more skeptical about the B Corp certification. They do not necessarily link business operations to this certification. These participants actually, just have a basic understanding of what a B Corp certification entails compared to the other stages. All participants looked into what a B Corp certification entails. When Wessanen first became B Corp-certified, one participant received information from the company about what this certification entails. This is how he discovered what a B Corp is. It was also discussed in various meetings at that time (*Participant 4*). The majority of the participants in this stage

searched for information about the B Corp certification online and all participants in this stage obtained information through Wessanen's internal presentations.

All participants place a high value on sustainability and corporate social responsibility: *“Naturally, since I'm also self-employed, I do make an effort to give this issue some of my attention. Hey, can I take certain actions that will have an impact on it? Rather than using gasoline, consider a hybrid car and a laptop that you can repair.”* (Participant 4).

A lack of communication regarding the B Corp certification was acknowledged by all participants, both internal and external: *“I believe they aren't communicating enough. There was a presentation about our high score after we received it, of course. To share it, yet ultimately it disappears once more. Additionally, you're not really sure when the new certification will be issued, how well we're performing, or other such things. In addition, we should discuss with the staff how we might be able to earn an even higher grade. Naturally, having such a high score is good. However, you obviously do not want the score to drop the next year. You desire a minimum of the same and ideally a higher level.”* (Participant 8). The majority of participants in this stage do talk about the B Corp certification with others, especially colleagues. The account manager also talks about it with clients and uses it as a USP (Participant 10). This is different compared to the other stages. One participant rarely or never discusses something about the B Corp certification with others: *“Not really, because then you already get a question of help, what is it? And then you're like, oh, that's just another logo or another addition of which there are already so many.”* (Participant 8). Individuals from the other stages also rarely, if ever, discuss anything about the B Corp certification with others. The majority of participants do not feel like B Corp ambassadors.

This certification is a nice addition when looking for a job, not a requirement, but it shows that the organization is doing a good job, according to all participants: *“It is a nice addition, it is not a requirement.”* (Participant 8). One respondent mentioned he would check

for the B Corp certification while looking for a new job and would likely pick a B Corp over a non-B Corp (*Participant 10*). One participant mentioned that a B Corp certification could help with employment and retention but only when people are informed about what this certification entails: *“If we know better what it entails, I certainly think so. We don't have very many people here who are covered by the collective bargaining agreement, for example, or who are union members. But I can imagine that if B Corp and the unions come together a bit more because, in the end, they have some of the same interests, that could be very important to people.”* (*Participant 4*). The other participants believe that a B Corp certification can help in hiring and retaining employees: *“I think it would be the case with the young people in particular. That they make a selection in a different way than the average or at least the somewhat older workers. I think maybe because they have a different past and they project their values somewhere else.”* (*Participant 8*). One participant mentioned that when a company is B Corp-certified, it does not increase his level of commitment to the company (*Participant 4*). Two participants mentioned that they could be more committed to a company when it is B Corp-certified and when the company is transparent about the B Corp elements. All participants mentioned they would not remain more loyal to a company that obtained the B Corp certification.

When working for a B Corp-certified company, one participant is willing to accept a lower salary: *“Yes, I think, what I said, the salary is not necessarily the most important thing. Obviously, you have to earn enough to have a good life. But I think it's more important that you enjoy going to work. Naturally, this is where the whole thing is helpful.”* (*Participant 4*).

The other participants are not willing to accept a lower salary at a B Corp-certified company.

All participants in this stage recognize that profit is still the most important aspect of the company. All participants now working at Wessanen Benelux indicate that profit is the most important aspect of the company. Which contrasts with the values of a B Corp

certification. According to two participants, ‘people’ within the company do not receive enough attention: *“The employee did become a little less important than it was. You see more pressure. They are cutting back on staff to cut costs.”* (Participant 4).

“Unfortunately, I have to say that profit is still the most important thing. With insight on the fact that it was taken over by an investment company, and they are harder. You do notice that around you with the decrease of workplaces.” (Participant 8).

“Profit at 1. Because that's what we're all being judged on every day. And certainly, internationally a lot of jobs are disappearing at the moment. And we were acquired by Pai, an investment company, they just want to see the money. Otherwise, they're not in it. So, Profit is definitely number 1, but of course, when we do business, it's with the focus on nature and people.” (Participant 10). However, they do believe that Wessanen gives the planet enough attention. It is challenging for the participants in this stage to identify themselves with the business’ values regarding “people.” This is represented in stage 3 as well.

