



M5 – Sustainability system and negotiation skills

Course description:

The overall aim of this module is to introduce women social entrepreneurs (present and future), as well as VET trainers and business coaches into the concept of sustainability and sustainable negotiation as an entrepreneurial skill to be developed towards the goal of making their businesses sustainable and competitive in the labour market. This module will give the learners an overview of the concepts of sustainable development and soft skills development with a special focus on sustainable negotiation, its benefits, challenges and impact. It will also facilitate them distinguishing between different skills needed in the entrepreneurial world and help them deepen the introduced concepts through self-reflection activities.

Course Objectives:

- I. Know the key information on sustainability (Level: REMEMBER, concepts and definitions)
- II. Recognize different skills and describe their characteristics (Level: UNDERSTAND)
- III. Determine the kind of skills required when negotiating in the entrepreneurial world (Level: APPLY)
- IV. Differentiate between their own (negotiation-related) soft skills (Level: ANALYSE)
- V. Select effective, adapted to the business-needs goals and work smoothly across different teams (Level: EVALUATE)
- VI. Build a strong and sustainable business network. (Level: CREATE)



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1. Concept and fundamentals of sustainability

1.1. Definition of sustainability



Sustainability in entrepreneurship fundamentally embodies ‘generating new products, services, production processes, techniques, and organizational modes which substantially reduce social and environmental impacts, and which increase the quality of life’ (Schaltegger, 2013).



Sustainable development involves the process of benefiting nature, society, and economy (Fischer et al, 2023). To better understand what sustainable development signifies, the United Nations present the Sustainable Development goals of the agenda 2030 as shown below:



1.2. Principles and objectives of sustainability

A key principle of sustainability is **resilience** which signifies longevity and bouncing back from foreseen or unforeseen challenges. It contributes to the idea that enterprises belong to a wider system and can adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of changes and disruptions. To be resilient, an Enterprise can survive through environmental, social, and economic changes. Another principle is the **interdependence** of economic, social, and environmental systems. Examples of interdependence in the context of sustainable development include:



Example 1: Interconnection between agricultural systems, biodiversity, and ecosystem services:

The agricultural practices adopted by farmers can have a significant impact on the surrounding biodiversity and ecosystem services. Adopting sustainable farming practices that promote biodiversity and ecosystem health, such as integrated pest management and agroforestry, can enhance the interdependence between agricultural systems and the environment.

Example 2: Interconnection between urban planning, transportation, and environmental sustainability:

The choice of transportation modes e.g., car, bus, train, or bicycle affects the energy sector and air quality, creating an environmental impact. If a city mostly relies on individual cars as the primary mode of transportation, it can lead to increased air pollution, traffic congestion, and energy consumption, impacting public health and the environment. Sustainable development requires embodiment of land use, alternative modes of transportation, and environmental friendliness in urban environments, while comprehending this interdependence fosters sustainable and resilient cities.

A third principle of Sustainability is **Sustainability** itself. In this context, sustainability implies the careful and responsible use of resources. Paradigms include using renewable energy sources, adopting environmental-friendly practices such as waste reduction, recycling, energy efficiency, implementing water-saving technologies, use of ethical and responsible sourcing of materials e.g., support and buy products from socially beneficial and environmentally friendly organizations, invest in low-emission transportation options, build/reconstruct buildings with green building materials and adopt Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives.

Another principle of Sustainability involves **Equity and justice**. Sustainability aims to ensure resources and opportunities are equally distributed to everyone regardless of their background or social status. Addressing this principle, the participation and engagement of all stakeholders are essential to ensure that a product, service, or any entrepreneurial, political, social initiative is diverse and meets the needs of the wider community.

1.3. Sustainability and Society (Towards Social Inclusion)

A sustainable society is defined as the society which ensures the health and vitality of human life, culture, and nature's capital, for present and future generations (Vierderman, 1993). It is the process of society – politicians, entrepreneurs, consumers, financial actors, policy makers and civil society-working together to ensure sustainability goals. In other terms, there is a shared responsibility of all actors involved to secure a sustainable society i.e. sustainable use of resources such as water and energy, preservation of natural resources, public health and wellbeing, equal opportunities and access to services such as health, water and sanitation, education and employment, ethical use of resources such as products, services and raw materials and of land as well as gender equality.



