

Strategic Internal Drivers for ESG Integration: Enhancing Employee Awareness and Social Aspect of ESG in Bank XYZ

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the internal strategic drivers necessary for effective ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) integration at Bank XYZ, with a focus on improving employee awareness and addressing social sustainability challenges. As ESG principles increasingly become a benchmark for corporate responsibility, banking institutions play a critical role in aligning their internal processes with global sustainability standards. However, gaps in employee-centric practices often hinder the full integration of ESG values. Using a mixed-method approach, this research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify and address these gaps. The quantitative analysis, conducted using SPSS, involved 339 employees from banks with low ESG performance scores and highlighted specific areas for improvement, such as insufficient ESG training ($M = 3.4286$) and unclear communication on parental leave policies ($M = 3.875$). Qualitative insights were gathered and analyzed using NVivo from discussions with four ESG banking experts, revealing actionable strategies, including awareness campaigns, cross-departmental collaboration, and the development of an ESG framework to enhance employee engagement.

The findings demonstrate that while employees possess a general understanding of ESG principles, there is a need for targeted role-specific training, improved communication of sustainability initiatives, and empowerment programs to drive engagement. By prioritizing foundational steps, core integration strategies, and fostering a culture of sustainability, Bank XYZ can align its internal processes with ESG objectives. These recommendations aim to not only improve the bank's social sustainability performance but also serve as a guide for embedding ESG principles across all organizational levels, contributing to a more sustainable and responsible banking environment. The integration of SPSS and NVivo tools in this research highlights a robust methodological approach, ensuring data-driven insights for both quantitative and qualitative aspects of ESG integration.

KEYWORDS: ESG integration, employee awareness, sustainability culture, banking sector, social sustainability, internal strategies

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles has become a cornerstone of corporate responsibility, particularly within the banking sector, which plays a pivotal role in driving sustainable economic development. As global sustainability challenges intensify, stakeholders increasingly demand accountability, transparency, and measurable progress from financial institutions. Banks are uniquely positioned to lead these efforts, yet the success of ESG integration often hinges on the alignment of internal processes and employee engagement. Employee-centric strategies are essential for fostering a shared commitment to ESG goals, as employees play a critical role in translating high-level sustainability objectives into actionable practices across all organizational levels (Francoeur et al., 2021; Saldana, 2013). Despite the growing emphasis on ESG standards, gaps persist in how organizations embed these principles within their operational and cultural frameworks. Research highlights that inadequate employee awareness and engagement with ESG principles can undermine an institution's ability to fully achieve its sustainability objectives (Glavas & Kelley, 2014; García Mira & Dumitru, 2014). Moreover, organizations often face challenges in effectively communicating ESG policies and empowering employees to participate in sustainability efforts, which limits their ability to drive meaningful change (EPSU, 2020).

COMPANY CONTEXT AND ISSUES

ESG principles have become integral to corporate strategies, particularly in industries like banking, where organizations are expected to balance financial performance with environmental and social responsibilities. ESG integration involves embedding sustainability principles into decision-making processes, operational frameworks, and corporate cultures to address global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and governance deficiencies (Francoeur et al., 2021). Research indicates that effective ESG integration

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not only strengthens corporate responsibility but also enhances organizational resilience and stakeholder trust (Glavas & Kelley, 2014). In the banking sector, ESG integration extends beyond traditional financial goals, requiring a comprehensive alignment of internal practices, employee engagement, and strategic objectives. Studies highlight that employee-centric strategies, such as targeted training and effective communication of ESG goals, are critical to fostering a culture of sustainability and achieving meaningful progress in ESG performance (Saldana, 2013).

