

# Key drivers of sustainable procurement in the oil and gas industry: Evidence from Namibia Corporation

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**Background:** Sustainable procurement is a crucial pillar of corporate governance and competitiveness, particularly in resource-constrained environments such as Namibia. Regardless of the rising interest in sustainability principles, the bulk of parastatals face difficulties in embedding environmental, social and economic considerations into internal procurement processes. Namibia Corporation (NAMCOR) exemplifies this challenge, where balancing cost efficiency, compliance and sustainability remains a complex task.

**Objectives:** This study aims to highlight and evaluate the key drivers influencing sustainable internal procurement at NAMCOR.

**Method:** An exploratory qualitative approach, interpretivist philosophy and case study design were adopted. Data were collected from 20 participants purposively selected from NAMCOR using semi-structured interview guide. Document analysis was also used to collect data, and thematic analysis was applied during data analysis.

**Results:** The results indicate that leadership commitment, corporate values, compliance with government policies, economic efficiency, employee competence, shareholder influence and supplier collaboration are the key factors of sustainable internal procurement. The adoption of sustainable practices is hampered by misaligned departmental priorities, weak sustainability awareness and inadequate monitoring mechanisms.

**Conclusion:** The study reveals that sustainable internal procurement needs a comprehensive strategy that combines governance, capacity building and digital technology. Stakeholder engagement and policy alignment will stimulate sustainability and organisational performance.

**Contribution:** This research enhances the understanding of sustainable procurement in Namibia. It provides a conceptual framework for adopting sustainability in procurement in the oil and gas industry. It offers practical guidance for corporate leaders who aim to align operational processes with sustainability objectives.

**Keywords:** sustainable procurement; internal procurement; organisational performance; Namibia Corporation; sustainability drivers; state-owned enterprises.

## Introduction

In the new millennium, entities have started recognising that procurement is not just a commercial operation, but a strategic initiative that allows for the attainment of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Sustainable procurement generally deals with all the activities that are associated with the sourcing of goods and services that enable organisations to be competitive and resilient in their respective industries (African Development Bank 2023). Internal procurement, however, pertains to all the processes initiated by an organisation to govern decisions associated with the acquisition of inputs and third-party services; thus, it consists of how commodities are requested and sourced from suppliers by the organisation. Internal procurement thus deals with the acquisition of goods and services governed by internal policies, which is different from external procurement, which is regulated by external policies such as the *Procurement Act* (Agyemang & Ansong 2024).

In the last decade, the area of sustainable procurement in the oil and gas industry has gained more interest from organisations, policymakers and academicians. Sustainable procurement is directly associated with cost savings, operational efficiencies, environmental protection and reputational outcomes (Brammer & Walker 2024). According to Karim (2024), procurement in organisations is

influenced by key drivers which include organisational culture, availability of financial resources and management commitment. However, there is limited empirical literature on the key drivers of sustainable procurement, specifically in the oil and gas industry in developing countries like Namibia. The bulk of studies that have been conducted focus more on the evaluation of supplier selection and internal procurement processes (Chinomona & Sandada 2021). This study was necessary to allow for the identification of what motivates internal stakeholders of organisations in the oil and gas industry to adhere to sustainable practices in internal procurement, including highlighting the challenges that impede the implementation of such practices.

This study specifically looked at key drivers of procurement in the oil and gas industry through the lens of Namibia Corporation (NAMCOR). Namibia Corporation is the national oil company of Namibia that deals with the sale of various petroleum products to different segments of the Namibian market, among them, the government, parastatals and the private sectors, which include mining, construction, transport and others. Namibia Corporation operates in an environment that is associated with increasing environmental sustainability awareness, regulatory pressures, resource limitations and high stakeholder scrutiny. The need to identify internal procurement drivers was not only for academic purposes but was also practically relevant to ensure that organisations in the oil and gas industry in Namibia align with sustainability practices so as to add value to the Namibian economy.