Individual responsibility plays a crucial role, in the context of being a responsible consumer or a producer, reducing damage to nature and natural resources by making radical use of natural resources, and preventing pollution. Such actions include reducing plastic use, disposing of trash in bins, adopting the principle of reduce-reuse-recycle, conserving energy and water, using sustainable transportation, choosing sustainable products, supporting conservation efforts, minimizing chemical use and so forth.



Organizational responsibility refers to the contribution of organizations, civil society, and enterprises, in adopting sustainable methods and practices aimed at benefiting environmental and social purposes. These include social innovations by enterprises, policy initiatives, financial support by the governments to support the uptake of sustainability initiatives, entrepreneurial actions through the creation of sustainable products, services and practices, and a collective effort by the society to stimulate sustainability achievements.

Being individually and organizationally responsible contributes to functioning as a sustainable society which in turn brings about social inclusion. To this extent, a sustainable society pioneers the promotion of well-being as well as equality and justice for all people irrespective of racial, ethnic, religious, academic, professional, age, disability, or social status. Specifically, key elements of social inclusion in sustainability include the promotion of the right to:

- Equal Resource Allocation such as food, water, and energy.
- Access to education such as educational programs which aim at raising awareness about environmental protection, social justice, and equality.
- Engagement in public dialogues and in community development through everyone's involvement in decision-making procedures.
- Living and participating in the shaping of diverse communities to ensure a thriving economy.
- Access to services such as healthcare, education, community programs for strengthening the wellbeing of all community members.

How do Sustainable Businesses support Social Inclusion?

“Put people first.”

United Nations' Development Goals



When we refer to sustainable businesses, we refer to businesses which integrate environmental and social aspects within their business model. The main objective of such a business is to create a positive impact on at least one of the two areas. Additionally, its vital strategy is to promote social wellbeing by benefiting the community. A sustainable business adheres to ethical standards, sustainability practices and social inclusion.



In this sense, sustainability equals wellbeing and equality. On the one hand, sustainability is about benefiting wellbeing for both present and future generations. On the other hand, at its very core lies the ideas of fostering equality and fairness among everyone, facilitating diversity and engagement of all people.

2. Hard and Soft skills and competencies

Becoming a social entrepreneur requires vital hard and soft skills and competencies to support making a business sustainable and competitive in the labour market. Workers gain hard skills through formal education, training programs, and practice. Hard skills are specific and measurable abilities needed to perform a particular job, like computer programming or graphic design. Employers assess a candidate's hard skills before hiring, and some skills are in higher demand, leading employers to use recruitment agencies or headhunters to fill specialized roles. On the other hand, soft skills cannot be measured. For instance, a doctor will need soft skills like empathy, active listening, and a good bedside manner, in addition to hard skills like medical knowledge, interpreting test results, and understanding anatomy.

2.1. Collaboration & Teamwork



Teamwork is the ability to work successfully with others toward a shared goal, being able to provide constructive feedback and make decisions with others effectively on an issue involving either internally in a business or externally with partners, customers, or clients.

Elements of effective collaboration and teamwork:

- Being able to adjust to new environments with new people.
- Being able to easily communicate and concentrate on a shared goal.
- Exhibit leadership skills and share their unique expertise.
- Build relationships with diverse team members.
- Deliver a deadline within the time framework given.
- Understand the value of the team.
- Being individually committed to what the team wants to accomplish.
- Have open lines of communication with other team members.

2.2. Critical thinking & Problem Solving



Problem-solving is achieved through identification of a problem, spotting different solutions to solve the specific problem, choosing the best solution and implementing the chosen one. Problem-solving cannot be obtained without **critical thinking**.



7 Steps towards an Effective Problem-Solving Process:		
1	Understand Current Condition	Identify the Problem.
2	Conduct Analysis	Analyze the problem as to why this is a problem, what we are trying to solve, what the probable causes are, what everyone's interests are to critically evaluate the best possible solution(s) for everyone.
3	Construct Solutions	Explore options for potential solutions without evaluating them.
4	Evaluate Solutions	Define advantages and disadvantages of each solution
5	Select Solution(s)	Choose the best solution based on disadvantages and disadvantages.
6	Document Solution(s)	Write down the solution(s) chosen.
7	Monitor the results	Assess the results in the following period i.e. 'Let's experiment with this method for the next few months and then evaluate our progress'.