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) INTEGRATION IN BANKING

ESG principles have become integral to corporate strategies, particularly in industries like banking, where organizations are expected to balance financial performance with environmental and social responsibilities. ESG integration involves embedding sustainability principles into decision-making processes, operational frameworks, and corporate cultures to address global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and governance deficiencies (Francoeur et al., 2021). Research indicates that effective ESG integration not only strengthens corporate responsibility but also enhances organizational resilience and stakeholder trust (Glavas & Kelley, 2014). In the banking sector, ESG integration extends beyond traditional financial goals, requiring a comprehensive alignment of internal practices, employee engagement, and strategic objectives. Studies highlight that employee-centric strategies, such as targeted training and effective communication of ESG goals, are critical to fostering a culture of sustainability and achieving meaningful progress in ESG performance (Saldana, 2013).

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AS A DRIVER FOR ESG SUCCESS

Employee engagement is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of ESG integration efforts. Engaged employees are more likely to adopt and champion sustainability initiatives, translating organizational goals into actionable outcomes (García Mira & Dumitru, 2014). Effective ESG strategies emphasize the alignment of employee values with corporate objectives, achieved through awareness campaigns, tailored training programs, and inclusive workplace practices. Research shows that gaps in employee awareness and empowerment can significantly hinder the realization of ESG goals, particularly in areas like diversity, equity, and role-specific capacity building (EPSU, 2020). In the context of social sustainability, employee engagement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, enabling organizations to address challenges related to inclusivity, workplace safety, and ethical practices. By prioritizing employee-centric approaches, organizations can create an internal culture that supports long-term ESG commitments while improving operational effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction.

METHOD

This research employs a mixed-method approach to comprehensively analyze the internal strategic drivers required for effective ESG integration in Bank XYZ. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study ensures a robust understanding of both measurable patterns and contextual insights, providing a holistic view of the research problem.

The quantitative aspect of the study involves a survey distributed to employees of Bank XYZ. The survey comprises Likert-scale items designed to measure six constructs related to ESG integration: workplace sustainability, employer's sustainable actions, work organization's sustainability actions, sustainability skills training, sustainable work environment, and individual sustainability actions. The data collected from 25 pilot respondents were used to validate the questionnaire's reliability and clarity, following Johanson and Brooks (2010), who recommend a sample size of 10–30 for pilot studies. The final survey was then distributed to a larger sample to capture trends and gaps in employee perceptions of ESG practices. Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the lower-scoring items, highlighting areas for improvement in ESG education, training adequacy, and communication.

The qualitative component employs focus group discussions (FGDs) to complement the quantitative findings. FGDs were conducted with selected employees and key stakeholders to explore contextual factors influencing ESG integration and to identify actionable internal strategies. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, with initial coding, theming, and pattern coding methods applied to identify recurring themes and insights. This approach, as suggested by Saldana (2013), ensures a structured and in-depth understanding of qualitative data.

The mixed-method approach allows for the triangulation of data, ensuring that findings are validated through multiple sources. Quantitative results provided a foundation for identifying specific gaps in employee-centric ESG processes, while qualitative insights offered nuanced explanations and strategies to address these gaps. Together, these methods form a comprehensive framework for understanding and improving ESG integration within Bank XYZ.

QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTRUCT & ANALYSIS METHOD

The questionnaire was designed to address workplace sustainability in a manner applicable to employees across industries and professions. Its development drew from previous research, including Francoeur et al. (2021), which analyzed pro-environmental workplace behaviors and sustainability practices relevant to diverse roles. Studies by García Mira and Dumitru (2014) and Yuriev et al. (2018) further informed the inclusion of organizational practices that reflect a shift toward sustainable operations. The survey was validated through two pre-tests, one with 51 participants and another with 14 in-depth interviews. Feedback and factor analysis

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refined the design, adhering to best practices (Boateng et al., 2018). To ensure relevance to the banking industry, the survey was tailored to address ESG practices specific to financial institutions. The final design assessed employee awareness, engagement, and perceptions of sustainability initiatives, focusing on challenges and opportunities unique to the sector. Validity and reliability testing were conducted again to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the adapted survey. This questionnaire utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 represents “Strongly Agree” and 1 represents “Strongly Disagree.”