Sustainable procurement does not only focus on supplier selection, but looks at policies and values that regulate how internal stakeholders of an organisation internally acquire goods and services (Hinterhuber 2025; Santos 2024). In the context of Namibia, external procurement in state-owned enterprises is regulated by the *Namibia Procurement Act of 2015*; however, internal procurement is left in the hands of organisations, thus in the majority of cases it is marred by irregularities, which negatively affect sustainability (Anti-Corruption Commission 2019; Government of the Republic of Namibia 2015; Office of the Auditor-General 2021).

Despite the existence of a national regulatory framework governing public procurement in Namibia, internal procurement practices within state-owned enterprises such as NAMCOR have continued to face significant challenges that undermine sustainability. At NAMCOR, procurement has been affected by fragmented procurement planning, limited integration of sustainability criteria into sourcing decisions, inconsistent adherence to internal procurement policies, capacity constraints among procurement personnel and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These challenges have contributed to inefficiencies, increased procurement risks, cost overruns and limited consideration of environmental and social sustainability objectives. The absence of a structured and standardised internal procurement framework has further constrained the organisation's ability to align procurement activities with long-term sustainability goals, particularly in a

capital-intensive and environmentally sensitive industry such as oil and gas sector. Against this backdrop, this article thus examined the internal dynamics that influenced sustainable procurement at NAMCOR and how these drivers can be harnessed to embed sustainability into procurement. This study sought to highlight the factors that internally influenced sustainable internal procurement at NAMCOR. This paper provided a deeper understanding of sustainable procurement by mapping internal drivers of internal procurement in the oil and gas industry of a developing country like Namibia. It also offered empirical evidence of the internal levers of internal procurement that can be utilised to foster sustainable practices.

## Problem statement and research questions

Regardless of the growing momentum in sustainable procurement worldwide, a greater number of organisations in developing countries, particularly those in the oil and gas industry, where sustainable procurement is a prerequisite, are failing to embed sustainability practices into internal procurement (Chari, Karodia & Sibalukhulu 2022). In Namibia, the government has implemented sustainability policies to be followed by state-owned enterprises like NAMCOR such as Vision 2030, the Harambee Prosperity Plan II, the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5) and the *Public Enterprises Governance Act of 2019*, all of which emphasise sustainable economic development, social responsibility, environmental stewardship and value for money; however, internal procurement practices at NAMCOR remain largely driven by cost considerations, with limited systematic integration of social and environmental sustainability considerations into procurement decision-making (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004, 2017, 2018, 2019). Namibia Corporation, like many organisations in similar industries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, has come up with sustainability objectives at the strategic level; however, there is little to no integration of these objectives into internal procurement decisions.

At NAMCOR, there is an absence of clear and standardised internal procurement guidelines that explicitly integrate sustainability principles. For example, a review of the organisation's internal procurement policy and procedures, standard operating procedures, tender evaluation templates, and procurement planning and contract management documents indicates that procurement decisions are predominantly guided by cost, technical compliance and delivery timelines, with limited or no explicit consideration of environmental protection, social responsibility, local supplier development or life-cycle costing. This omission demonstrates a misalignment between internal procurement governance at NAMCOR and national sustainability policy expectations articulated in Vision 2030, NDP5 and the *Public Enterprises Governance Act of 2019* (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2019; International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 2017).

The adoption of sustainable procurement practices at NAMCOR appeared to be influenced by limited leadership

commitment and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, factors that have been widely identified as critical enablers of sustainability implementation within organisations (Testa et al. 2016; Walker & Brammer 2012). The observed failure to harmonise policy intent with operational practice reflected a persistent implementation gap, suggesting inadequate institutional understanding of the internal drivers that enable or constrain effective sustainable procurement within organisations operating in resource-intensive industries in developing countries (Amann et al. 2014; Glover et al. 2014). Moreover, there is an absence of robust empirical evidence on the factors that motivate or demotivate internal stakeholders to embed sustainability into internal procurement process risks, which has resulted in cosmetic interventions that prioritise procedural compliance rather than structural and transformative change (Bratt et al. 2013; Meehan & Bryde 2011). Existing studies on sustainable procurement have largely concentrated on external supply chains, supplier relationships and logistics performance, with limited attention paid to internal organisational dynamics such as leadership, governance structures, skills and incentive systems (Preuss 2009; Zhu, Sarkis & Lai 2013). Namibia Corporation provided a suitable platform to evaluate the key drivers of internal procurement so as to produce evidence specifically for the Namibian context, with a view to informing internal procurement policies of all the entities in the oil and gas industry in Namibia. In seeking to address this predicament, this study intended to answer the following research questions:

- *What are the key internal drivers influencing the implementation of sustainable procurement practices at NAMCOR?*
- *How do organisational leadership, culture and policy frameworks shape the adoption of sustainability practices in internal procurement?*
- *What internal barriers hamper the effective implementation of sustainability principles into procurement operations?*
- *How can NAMCOR strengthen its internal procurement systems to promote long-term sustainability performance?*

In seeking answers to the aforementioned questions, this study identified fundamental factors that influence the level of appetite by internal stakeholders to adopt and embed sustainability practices into the internal procurement process at NAMCOR.

## Literature review

### Understanding sustainable procurement

Sustainable procurement is described by ISO (2017) as the act of acquiring goods, components and services by an organisation in a way that not only guarantees maximum value for money but takes into consideration the social and environmental implications during the entire procurement process. Sustainable procurement endeavours to reduce the negative repercussions of procurement on the environment, as well as promote the long-term economic resilience of an organisation. A study by Ahsan and Rahman (2024) indicated

that sustainable procurement does not only look at external supplier engagement, but also focuses on tools and procedures within an organisation that mould and direct purchasing decisions. As indicated by Walker, Brammer and Svensson (2023), sustainable procurement requires organisational alignment where policies, management and employee practices promote ethical and conscious buying behaviour within an organisation.

### Internal procurement

Internal procurement refers to all the internal procedures, practices and systems that are used by an organisation when purchasing goods and services to meet operational requirements (Ambe & Maleka 2021). Monczka et al. (2020) described internal procurement as a process that links the supply needs of an organisation with internal policies, inventory management and budgeting. Van Weele (2018) further indicated that internal procurement is a systematic, methodical approach in the acquisition of products to satisfy internal needs and is aimed at enhancing cost and operational efficiency. Internal procurement is very important in helping to ensure control, transparency and accountability in supply chain initiatives. The oil and gas industry involves long-term contracts of high value; thus, ethical internal procurement protocols allow an organisation to align its strategic goals with operational execution (Tiwari & Khan 2021). A well-structured internal procurement system is pivotal in cushioning risks, cultivating harmonious relations with suppliers and helping the entity to align local content goals with sustainability. Internal procurement enables management to make informed decisions and allows for the consolidated tracking of expenses, delivery effectiveness and supplier compliance (Zhou, Wang & Lin 2022). Entities in the oil and gas industry have been faced with intensified public scrutiny to adhere to environmental regulations as well as corporate governance standards. Sustainable internal procurement acts as the bridge between procurement policies and implementation.

### Drivers of sustainable procurement

Sustainable internal procurement refers to the systematic integration of environmental, social and economic considerations into an organisation's internal procurement policies, procedures and decision-making processes to achieve long-term value creation while minimising adverse social and environmental impacts (ISO 2017; Walker & Brammer 2012). Unlike externally oriented sustainable procurement, which focuses on supplier compliance and supply chain relationships, sustainable internal procurement emphasises organisational structures, governance mechanisms, leadership commitment and internal capabilities that enable sustainability principles to be embedded within procurement operations (Preuss 2009).

One of the most critical drivers of sustainable procurement is leadership commitment and top management support.

Senior leadership plays a central role in setting strategic priorities, allocating resources and signalling the importance of sustainability within procurement functions. Studies consistently show that strong leadership commitment enhances the adoption of sustainability-oriented procurement practices by legitimising sustainability goals and integrating them into organisational strategy (Testa et al. 2016; Walker et al. 2012).

Another key driver is the presence of clear internal policies and governance frameworks that explicitly incorporate sustainability objectives. Well-defined procurement policies, codes of conduct and procedural guidelines provide operational clarity and reduce discretion that may otherwise prioritise short-term cost considerations over long-term sustainability outcomes (Amann et al. 2014; Bratt et al. 2013). The absence of such internal frameworks often results in fragmented implementation and symbolic compliance with sustainability principles.