All participants believe that a B Corp certification would be advantageous for the food industry: *“Eventually, if they all did something with it, at least you would get rid of all that more, more, more. While we don't need it at all.”* (Participant 4).

All participants are proud to work for Wessanen Benelux. Nevertheless, they are more proud to work for this company than the fact that this company is B Corp-certified: *“I'm actually just proud to work for Wessanen, and that expresses itself not so much in being a B Corp, but just actually all the elements around it. Being a B Corp-certified company is a great addition, especially with such a high score. However, I simply believe that what they stood for in the past is significant.”* (Participant 8).

Stage 5 – Former employees

One participant in this stage was familiar with the B Corp certification: *“A B Corp certification is actually, in my mind, a validation that a company is doing everything possible*

to manage all processes in the company for corporate social responsibility and sustainable operations, really in every chain, in every piece of the chain.” (Participant 9). The other participant was not familiar with the B Corp certification, she questionably told a few global elements of the B Corp certification (*Participant 11*). It is noteworthy that participants in this stage have minimal knowledge about the B Corp certification compared to those in the earlier stages. One participant mentioned that after leaving Wessanen, her concern for sustainability had decreased significantly. She indicates that since she now works for a company that places no value on sustainability and that her partner does not place much importance on it, she is no longer concerned with it at all (*Participant 11*). All participants in this stage searched for information about the B Corp certification online and all participants in this stage obtained information through Wessanen's internal presentations.

One participant places value on sustainability and corporate social responsibility, the other participant considers it less important. All participants acknowledged that there is a lack of communication regarding the B Corp certification, both internally and externally: *“I think B Corp itself could get some more communication exposure, beyond just the companies, i.e. more substantive exposure.” (Participant 11).* Both participants rarely or never discuss something about the B Corp certification with others. Individuals from the other stages also rarely, if ever, discuss anything about the B Corp certification with others. Therefore, participants from this stage do not feel like B Corp ambassadors.

This certification is a nice addition when looking for a job, not a requirement, but it shows that the organization is doing a good job, according to both participants. One participant believes that a B Corp certification could help in hiring and retaining employees: *“Yes, for those who are interested yes, because it makes the company proud, but then it has to be an intrinsic motivation for that person, there has to be sustainability. So, I do think these kinds of companies attract more conscious types of people.” (Participant 11).* Another

participant questions the effectiveness of a B Corp certification in fostering employment and employee retention (*Participant 9*). One participant questioned whether someone feels more committed to a business when it has a B Corp certification: *“But whether that is with or without B Corp certification does not matter, in my point of view.”* (*Participant 9*). The other participant mentioned that she is more committed to a company when it is B Corp-certified (*Participant 11*). Both participants mentioned they would remain more loyal to a company that obtained the B Corp certification.

At a B Corp-certified company, one participant is willing to accept a lower salary (*Participant 11*). The other participant is not willing to accept a lower salary at a B Corp-certified company (*Participant 9*).

A former employee mentioned that similar to those who are currently working at Wessanen, profit is still the most important aspect of the company. However, he does believe that Wessanen gives people and the environment (planet) enough attention (*Participant 9*). The other participant recognized that people and the planet were more important: *“I just think the other two excelled.”* (*Participant 11*). This is noteworthy because all other participants who are now employed at Wessanen indicated in this study that profit is the most crucial aspect of Wessanen Benelux. All participants believe that a B Corp certification would be advantageous for the food industry: *“I think it's mostly awareness. Awareness of, oh we can actually do a better job.”* (*Participant 11*). All participants mentioned that they were proud to work for a B Corp-certified company. In this study, all participants stated they were proud to work at a B Corp.

Generational differences

Several participants mentioned, they think that age/generation and personality traits have an impact on people's thought processes. At this moment, employees care about their organization's response to the major social and environmental issues of this century.

According to a recent study from Republic (2023), 30% of the study's participants have considered to left their jobs as a result of a company's failure in these areas. The other half of the participants are also currently debating quitting for the same reason: *"Half of the employees consider quitting because their personal values do not match those of their employer."* For Millennials and Generation Z, the numbers are higher. These generations make up half of the workforce at many companies. One participant in this study mentioned: *"I believe that future generations, in particular, are far more concerned in how we treat our planet. These individuals would certainly be more interested in a B Corp than a non-B Corp."* (Participant 3). A tight labor market and high dissatisfaction among employees create a ticking time bomb for businesses and their leaders (Republic, 2023, McCalla-Leacy, 2023)

One participant mentioned, regarding 'People, Planet, Profit': *"Planet, yes, I do believe that as well for someone from a younger generation, I find that to be extremely important."* (Participant 6). Another participant mentioned that the B Corp certification could be a wonderful differentiating element for younger people when searching for a new job: *"It depends on the individual. I believe that younger people, or those between the ages of 25 and 40, especially those who have had higher education, are more aware of their surroundings, the world they live in, and their connection to it. As a result, it can be a wonderful differentiating element while searching for a new job, especially given how competitive the job market is right now."* (Participant 13).