Table 1. Questionnaire Constructs and Measurement Overview for Sustainability Integration

Author, Year	Construct	Target of Measurement	Sample Question	Number of Question
Moinalen, 2023	Workplace sustainability	Estimates whether employee perceives own workplace sustainable	I know that sustainability means taking care of the environment and society while running a business, and that it is important for the company that I’m working for future success.	2 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Employer’s sustainable actions	Assesses employees’ perceptions of their employer and whether the employer mode of operation is sustainable	The company that I’m working in shares information with employees about its efforts to protect the environment, support communities, and operate ethically.	4 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Work organization’s sustainability actions	Measures the frequency sustainability actions at employees’ work organizations	The company encourages employee participation in health and safety matters through regular consultations and feedback sessions.	4 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Sustainability skills training	Measures the training on sustainability concerns	I have received adequate training on ESG-related topics that are relevant to my role.	3 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Sustainable work environment	Estimate how sustainability is considered in the working environments	I have a clear understanding of parental leave policies and how they support work-life balance.	3 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Own sustainable actions	Evaluate employees own sustainable actions at work	The ESG education provided by the company has positively influenced my day-to-day work practices.	2 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Awareness of new occupational safety and health risks	Measure employees’ awareness of occupational risks related to sustainability transitions	I feel that my company’s ESG education programs have raised my awareness about workplace safety and health policies.	2 questions
Moinalen, 2023	Climate change related worries and opportunities	Measure employees worries and opportunities related to climate change and sustainability transitions at work	I believe that it’s important for me, as an employee, to learn about how our company is working to help the environment and society.	1 question

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis to summarize patterns and trends in the dataset, focusing on measures like mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions. This method is effective for identifying strengths and gaps, particularly in ESG-related constructs such as employee training and policy communication (Boateng et al., 2018). SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was employed for data processing, allowing for accurate statistical outputs and visualization through tables and charts. Survey data were coded and analyzed to generate descriptive statistics, highlighting high and low-performing areas. For instance, lower mean scores for ESG training and communication pinpointed specific areas for improvement.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION CONSTRUCT & ANALYSIS METHOD

As part of the second phase, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to complement survey findings. FGDs are a qualitative data collection method that combines guided questions with the flexibility to explore emerging topics in group interactions. This approach allows researchers to deeply investigate specific themes while capturing diverse perspectives. According to Gill et al. (2008), FGDs ensure key themes are consistently addressed while remaining adaptable to uncover new insights, making them particularly effective for exploring complex phenomena and understanding group dynamics.

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The FGDs provided detailed insights by probing survey themes further, with data systematically organized and analyzed using NVivo software. This process facilitated coding and identification of key internal strategic factors essential for effective ESG integration across organizational levels. The final step involved synthesizing survey and FGD findings to map actionable recommendations for enhancing ESG practices and reporting standards, focusing on improving public perception. The discussion framework drew from organizational learning principles, examining elements such as commitment, systems thinking, openness to innovation, and knowledge sharing (Hooi, 2022; Migdadi, 2021). This structured approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how banks can integrate and sustain ESG practices effectively.