2.3. Adaptability and Flexibility



Adaptability is defined as the concept of being able to flexibly adapt to uncertainties, unexpected events and unforeseen situations or behaviors. Being adaptable means being flexible to manage change. In the workplace, adaptability skills help negotiation and reaching out to agreements with a positive attitude.

Based on the I-ADAPT (Individual Adaptive) theory, derived from the survival theory, adaptation is the ability of any organism/species to adapt to changes and adjust according to time. In workplaces, adaptive performance is when a person can adapt to different situations through altering their behavior to better respond to the specific environment, events, or surroundings.

Watch the Video: [Adaptive Leadership – Introduction, Eric Martin, 2018](#)

What are common changes in the workplace that require adaptability and flexibility?

- **Technological Changes:** In modern societies and workplaces, technological tools are thriving day by day. Employees and employers are required to adapt to new changes in the way they work at a constant pace. That becomes more challenging for older generations who grew up in a world without computers and find it harder to adapt to new ways.
- **Economic Changes:** Political and Economic turmoil or financial disruptions within the organizational levels impact both workforce and entrepreneurs. Individuals are required to adjust to new situations and economic environments.



- **Shift from Manufacturing to Knowledge-based work:** In the nowadays work environments, labor expertise is often distributed, and many times individuals not only are required to multitask but come together with other colleagues from different backgrounds and expertise to collaborate and solve a problem concerning a business or a project. Therefore, not only the role of adaptability when working with other people becomes crucial- as individuals often need to work with people with diverse expertise and interests- but also, they need to be able to face unforeseen situations of work-tasks with flexibility.

How to manage changes in work settings and become more flexible?

- Improve your technological skills such as computer literacy.
- Keep up to date with the latest developments.
- Be open to new ideas, concerns, and feedback while Seek Feedback.
- Keep Open Communication with other team members.
- Improve other soft skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and time management.
- Be proactive and take initiative to come up with a solution to a problem.
- Be prepared for any uncontrollable changes such as political

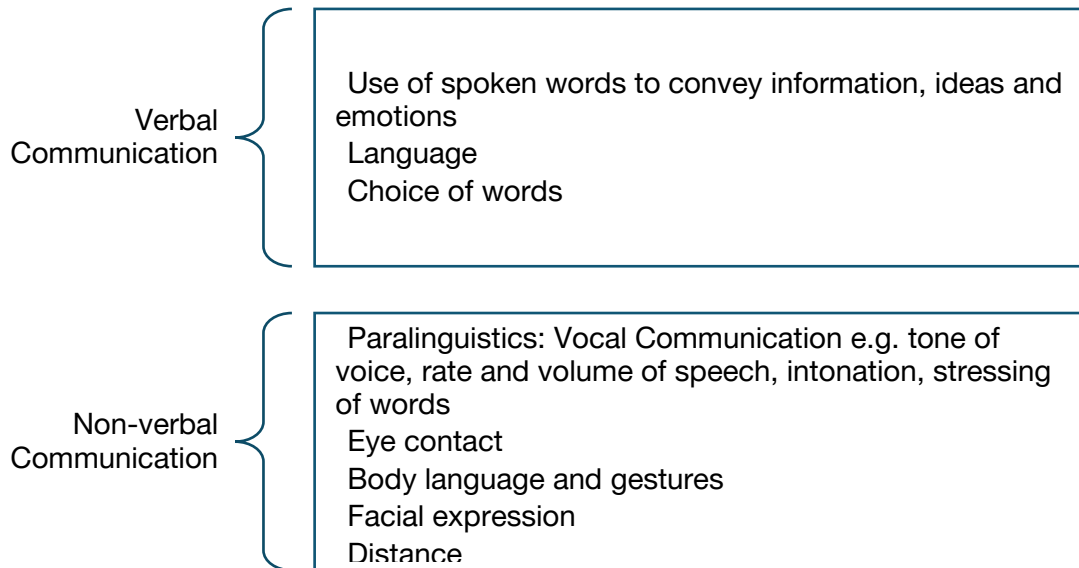
2.4. Communication and Team Building



Communication is the exchanging process of information between individuals. Communication plays a pivotal role in team building as it relates to building trust, improved comprehension, and collaboration.



Types of Communication:



Understanding the differences between verbal and non-verbal communication helps comprehend the importance of all parameters in conveying a message to our interlocutor(s).