Discussion

Explanation of findings

This study aimed to investigate the significance of a B Corp certification within the different stages of the employee journey for attracting and retaining employees in a tight labor market. With a specific focus on employees within the Dutch food industry. According to Aust et al. (2020), the relationship between sustainability and human resources is still in its exploratory stages and is a relatively new approach. According to Zaid et al. (2018), recruitment, selection, training, assessment, pay, compensation, and rewards are effective tools for coordinating employees with organizational objectives that result in long-term social sustainability performance. The oil, food, plastics, and fashion industries are the four most polluting industries in the world (Seetharaman et al., 2022). Developing more sustainable business models is crucial for these industries. This study contributes to the relationship between employer branding, human resource management, and sustainability communication.

The results showed that in every stage of the employee journey employees place a high value on sustainability and social responsibility. This has also been confirmed by theory. The idea that modern businesses have responsibilities to their stakeholders, community, and society is a topic that has received a lot of attention in recent years. Nowadays, stakeholders, e.g. employees are increasingly looking to non-financial considerations (such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), natural resources, and human capital) to help them make the best possible business decisions (Hoang, 2018). The majority of participants of this study consider the B Corp certification as a seal of trust. Based on previous theorizing, the researcher expected that there would be information asymmetry since job seekers and current employees are generally unaware of the organization's sustainable practices and sustainability in general. As a result, they will be less invested in the business, which may lead them to leave the

organization earlier. New hires will be less willing to work for a company if they lack knowledge of the business' sustainable operations. People acquire more knowledge as they move from job seekers to employees, join the company, work there for a while, stay for a while longer, and then leave the company. According to the results of this study, through the stages, development can be observed. Participants generally gain more knowledge during their employee journey. Although the participants don't necessarily require the certification anymore, they are nevertheless interested in receiving the most recent details related to business operations. This study does not just demonstrate that information asymmetry decreases the longer a person works for a company. Some participants in stages 4 and 5 acknowledged that they were lacking in-depth knowledge of the B Corp certification. Some participants in these stages had even less knowledge about the certification compared to those in previous stages. This could also relate to the date of employment, generation, type of contract, and interest.

Practical implications

An indication that can be used to make judgments about sustainability is the B Corp certification. Participants in this study reported seeing little to no communication about the B Corp certification, neither from businesses nor the government, for instance. When major brands, and leading companies start communicating about the B Corp certification, awareness of this certification will increase (Fitzgerald, 2022). Employees will associate sustainability and social responsibility with the B Corp certification. According to this research, the B Corp certification positively impacts commitment and loyalty from employees as well as awareness, which is evident in the acceptance of lower salaries among current employees and potential employees. Additionally, the certification could attract potential employees. The majority of the participants indicated the alignment of individual values with the values of the organization. The underlying mechanism is the self-congruity theory (Li et al., 2021).

According to this research, young individuals base their decisions on identity congruence more than other people do. According to earlier research, Generation Z is highly conscious of and motivated by ethical and environmental challenges (Djafarova & Fooks, 2022). B Corp-certified businesses will be able to attract and retain employees when businesses' and employees' values align. The participants mentioned they are more engaged with a company as a result of increased company transparency and openness about business practices. Therefore, B Corp-certified organizations must communicate these values transparently and explicitly.

Participants expressed interest in learning more about how their employer addresses social and environmental issues in its operations. Current employees would prefer to get this substantive information by email and training in their native language. They prefer to receive information that is clear and brief, so they can process it quickly. Information on the B Corp certification should preferably be provided to new employees via training and email. The government and social media are the preferred sources of information regarding the B Corp certification for new hires and employees within stage 3.

Theoretical implications

This study illustrates the information gap that exists between businesses and potential, new, current, and former employees. Individuals find it difficult to assess sustainability. For example, it can be challenging for new hires to assess sustainability since they lack access to all of a potential employer's knowledge on this subject. A certification, such as one related to sustainability, makes something challenging to evaluate relatively easy to evaluate, it simplifies the processing of sustainability. However, when do people become value-sensitive? The General Evaluability Theory from Hsee & Zhang (2010) improves our comprehension of this important question. The theory states that when evaluators have obtained pertinent reference information from any of the three basic sources of reference

information, mode, knowledge, and nature, evaluability and, consequently, value sensitivity is high (Hsee & Zhang, 2010). The B Corp certification could provide uncertainty reduction and save cognitive resources for potential and new employees. This relates to the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) from Berger & Calabrese (1975). The Uncertainty Reduction Theory was developed as a model for interpersonal communication. Whenever there is uncertainty, events can be unpredictable or difficult to comprehend (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Although this study has provided important insights into the significance of a B Corp certification for retaining and attracting employees in the Dutch food industry, a few limitations should be noted.