Organisational capacity and skills within the procurement function also significantly influence sustainable internal procurement. Procurement professionals require adequate knowledge, competencies and training to understand sustainability concepts such as life-cycle costing, social value creation and environmental risk assessment. Empirical studies have shown that limited technical capacity and lack of sustainability expertise among procurement personnel act as major barriers to effective sustainability integration (Gelderman, Semeijn & Bouma 2017; Meehan & Bryde 2011).

Furthermore, monitoring, evaluation and performance measurement systems serve as essential drivers by enabling organisations to track sustainability outcomes and ensure accountability. The use of sustainability indicators, key performance measures and internal audits strengthens compliance and supports continuous improvement in procurement practices (Testa et al. 2016; Zhu et al. 2013). Weak or absent monitoring mechanisms, by contrast, undermine the practical implementation of sustainability objectives.

Organisational culture and internal stakeholder engagement also influence the extent to which sustainable procurement practices are embraced. A culture that values ethical conduct, transparency and long-term value creation encourages procurement officials and end-users to support sustainability initiatives, whereas resistance to change and entrenched cost-driven mindsets inhibit adoption (Preuss 2009; Walker & Brammer 2012). Internal collaboration across departments further enhances the integration of sustainability into procurement decision-making.

The shift towards sustainable internal procurement over the past decade has been driven by a combination of internal organisational factors and external pressures, including regulatory expectations, stakeholder scrutiny and global sustainability agendas. However, the effectiveness of sustainable procurement implementation

ultimately depends on the strength of internal drivers that translate sustainability commitments into operational practice.

## Barriers and implementation challenges

The adoption of sustainable practices in procurement has gained traction, particularly in the oil and gas industry, considering the negative implications that this industry poses to society and the environment; however, the adoption of these practices is hampered by certain challenges. These challenges include, among others, limited resource availability, poor leadership accountability and support, divergent departmental goals and the absence of sustainability evaluation mechanisms (Chari, Nyasha & Banda 2024). In the majority of organisations, particularly in the oil and gas industry in Africa, procurement is often treated separately from sustainability, hence leading to ineffective implementation and monitoring (Hinterhuber 2025). Another barrier to the adoption of sustainable practices in procurement is resistance to change; most internal stakeholders fear that sustainability practices may lead to work overload, be costly and may threaten their positions; hence, they shun away from their implementation (Mupetami & Likando 2022).

## Towards sustainable procurement systems

Existing research shows that the embedding of sustainability in procurement systems and processes highly depends on systemic transformation, not isolated initiatives. Touboulie and Walker (2023) cited that the implementation of sustainable practices in procurement needs to be supported by digital tools, cross-functional collaboration and continuous performance evaluation and monitoring. Sustainability in procurement can be achieved through the establishment of an internal framework that governs internal procurement (Singh & Kaur 2023). It was revealed by Hörisch, Freeman and Schaltegger (2020) that a move towards sustainability in procurement should be aligned with ISO 20400.

## Theoretical perspectives on sustainable procurement

Sustainable procurement in the oil and gas industry has been explored through the lenses of various theoretical perspectives, which all collectively indicate the need for companies to embed environmental and social principles in procurement. Theories on sustainable procurement were employed in this study to act as a cornerstone for understanding the determinants of sustainable procurement in the oil and gas industry of developing countries.

The stakeholder theory stipulates that entities should not only be accountable to owners but should endeavour to satisfy the interests of various stakeholders such as the government, society, employees and environmental groups (Freeman 1984). Procurement decisions in the oil and gas industry are examined to establish their effect to the environment and society. Pressure from environmentalists,

the government and civic society often drive organisations to incorporate sustainability principles in supplier selection, contract management and sourcing practices (Carter & Rogers 2008). In Namibia, public ownership of resources and sustainability goals exacerbate stakeholder influence and pressure for sustainability-oriented procurement behaviour. This theory was used to analyse the equal treatment of stakeholders at NAMCOR.