Table 2. Focus Group Discussion Question Construct for ESG Integration

Point	Area of Focus	Theory	Interview Question
A	Managerial Commitment and	Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and	How does the bank's leadership demonstrate its commitment to ESG goals, and what specific dynamic Dynamic Capability Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2007) capabilities are prioritized to sense and respond to emerging ESG opportunities and risks?
B	Systems Perspective and Ambidexterity	Systems Thinking (Senge, 1990) and Ambidextrous Organization (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004)	What systems or frameworks are in place within the bank to support ESG initiatives, and how does the organization balance the need for operational efficiency with the exploration of new ESG opportunities?
C	Openness, Experimentation, and Absorptive Capacity	Learning Culture and Innovation (Argyris & Schön, 1978) and Absorptive Capacity (Zahra & George, 2002)	How does the bank encourage employees to experiment with new ESG ideas, and what practices are in place to assimilate and apply external ESG knowledge effectively across departments?
D	Knowledge Transfer and Collaborative Learning Networks	Knowledge Management (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and Collaborative Innovation Networks (COINs) (Gloor, 2006)	What mechanisms does the bank use to ensure that ESG knowledge and best practices are shared not only within the organization but also through collaborations with external stakeholders?
E	Risk-Taking and High-Reliability	Adaptive Capacity (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001) and High-Reliability Organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007)	How does the bank approach risk-taking in the context of ESG integration, and what strategies are used to ensure resilient, high-reliability responses to ESG-related risks and failures?
F	Continual Learning and Continuous Improvement	Continuous Improvement (Imai, 1986; Deming) and Continuous Adaptation in Dynamic Environments (Teece, 2007)	What processes does the bank have in place for continual learning and improvement in ESG practices, and how does the organization measure progress and adapt based on dynamic environmental changes?

The qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs) were analyzed using NVivo software to ensure a structured and systematic approach. Transcripts were imported into NVivo and underwent initial coding, where key segments were tagged with descriptive labels representing recurring ideas or keywords (Saldana, 2013). These codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as ESG training, employee awareness, and leadership commitment, using NVivo's query tools to identify patterns and relationships. Pattern coding was applied to organize themes into higher-level constructs, such as foundational strategies and sustainability culture steps. NVivo's visualization tools, including hierarchy charts, helped illustrate the connections between themes and their importance. This analysis provided actionable insights into employee-centric ESG practices, aligning qualitative findings with quantitative results for a comprehensive understanding of ESG integration (Gill et al., 2008; Saldana, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis assesses the effectiveness of constructs and items associated with employee-centric internal processes in supporting ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) transitions. It emphasizes the evaluation of mean scores and standard deviations to pinpoint strengths and areas needing improvement, offering a framework for prioritizing strategies to strengthen employee involvement in ESG initiatives.

Table 3. Identified Employee Centric Areas for Improvement in ESG Integration

Construct	Item	Area for Improvement	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Workplace Sustainability	“The ESG education provided by the company has enhanced my understanding of sustainable business practices.”	Enhance ESG education to focus on specific sustainable business practices.	3.9464	1.03431
Employer’s Sustainable Actions	“I understand that the company I’m working in has programs focused on protecting the environment, helping people, and running the business responsibly.”	Strengthen communication about employer-led sustainability programs.	3.9821	1.01786
Work Organization’s Sustainability Actions	“The company where I’m working actively communicates its stance against child labor and forced labor through its ESG programs.”	Improve clarity and consistency in communicating the company’s stance against child labor and forced labor in ESG programs.	3.8929	1.00324
Sustainability Skills Training	“I have received adequate training on ESG-related topics that are relevant to my role.”	Address gaps in the adequacy and relevance of ESG-related training for employees, focusing on role-specific customization.	3.4286	1.29133
Sustainable Work Environment	“I have a clear understanding of parental leave policies and how they support work-life balance.”	Improve communication and understanding of parental leave policies and their support for work-life balance.	3.875	1.09648
Own Sustainable Actions	“I feel empowered to contribute to the company’s sustainability goals through the knowledge gained from ESG training.”	Provide more actionable insights and empowerment through ESG education programs to support employee contributions.	3.7321	1.18308

The analysis of employee awareness of the social (employment) dimension of ESG integration highlighted several areas in need of improvement. Insights were drawn from constructs like workplace sustainability, employer-led sustainable actions, and training programs. Although certain strengths were noted, the findings indicate significant gaps in the communication, implementation, and support of ESG practices within the organization. Further qualitative research, such as focus group discussions, could provide a deeper understanding of the issues contributing to lower ratings and differing opinions on this variable.