Limitations

First, the sample size of this study was quite limited, which would limit the generalizability of the findings to larger and more diverse populations. Future research should consider using a larger sample size to examine the significance of the B Corp certification in different cultures, industries, and groups. In our corporate culture and Western nations, sustainability is highly valued, while in non-Western nations it might not be as significant. Second, according to earlier research, employees want to give meaning to their work in order to get more satisfaction from their job. Employees are more engaged and loyal when they can align their personal values and standards with those of the organization. In this study, this is also confirmed. However, it is not guaranteed that this is related to the B Corp certification. The findings support the group's view that sustainability is important. Nevertheless, a few participants indicated that this is not always related to the B Corp certification.

In stage 1 (potential employees), the participants indicated that they value sustainability and social corporate responsibility. However, this may be due to several factors. Generation, all potential employees in stage 1 are covered by Generation Z. The context, the food industry is polluting and developing. Finally, the sample, participants were

selected based on the likelihood that they might consider working for a B Corp-certified company. However, research has revealed, at this time, sustainability and social corporate responsibility are crucial factors for individuals to consider while seeking a new job (Stahl et al., 2020). Additionally, participants may have provided socially desirable responses when discussing sustainability.

In conclusion, in order to ensure the generalizability and reliability of this research given the elements mentioned above, it is critical that future research should be conducted. Future research might examine the significance of the B Corp certification within other industries, for example, the fashion industry. Another interesting field for research regarding the B Corp certification is the awareness of this certification among individuals in The Netherlands. This study provides a basis for further research into the relationship between a B Corp certification and human resource management.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Planning

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Week 4 | First meeting |
| Week 5 | First set up |
| Week 6 | Writing the introduction and theoretical background |
| Week 7 | Writing the introduction and theoretical background |
| Week 8 | Writing the method section/interview guide |
| Week 9 | Deadline Go/No Go document |
| Week 10 | Process feedback |
| Week 11 | Collecting the data |
| Week 12 | Collecting the data |
| Week 13 | Collecting the data |
| Week 14 | Collecting the data |
| Week 15 | Collecting the data |
| Week 16 | Analyzing the data |
| Week 17 | Analyzing the data |
| Week 18 | Writing the result section |
| Week 19 | Writing the result section |
| Week 20 | Writing the conclusion |
| Week 21 | Writing the discussion |
| Week 22 | Writing the recommendations |
| Week 23 | Writing the limitations and future research section |
| Week 24 | Process feedback |
| Week 25 | Process feedback |
| Week 26 | Deadline |

Informed Consent

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves the recording of my answers to the interview questions, which will be submitted to the readers of this research
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in this research.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in Tilburg until the end of this research project.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 2 years.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalization, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher Date

Appendix 3 - Information Letter

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this research. My name is Carmen and I am a Master's student at Tilburg University. This research will be conducted at Tilburg University in cooperation with Wessanen Benelux. With this research, I aim to improve our understanding of the significance that B Corp certification may have for employees in the food business in The Netherlands. I will conduct in-depth interviews to investigate this. During this interview, I will examine how important a B Corp certification is for employees in the food business in The Netherlands. Your participation in this interview is important because in this way the University of Tilburg can gain important insights regarding this subject. All used information gathered via this interview will be used anonymously in this research. Your own opinion and experience are important to me, so there are no wrong and preferred answers. You can make a great contribution to the research by participating. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. Please take enough time to consider the information in this letter. If you have any questions about the research now or later, you can always ask me a question.

It is important that you fully understand the questions during the interview. So, do not hesitate to ask additional questions if something is insufficiently clear. During the interview, you will be asked to sign a form to give your consent to participate in the interview. However, you may stop at any time if you wish. You also have the right to inspect the data collected about you and you can ask the researcher for any adjustments. Your answers will only reach the researcher and will therefore not be passed on to your employer or any other organization or individuals. If you wish, you can obtain a report on the research. If you agree to participate in this study, this means that you also consent to the use of your data for the study. You may at any time review the information that we will request from you and make any necessary adjustments. The results are processed with well-secured computer systems to which unauthorized persons have no access. If you have any doubts about your participation afterward, you can always contact the researchers, also to view the data or to request changes. You will find the contact details at the bottom of this letter.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Carmen Verhoef

c.g.m.verhoef@tilburguniversity.edu

Introduction

[Introduce yourself]

· Goal: In this study, I aim to improve my understanding of the experiences of individuals working at a B Corp-certified organization.