Institutional Environmental Theory describes how organisational processes and procedures are moulded by formalised rules, cultural expectations and industry norms (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Scott 2014). The oil industry is associated with intense environmental regulations, public procurement regulatory frameworks and international sustainability guidelines. Coercive pressure from government policies, environmental professionals and pressures from global best practices compel companies to implement sustainable procurement practices (Zhu et al. 2013). For oil mining organisations, compliance requirements and the need to demonstrate legitimacy strongly influence procurement decisions. In this study, the researcher used this theory to evaluate adherence to institutional and environmental regulations.

Resource-based view (RBV), on the other hand, emphasise the need to command rare resources such as highly skilled employees and financial resources that give an organisation sustained competitive advantage (Barney 1991). The RBV therefore indicates that sustainable procurement is influenced by the availability of competent procurement personnel who possess adequate sustainability expertise and who effectively utilise supplier evaluation systems (Walker, Di Sisto & McBain 2008). In the oil and gas industry, where procurement complexity and risk exposure are high, internal resource capacity greatly shapes the extent to which sustainable procurement practices can be successfully implemented. The RBV was used to identify resources that give NAMCOR the ability to embed sustainability in its operations.

Collectively, the aforementioned theoretical perspectives provide a solid theoretical foundation for evaluating the key drivers of sustainable procurement. This study conceptually frames the drivers influencing sustainable procurement at NAMCOR. The findings are therefore interpreted within established theoretical lenses, contributing localised evidence from a developing country national oil corporation to the broader sustainable supply chain management literature.

### Viewpoints, controversies and limitations in sustainable procurement theory

Regardless of the extensive use of theoretical perspectives on sustainable procurement, they have been criticised, and they have their limitations. The stakeholder theory is valuable in indicating the role of external pressures and accountability; however, it has been fiercely criticised for its failure to take into consideration a method of setting

priorities when there are competing stakeholder interests, which is more prevalent in the oil and gas industry, where economic, environmental and social demands often compete (Friedman & Miles 2006). This limitation raises concerns about the practical applicability of stakeholder-driven procurement decision-making in capital-intensive sectors.

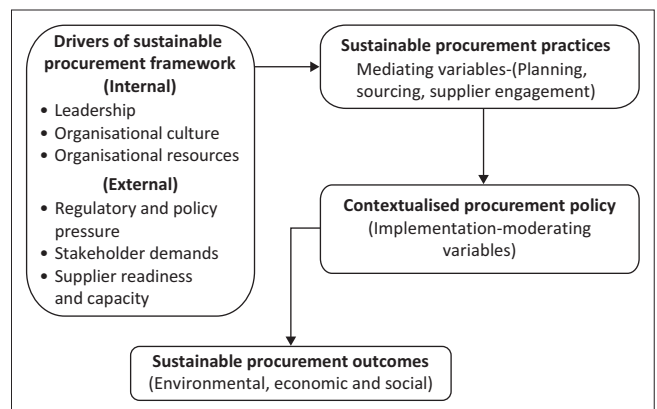
The institutional environmental theory has been extensively adopted to describe the integration of environmentally sustainable practices in organisational processes. Despite its significant contributions, it has been criticised for stressing more on organisational conformity and not putting emphasis on tangible performance results (Meyer & Rowan 1977). In the context of sustainable procurement, this has led to concerns that organisations may adopt sustainability practices symbolically to achieve legitimacy without fundamentally transforming procurement processes, particularly in highly regulated public-sector environments.

In the same vein, the RBV has been heavily criticised for downplaying social and environmental considerations of sustainability (Priem & Butler 2001). Even though the RBV theory establishes the importance of internal capabilities of an organisation in achieving sustainability, it fails to sufficiently recognise external pressures and ethical responsibilities that are particularly salient in extractive industries operating under intense public scrutiny.

### Research framework

The world is not static; such is procurement in organisations. Public procurement has evolved, resulting in the development of new procurement methods to promote accountability, transparency and sustainable achievement. Figure 1 suggests that sustainability can be achieved through the building of a sustainable framework in public procurement. The framework shown in Figure 1 illustrates the link between key factors and constructs that affect sustainable procurement at NAMCOR.