Insights from the FGDs highlight that fostering a sustainable culture relies on employee-focused initiatives, including education, skill enhancement, and collaboration. Employees play a dual role as both implementers of ESG strategies and drivers of innovation and transformation. Therefore, prioritizing the cultivation of a sustainability-focused culture ensures that ESG principles are deeply ingrained within the organization, supporting continuous progress and alignment with evolving sustainability objectives. This analysis emphasizes the necessity of a phased, employee-centered approach to ESG integration, using FGD insights to create a strategic roadmap for driving organizational change and sustainability.

The hierarchy chart categorizes essential strategies for effective ESG integration within the banking sector. Framework and Governance forms the foundation, focusing on Monitoring and Reporting for accountability, establishing an ESG Framework for alignment with sustainability standards, and deploying a Dedicated Team to oversee implementation. Leadership Commitment emphasizes the importance of Strategic Alignment between leadership objectives and ESG goals and Top-Level Support to inspire

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engagement and allocate resources effectively. Employee Engagement and Capacity Building highlights initiatives such as Awareness Campaigns to align employees with ESG goals, Training and Development to equip them with necessary skills, and Incentives and Rewards to motivate contributions toward sustainability. Organizational Collaboration underscores Cross-Departmental Cooperation and Shared Accountability to ensure cohesive efforts toward achieving ESG objectives. Risk Management and Continuous Improvement focuses on Continuous Learning to refine ESG practices and Proactive Risk Management to address potential challenges early. Lastly, Integration with Business Operations incorporates ESG in Decision Making and Operational Efficiency to embed sustainability into daily processes. Together, these strategies highlight a comprehensive, employee-centered approach to achieving ESG goals and fostering organizational alignment with sustainability principles.



Figure 1. Hierarchy of Key Internal Strategies for ESG Integration in Banking

The word cloud provides a visual representation of the key themes and priorities identified during the focus group discussion and data analysis on ESG integration at Bank XYZ. Prominent terms such as “employees” and “sustainability” highlight the central focus on employee-centric strategies to embed sustainability into the organization’s culture. Additionally, words like “awareness,” “management,” and “campaigns” emphasize the importance of improving employee understanding and engagement through structured awareness initiatives and training programs.

- Terms such as “targets,” “initiatives,” and “goals” point to the bank’s strategic efforts to achieve measurable ESG objectives, aligning with its overall sustainability vision. The inclusion of “training” and “development” suggests a strong emphasis on equipping employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement ESG principles effectively.
- Collaboration and accountability are underscored by the appearance of words like “teams,” “support,” and “accountability,” which indicate a focus on fostering cross-departmental cooperation and shared responsibility for ESG success. The visibility of terms like “leadership” and “commitment” further demonstrates the critical role of top-level support in driving ESG initiatives forward.

Practical strategies are reflected in words like “campaigns,” “recycling,” and “waste,” which signify actionable steps to promote sustainable practices at an employee level. Additionally, terms like “risk” and “adaptation” underscore the importance of proactive risk management and organizational adaptability to align with ESG objectives. This word cloud analysis reinforces the quantitative and qualitative findings, highlighting the need for foundational steps, core integration strategies, and a focus on sustainability culture to drive long-term ESG integration successfully.



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Key Internal Strategies for ESG Integration in Banking

The table below presents the step-level framework for key internal strategies essential for effective ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) integration in the banking sector. These strategies are organized into distinct levels, starting with foundational steps that establish the critical framework for ESG implementation, followed by core integration steps that embed sustainability principles into the organization’s operational and decision-making processes. This structured approach ensures a systematic progression, guiding the organization from establishing essential ESG practices to integrating them comprehensively across all levels of operation.