Think about a scenario where the same message, for example, *'I don't agree with you'*, or *'Okay'*, is vocally spoken but the speakers use different non-verbal communication. What message will do they send it to their interlocutor(s) if they don't use eye contact, if they are walking around the room, speak loudly or in a very low pitch?

In work-environments, the use and choice of verbal and non-verbal communication is crucial to facilitate understanding between team members, improve collaboration and teamwork, achieve problem solving, and avoid conflicts while working for the benefit of a business or a project.

Effective Verbal and non-verbal communication at work contexts:

- Organize your thoughts to reduce awkward pauses when speaking.
- Use appropriate words to convey your message with clarity.
- Avoid subjective opinions.
- Think about your interlocutor(s). What is their experience and knowledge of the subject?
- Keep eye contact with the interlocutor(s).
- Use appropriate gestures, facial expressions and body language.
- Vary your vocal tone to avoid speaking in a monotonous voice.
- Be attentive to inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal communication used: Not having psychological and/or physical wellbeing leads to focusing on negative aspects of a conversation sending uncaring non-verbal signals.



2.5. Skills and Competencies highly valued/needed in the entrepreneurial world

The NADINE MODEL, which was developed as part of Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the grant agreement No 822601, can be used to evaluate soft skills. These are articulated in 4 scales and 19 specific soft skills:

Interpersonal Skills	Organizational Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Interaction • Team Working • Intercultural Competence • Coping with Authority • Conscientiousness • Extraversion <p><u>Example:</u> 'I believe it is always better to cooperate with others rather than to compete with them', 'I can easily adjust to changes'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Efficiency • Time Management • Independent Work <p><u>Example:</u> 'I dedicate a substantial amount of time to checking a project, before I consider it completed', 'I don't leave things for the last minute' etc.</p>
Personal Skills	Entrepreneurial Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability • Reliability • Willingness to learn • Stress tolerance <p><u>Example:</u> 'I tend to feel comfortable when things change around me', 'I can manage to control the way I react, even when I feel emotionally tense', 'I do not usually lose my patience', etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Managerial Skills • Taking Initiative • Risk Tolerance • Leadership <p><u>Example:</u> 'I tend to come up with new ideas and proposals', 'I'm in constant search for new incentives', 'You can't win if you don't take any risk' etc.</p>

The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp) by the EU defines skills and competencies that are considered essential for everyone to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and defines the following skills. Available here: https://iefp.eapn.pt/docs/AE1_Quadro_Europeu_competencias_digitais.pdf



2.6. Intercultural competence (and why it is needed)



Intercultural competencies refer to the skills and abilities to understand, respect, interact and communicate with other people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. As Dara Deardorff states, “Intercultural competencies are those attitudes, knowledge and skills that comprise a person's ability to get along with, work and learn with people from diverse cultures”.

Intercultural skills for Sustainable Development

As previously shown, a principle of sustainability is Equity and Justice. It empowers the elements of equal rights to education, healthcare services, community programs while promoting diversity in community and engagement of everyone in the decision-making process to achieve wellbeing and benefit the public good.

A Sustainable business places people at the heart of its concept. Diversity lies in its core. On its very fundamental concept, diversity in sustainable businesses can bring innovation and new ideas, market openness as well as help businesses to achieve corporate objectives such as resilience and value creation to the customers. Diversity rephrases from having a heterogeneous team in which age, gender, ethnic origin, cultural characteristics, religion, or sexual orientation is the same in all team members and instead, promotes diversity as a principle to social sustainability. Thus, developing intercultural competencies are of major importance for sustainable development.



3. Negotiation skill

3.1. Definition of Negotiation



Negotiation is the process of communicating something with another person to reach an agreement with them. It demands effective communication skills, flexibility and problem solving. In business settings, negotiations refer to corporate entities, employees and enterprise customers.

Elements towards effective negotiation include:

- Effective communication including verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Active Listening Skills.
- Adaptability and Flexibility.