The drivers of sustainable procurement were divided into internal and external factors, and these drivers were



**FIGURE 1:** Research model: Drivers of sustainable internal procurement, sustainable internal procurement practices and sustainable internal procurement outcomes.

considered to be independent variables. The internal and external drivers of sustainable procurement were considered to be the initiating forces that stimulate sustainable procurement practices. These drivers affect the extent to which an organisation integrates sustainability into procurement. Sustainable procurement practices are the mediating variables. Mediating variables are the processes and procedures that are adopted in response to the identified internal and external drivers. These mediating variables included procurement planning with sustainability criteria, life-cycle cost analysis, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations in supplier evaluation, ethical and local sourcing and use of green technologies and sustainable materials. Procurement practices mediate the relationship between the drivers and the expected outcomes. Sustainable procurement outcomes are the dependent variables. These are the results produced by the effective adoption of sustainable procurement brought about by the gazetted procurement policy. These outcomes reflect the success and sustainability impact of procurement decisions.

## Research methods and design

The study made use of an exploratory qualitative research approach that was based on inductive reasoning, hence following an interpretivist philosophy as it involved the analysis of participants' responses (Fouche, Strydom & Roestenburg 2021). A case study design was adopted because the study specifically looked at NAMCOR and not the entire oil and gas industry in Namibia.

### Sampling method, population and sample size

This study made use of non-probability sampling in the form of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used so as to ensure that the sample was composed of participants who had direct experience, knowledge and involvement in internal procurement. The population of this study comprised procurement officers, supply chain managers, senior management and other relevant internal stakeholders directly involved in the internal procurement processes of NAMCOR. The inclusion of these participant categories was theoretically justified by stakeholder theory, which emphasises that organisational outcomes are shaped by the actions and interactions of multiple internal stakeholder groups with differing roles, interests and decision-making authority (Donaldson & Preston 1995; Freeman 1984). In the context of sustainable procurement, these actors collectively influence policy formulation, operational execution, oversight and strategic alignment, making their inclusion essential for a holistic understanding of internal procurement dynamics.

From a methodological perspective, the selection of these groups aligns with purposive sampling principles, which advocate for the deliberate selection of information-rich participants who possess direct knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton 2015). Procurement officers and supply chain managers provide

insights into day-to-day procurement practices; senior management contributes perspectives on leadership commitment and strategic priorities, while other internal stakeholders offer complementary views on governance, compliance and cross-functional coordination. Including multiple organisational levels enhanced credibility and dependability through data triangulation and reduced the risk of single-perspective bias, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness and internal validity of the study (Creswell & Poth 2018; Lincoln & Guba 1985).

The aforementioned population was deliberately selected because these individuals were considered to have direct and adequate knowledge, experience and decision-making authority with regard to procurement processes and procedures at the organisation in question. The study made use of a sample which was 65% of the total population (30 people); thus, the sample of this study was 20 participants. This sample size is in line with Wutich, Beresford and Bernard (2024), where it was asserted that a sample size of such magnitude is sufficient to reach data saturation with deep probing occurring in interviews. The demographics of these participants are presented in Table 1.

This study made use of 20 targeted participants, indicating a 100% response rate. The researcher obtained data from both male and female participants, with female participants constituting 30% (6 out of 20) and male 70% (14 out of 20). The gender disparity was skewed towards male participants; however, the gap is not worrisome in concluding the study analysis. More so, the demographic analysis shows that six participants had bachelor's degrees, seven had master's degrees, two had PhDs, four had diplomas and one had a certificate. Participants consisted of eight procurement officers, three compliance officers, four procurement managers, four senior managers and one finance officer.

**TABLE 1:** Demographic data of the participants.

Participants	Gender	Participant category	Educational qualification
Participant 1	Male	Procurement officer	Bachelor's degree
Participant 2	Male	Compliance officer	Master's degree
Participant 3	Female	Procurement officer	Certificate
Participant 4	Male	Procurement manager	Master's degree
Participant 5	Female	Procurement officer	Diploma
Participant 6	Female	Compliance officer	Master's degree
Participant 7	Female	Procurement manager	Bachelor's degree
Participant 8	Male	Procurement officer	Diploma
Participant 9	Male	Procurement officer	Bachelor's degree
Participant 10	Male	Senior manager	PhD
Participant 11	Male	Compliance officer	Diploma
Participant 12	Female	Senior manager	Master's degree
Participant 13	Male	Procurement officer	Bachelor's degree
Participant 14	Male	Procurement officer	Bachelor's degree
Participant 15	Male	Senior manager	Master's degree
Participant 16	Male	Procurement manager	PhD
Participant 17	Female	Senior manager	Master's degree
Participant 18	Male	Procurement manager	Master's degree
Participant 19	Male	Procurement officer	Diploma
Participant 20	Male	Finance officer	Bachelor's degree