Table 4. Step Level of Key Internal Strategies for Effective ESG Integration in Banking

Step Level	Key Internal Strategies	Description
Foundational Steps	Monitoring and Reporting	Ensuring accurate ESG reporting processes to enhance transparency, accountability, and alignment with regulations.
	ESG Framework	Developing a structured ESG framework to guide sustainability efforts and align them with strategic objectives.
	Strategic Alignment	Aligning leadership strategies with ESG objectives to drive effective implementation and organizational commitment.
Core Integration Steps	Cross-Departmental Cooperation	Enhancing collaboration across departments to support ESG initiatives through shared goals and accountability.
	ESG in Decision Making	Embedding sustainability metrics into strategic
	Top-Level Support	Securing engagement from top-level management to drive commitment and resources for ESG integration.
	Proactive Risk Management	Identifying and mitigating ESG risks early to ensure resilience and adaptability in business operations.

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	Operational Efficiency	Optimizing resource utilization and minimizing waste to achieve cost savings and environmental benefits.
Sustainability Culture Steps	Awareness Campaigns	Engaging employees through awareness initiatives to foster alignment with ESG principles and corporate values.
	Training and Development	Providing training programs to build employee capacity and align skills with the organization's sustainability goals.
	Incentives and Rewards	Introducing reward systems to encourage employee engagement and innovation in ESG practices.
	Continuous Learning	Fostering a culture of continuous improvement by learning from ESG challenges and successes.
	Shared Accountability	Promoting shared responsibilities across teams to enhance collective efforts toward achieving ESG goals.
	Dedicated Team	Assigning specialized teams to oversee and coordinate ESG activities across the organization.

The foundational steps serve as the essential building blocks for establishing a strong ESG framework. Insights from the focus group discussions (FGD) emphasized the significance of monitoring and reporting for ensuring accountability and meeting regulatory requirements, such as those from financial authorities. Regular reporting, including quarterly leadership reviews, helps track ESG performance and maintain alignment with organizational goals. Additionally, the development of an ESG framework was identified as critical for translating broad sustainability objectives into actionable plans, guided by pillars like Sustainable Banking and Sustainability Culture. Strategic alignment emerged as another key priority, ensuring that leadership strategies are harmonized with ESG goals and fostering top-down commitment to sustainability.

Core integration steps focus on embedding ESG practices into daily operations and decision-making processes. FGD participants highlighted cross-departmental cooperation and shared accountability as vital for enabling smooth ESG implementation. Integrating ESG metrics into decision-making ensures sustainability is prioritized in resource allocation and operational planning. Top-level support was noted as essential for driving these initiatives, with visible leadership commitment motivating employees and allocating necessary resources. Sustainability culture steps, such as awareness campaigns, training programs, and incentives, were identified as the backbone of long-term ESG integration. These initiatives align employee values with organizational goals, empower proactive participation, and foster continuous learning. A dedicated ESG team, coupled with shared accountability, creates a cohesive and sustainable approach to achieving corporate ESG objectives.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To address the identified gaps and strengthen ESG integration, Bank XYZ should prioritize enhancing its ESG training programs. Providing role-specific and targeted training will ensure employees have the knowledge and skills needed to implement ESG practices effectively in their daily work. Additionally, improving communication about company policies, such as parental leave and work-life balance, is essential. Establishing clear and consistent communication channels will ensure employees understand and can engage with these policies, fostering trust and alignment with ESG goals. Developing a sustainability culture is another critical step. This can be achieved by launching targeted awareness campaigns and introducing incentive programs to recognize and reward employee contributions to ESG initiatives. Such efforts will encourage engagement and create a shared sense of responsibility for sustainability within the organization. Moreover, leadership commitment must be visibly demonstrated, with top-level management actively supporting ESG goals. This includes providing necessary resources and motivating employees to prioritize sustainability. Cross-departmental collaboration should also be promoted to streamline ESG implementation and address complex sustainability challenges collectively. Finally, the bank should adopt a continuous improvement approach by regularly monitoring ESG practices and gathering employee feedback. This will allow the organization to adapt and refine its strategies in line with evolving

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sustainability goals and standards. Together, these recommendations will enhance ESG integration, particularly in the social (employment) aspect, while positioning Bank XYZ as a leader in sustainable banking.

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