3.2. A hard or a soft skill? (Negotiation as a skillset)

Negotiation as a hard skill demonstrates:

- **Strategy:** Strategic thinking involves the ability to analyze complex situations, anticipate potential outcomes, and develop effective plans to achieve specific goals. It often requires a comprehensive understanding of the organization's objectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as the ability to make decisions that align with long-term goals. Strategic thinking is crucial for leaders and decision-makers to steer their organizations in the right direction.
- **Analysis:** Analytical skills refer to the ability to collect, interpret, and evaluate data to understand patterns, trends, and relationships. This includes the capacity to break down complex problems into smaller components, identify key issues, and assess various factors to arrive at logical conclusions. Strong analytical skills are vital in fields such as data analysis, market research, financial analysis, and scientific research.
- **Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking involves objectively evaluating information, arguments, and evidence to form well-reasoned judgments or decisions. It requires the ability to question assumptions, identify biases, and consider alternative perspectives. Critical thinkers can assess the validity of claims, recognize logical inconsistencies, and make informed choices based on sound reasoning. This skill is crucial in various professional settings, including problem-solving, decision-making, and effective communication.

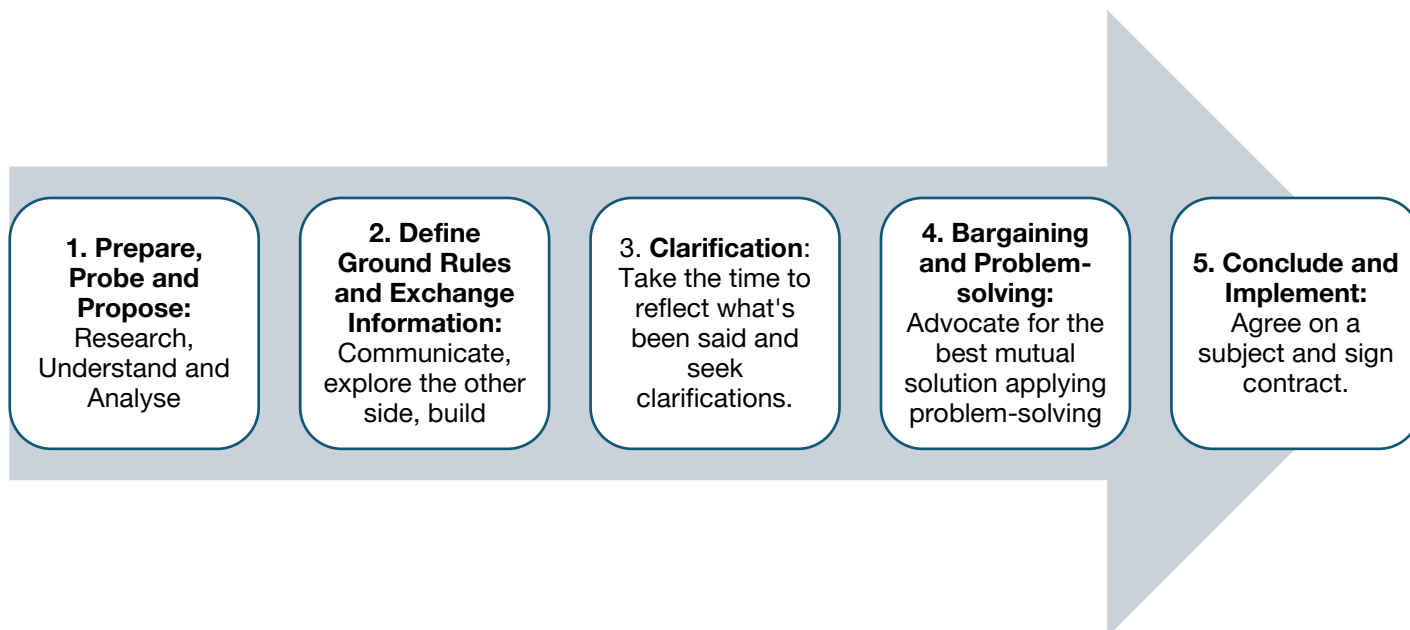


Negotiation as a Soft Skill, needs:

- **Active Listening Skills:** Employing active listening by devoting undivided attention, acknowledging comprehension through nodding, and consolidating essential elements to guarantee lucidity.
- **Constructive Feedback:** Offer feedback that is precise, prompt, and centered on enhancement. Present it in an optimistic fashion, highlighting both strengths and places for improvement.
- **Verbal Communication:** Clarity and Brevity: Employ unambiguous language to effectively express your point. Eliminate technical terminology and vagueness, ensuring that your information is comprehensible to all.
- **Nonverbal communication:** Body Language, Facial expressions, tone and rhythm of the voice to ensure that they are adjusted to the message a person wishes to deliver.
- **Conflict-Resolution:** Emphasize the importance of effectively resolving issues in a positive and productive way. Positive resolution of disagreements fosters enhanced communication, fortified connections, and heightened team cohesion. The objective is not to eradicate conflicts, but rather to convert them into occasions for acquiring knowledge and fostering cooperation.