## Data collection tools

This study used qualitative research instruments to collect data. Interviews and document analysis were used to collect data. A semi-structured interview guide was used, with face-to-face interviews conducted with participants. In conducting document analysis, the researcher used documents such as NAMCOR's procurement policy manuals and guidelines, annual procurement reports and audit reports, internal memos and circulars on procurement practices, sustainability reports and strategic plans. The documents used were for the period 2015–2025.

## Data analysis

The study made use of thematic analysis to analyse data. Thematic analysis was used to identify the key drivers that influenced sustainable procurement at NAMCOR. Thematic analysis of data was done using Clark and Braun's (2013) six steps of analysis. The NVivo software (QSR International/Lumivero is based in Burlington, Massachusetts, USA) was also used to conduct thematic data analysis.

## Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained ethical approval from the International University of Management's Research Ethics Committee, Windhoek Campus, on 07 December 2023. Permission to carry out the study was also obtained from NAMCOR, with the permission letter having been received on 29 July 2024.

## Results

The study found that sustainability in internal procurement at NAMCOR was influenced by various key drivers. These key drivers were put into groups: (1) Internal organisational drivers (leadership commitment, corporate sustainability vision and organisational values); (2) Regulatory and policy pressures (compliance with government policies, adherence to environmental laws and industry standards); (3) Stakeholder Expectations and Reputation (Stakeholder demands, public image and shareholder influence); (4) Triple Bottom Line Considerations (Environmental impact, social responsibility and economic efficiency) and (5) Risk Management and Long-Term Cost Savings (Risk reduction, supply chain resilience and life cycle costing). The findings indicated that these drivers were acknowledged in principle; however, they were not consistently embedded into procurement decision-making because of gaps in policy, training and monitoring mechanisms.

## Discussion

According to ISO 20400 (2017), sustainable procurement should be driven by a mixture of organisational objectives, stakeholder needs and broader sustainability goals. ISO 20400 outlines that leadership commitment, stakeholder engagement and risk management are essential enablers of sustainable procurement. In NAMCOR's case, the study found that although senior management recognised the strategic

importance of sustainability, operational-level staff lack structured internal guidelines, clear performance indicators and formalised accountability mechanisms to effectively align daily procurement practices with sustainability objectives. From the perspective of Institutional Environmental Theory, this finding reflects a common organisational response to institutional pressures, where compliance is often symbolic rather than substantive. The theory posits that organisations operating in highly regulated and publicly scrutinised environments adopt sustainability commitments primarily in response to coercive pressures (such as government policies and regulatory requirements), normative pressures (professional standards and industry expectations) and mimetic pressures (the desire to emulate perceived best practices) (Delmas & Toffel 2008; DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Sustainability recognition at senior management level appears to be driven largely by external coercive and normative pressures; however, the absence of internalised procedures, measurable performance indicators and monitoring systems suggests limited institutionalisation of sustainability at the operational level. This misalignment indicates that sustainability practices have not yet been fully embedded into organisational routines, resulting in a decoupling between policy intent and implementation. Consistent with Institutional Environmental Theory, such decoupling allows organisations to maintain legitimacy in the external environment while internal practices remain largely unchanged, thereby constraining the effectiveness of sustainable procurement implementation.

Despite institutional pressures existing in the Namibian oil and gas sector, the study found that their translation into internal procurement systems is inconsistent. Namibia Corporation is currently experiencing what Scott (2001) described as a 'symbolic compliance', where sustainability is rhetorically acknowledged but procedurally underdeveloped.