· Interview procedure: I will ask you some questions about Wessanen Benelux and the B Corp certification. There are no wrong or preferred answers and you are free to talk. I am interested in your perspective. You will remain anonymous at all times: Your answers can not be traced back to you and I will not include your name in the reports.

· Recording: To process all information later, I would like to record the interview. I will erase the recording after I transcribed the interview. Do you mind me recording the interview? **[if the participant answers no, you start the recording.]**

· Informed consent: Hand them the informed consent letter.

Do you have any questions about the interview? Let's start!

Introduction:

1. Wat is volgens jou een B Corp certificering?
2. Hoe ben je erachter gekomen wat deze certificering inhoudt?
3. Wat weet je over B Corp?
4. Heb je ooit voor een bedrijf gewerkt dat B Corp gecertificeerd is, voordat je bij Wessanen Benelux werkte?
5. Zat er verschil in bijvoorbeeld de bedrijfsvoering?
6. Hoe belangrijk zijn maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid en duurzaamheid voor jou in je huidige of vorige baan?
7. Heb je ooit deelgenomen aan trainingen of opleidingen met betrekking tot duurzaamheid of maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid op de werkvloer?
8. Ben je ooit betrokken geweest bij het implementeren van duurzaamheids- of maatschappelijk verantwoordelijkheidsinitiatieven op het werk?
9. Hoe zie jij de verhouding binnen Wessanen Benelux tussen People, Planet en Profit?
10. Ben je het hier mee eens?

Topic 1: Meaning and employee engagement

1. Wat betekent een B Corp certificering naar jouw mening voor de voedselindustrie?
2. Wat betekent de B Corp certificering voor jou?
3. Ben je naar informatie over deze certificering op zoek gegaan toen je startte bij Wessanen?
4. Is deze certificering belangrijk voor jou?
5. Werk je voor Wessanen Benelux vanwege de B Corp certificering?
6. Was dit een cruciaal element of vereiste in je zoektocht naar werk?/Is dit een factor in je keuze van werkgelegenheid bij Wessanen Benelux?
7. Maakt een B Corp certificering je meer betrokken?
8. Heb je persoonlijk veranderingen waargenomen in de waarden of cultuur van je bedrijf als gevolg van het behalen van een B Corp certificering?
9. Denk je dat een B Corp certificering de Nederlandse voedselindustrie kan helpen bij het werven en behouden van werknemers?
10. Wat zijn volgens jou de belangrijkste voordelen die een B Corp certificering biedt aan werknemers?

Topic 2: External communication and other important factors

1. Ben je trots om voor een B Corp gecertificeerd bedrijf te werken?
2. Praat je met andere mensen over de B Corp certificering?
3. Zo ja, waar vertel je over deze certificering? En waarom?
4. Beschouw je jezelf als een B Corp ambassadeur?

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Topic 3: Internal communication</p> <p>Demographic questions:</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Zou je bereid zijn om minder te verdienen bij een B Corp gecertificeerde organisatie?2. Denk je dat Wessanen Benelux een positieve invloed heeft op de werknemerstevredenheid?3. Ben je loyaler geworden als gevolg van deze certificering?4. Wat communiceert Wessanen intern over de B Corp certificering? Ben je tevreden hierover?5. Hoe wordt informatie over de certificering verspreid?6. Denk je dat er voldoende communicatie is over de certificering? <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Wat is je leeftijd?2. Wat is je gender identiteit?3. Wat is het hoogste opleidingsniveau dat je hebt bereikt?4. Hoelang ben je werkzaam bij Wessanen Benelux of hoelang heb je daar gewerkt?5. Wat is je functie? |
| <p>Rounding off the interview</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Zijn er nog andere onderwerpen die we niet hebben besproken? <p><i>[Stop recording]</i></p> |

Appendix 5 – Codes transcript

Table 3

Codes transcript

| <i>Level 1</i> | <i>Level 2</i> | <i>Level 3</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| B Corp certificering | | |
| Voedselindustrie | | |
| Interne communicatie | | |
| Externe communicatie | | |
| Duurzaamheid | | |
| Maatschappelijke verantwoordelijkheid | | |