3.3. The process of negotiation

5-STAGES of Negotiation according to Jeff Cochran:





3.4. Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

Negotiation in relevance to conflict resolution provides a constructive approach to resolving problems and identifying mutual solutions. Being able to negotiate implies that a person understands, values, and acts on other people's concerns and interests.

To effectively negotiate, open and constructive communication is required. Persons involved need to feel empowered to discuss their concerns and views on a matter. Secondly, both (or more) parties actively participating in the negotiation process can identify common interests upon discussions which will benefit identifying applicable solutions. Finding a common ground following the constructive discussions will reduce conflicts and foster a sense of collaboration. This process will enable all parties to understand each other's perspectives and motivations to build empathy and respect for each other.

Negotiation = 'Give-and-take'

The give-and-take concept involves reach e. It emphasizes reciprocity, building trust, balancing interests, and creating win-win solutions. This approach fosters collaboration, effective

communication, and a more harmonious environment in various contexts, including negotiations and interpersonal relationships.



4. Sustainable negotiation

4.1. Benefits of the sustainable negotiation

Sustainable negotiation is when an entrepreneur engages in negotiations to benefit from relationships between them and other organizations in the long-term. The main objective is to establish lasting benefits through collaborative manners for achieving environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The benefits are attributed to:

- **Long-term value creation:** Sustainable negotiations focus on creating value that endures beyond the immediate deal. This can lead to the development of lasting relationships, increased trust, and enhanced cooperation between parties.



- **Social responsibility:** Sustainable negotiations often involve considerations for the well-being of communities and stakeholders. This can lead to the implementation of fair labor practices, community engagement initiatives, and support for social development programs, thereby fostering a positive social impact.
- **Enhanced reputation and brand image:** Organizations that prioritize sustainable negotiation practices tend to build a positive reputation and improve their brand image. This can attract socially conscious consumers, investors, and partners, leading to increased market competitiveness and improved financial performance.
- **Risk mitigation:** Integrating sustainability into negotiations helps to identify and mitigate potential risks associated with environmental, social, and governance factors. By addressing these risks proactively, parties can avoid future liabilities and negative consequences, thereby ensuring long-term stability and resilience.
- **Innovation and adaptation:** Sustainable negotiations encourage innovative thinking and adaptation to changing market dynamics. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and sustainable innovation, organizations can stay ahead of the curve and capitalize on emerging opportunities, leading to long-term growth and success.

4.2. Challenges of negotiating

As previously noted, negotiation is a demanding procedure which requires parties involved in the negotiation process to reach a mutual agreement. That in turn, brings about numerous concerns and implications. Few examples of challenges include:

- **Barriers in communication:** Language or cultural differences which can lead to misinterpretations.
- **Differ interests and desires:** When two positions are widely different from each other, disputes may arise, and negotiation may fall.
- **Emotional Management:** When adaptability and flexibility is reduced or conflict of interests arise, emotional stress is increased which leads to irrational decision-making.
- **Time Management:** Negotiations may be time-sensitive and demand to come into agreement in a tight schedule.
- **Limited awareness:** The process of negotiation enumerates as the first step, research, and analysis of the subject matter to be discussed (*see section 2.3). When information and knowledge is incomplete or inaccurate, it leads to difficulties in reaching a decision, leaving severe outcomes for the enterprise, the project, or the issue under discussion.



4.3. Impact of sustainable negotiation. Sustainable team/Community/network building

Impact of sustainable negotiation on the environment:

- Sustainable negotiations prioritize eco-friendly practices and promote environmentally responsible decisions, leading to reduced environmental impact.
- Sustainable negotiation promotes compliance with environmental regulations and ethical standards.

Impact of sustainable negotiation on the community:

- Sustainable negotiations take into consideration human rights protection, community cohesion and development, facilitating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Impact of sustainable negotiation on the enterprise/organization:

- Sustainable negotiation encourages ethical business practices, transparency, and accountability, leading to increased trust among stakeholders.
- Sustainable negotiation fosters a positive reputation for businesses and organizations while it creates opportunities for organizations to collaborate with other organizations.



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SCALE-UP: Project No. 2022-1-ES01-KA220-VET-000087577

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