According to Freeman et al. (2018), organisations must balance the interests of diverse stakeholders, including government regulators, local communities, employees and customers whose demands increasingly extend beyond financial efficiency to environmental and social responsibility. At NAMCOR, findings indicated that compliance with government regulations was prioritised, suggesting that external stakeholders, particularly regulators, exerted significant influence more than other stakeholders like the community. However, stakeholder demands related to sustainability, such as environmental protection or social inclusion, appeared less integrated into procurement planning. From a stakeholder theory perspective, these findings highlight that there is preferential treatment of stakeholders based on power and legitimacy rather than equal consideration of all stakeholder interests. The government is the major stakeholder because of its coercive power and ability to impose legal and financial sanctions, thereby shaping procurement behaviour more strongly than community stakeholders. This aligns with instrumental interpretations of stakeholder theory, where organisations prioritise stakeholders that pose the greatest risk to organisational survival. The comparatively weaker influence of community stakeholders indicates an

imbalance in stakeholder salience, driven by limited enforcement capacity. This finding is also aligned with similar findings of Ambe and Badenhorst-Weiss (2012), where it was found that in African contexts, sustainability adoption is largely driven by external regulatory pressure rather than internal value systems.

Ajzen's (1991) model posits that behavioural intention depends on attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The study's findings indicated that while some procurement staff acknowledged the value of sustainability, entrenched attitudes prioritising cost efficiency limited intention to act differently. Moreover, subjective norms at the leadership level appeared to downplay sustainability, signalling that the organisational culture does not reinforce such behaviours. Perceived behavioural control was also weak, as staff lacked tools and frameworks for implementing sustainability-related procurement. This mirrors findings from global research where procurement managers often view sustainable procurement as resource-intensive and outside their immediate control (Walker et al. 2012).

Findings showed that NAMCOR's procurement processes are heavily transactional, with limited development of internal resources such as knowledge, technology and supplier collaboration frameworks that would embed sustainability. The lack of sustainability-related key performance indicators (KPIs) and life-cycle costing models points to the underutilisation of intangible resources that could drive long-term competitiveness.

From a RBV, the limited development of internal resources at NAMCOR shows the lack of strategic resources needed to adopt sustainable procurement practices. Insufficiency in sustainability-related knowledge, enabling technologies and structured supplier collaboration minimise the organisation's ability to translate sustainability intentions into operational advantage. Resource-based view suggests that without valuable, rare and well-integrated resources, sustainable procurement remains compliance-driven rather than capability-driven; this limits NAMCOR's potential to leverage sustainability as a source of long-term organisational value. Organisations that align procurement with sustainability often leverage internal capabilities such as green innovation, supplier partnerships and human capital development to create a strategic advantage (Brandon-Jones et al. 2017). This gap suggested NAMCOR risks falling behind peers who invest in such capabilities.

It was evident that NAMCOR's current procurement approach fell short of a quality-focused system. A quality-driven procurement system would treat supplier evaluation, post-contract audits and ESG compliance as essential performance indicators. However, the findings showed that these aspects were rarely considered.

## Conclusion

In summary, the findings indicated that sustainable procurement drivers in the oil and gas industry in Namibia

remain externally motivated (compliance and reputation) and internally constrained by cost-centric attitudes, weak behavioural intention and underdeveloped resources. The study established the need for stronger stakeholder engagement, shifts in organisational norms and strategic investment in sustainability capabilities in line with the stakeholder theory, RBV and institutional environmental theory. Namibia Corporation should treat stakeholders' interests equally, invest in internal capabilities such as technology and sustainability skills of personnel and adhere to global and national sustainable environmental standards.

Future studies should consider conducting comparative studies on sustainable internal procurement practices in SADC and between developing and developed countries. Additionally, there is a need to conduct quantitative studies to evaluate the factual effect of sustainability practices on efficiency and organisational performance. Researchers should in the future examine the importance of technology such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data in promoting transparency, guiding the implementation of sustainability practices to achieve positive sustainability outcomes.

Additionally, researchers should explore the role of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, in enhancing procurement accountability and sustainability outcomes, thereby broadening the empirical and theoretical understanding of sustainable procurement in resource-constrained environments.

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### Competing interests

The author, Petrina N. Erasmus, declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### CRedit authorship contribution

Petrina N. Erasmus: Data curation, Visualisation and Writing original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

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