From Dialogue to Impact

Realising sustainable ambitions through communication in the front-end phase



P5 Presentation - Isis Eva Sophia Bourgonjen

Delft University of Technology | Nice Developers B.V.

NICE DEVELOPERS



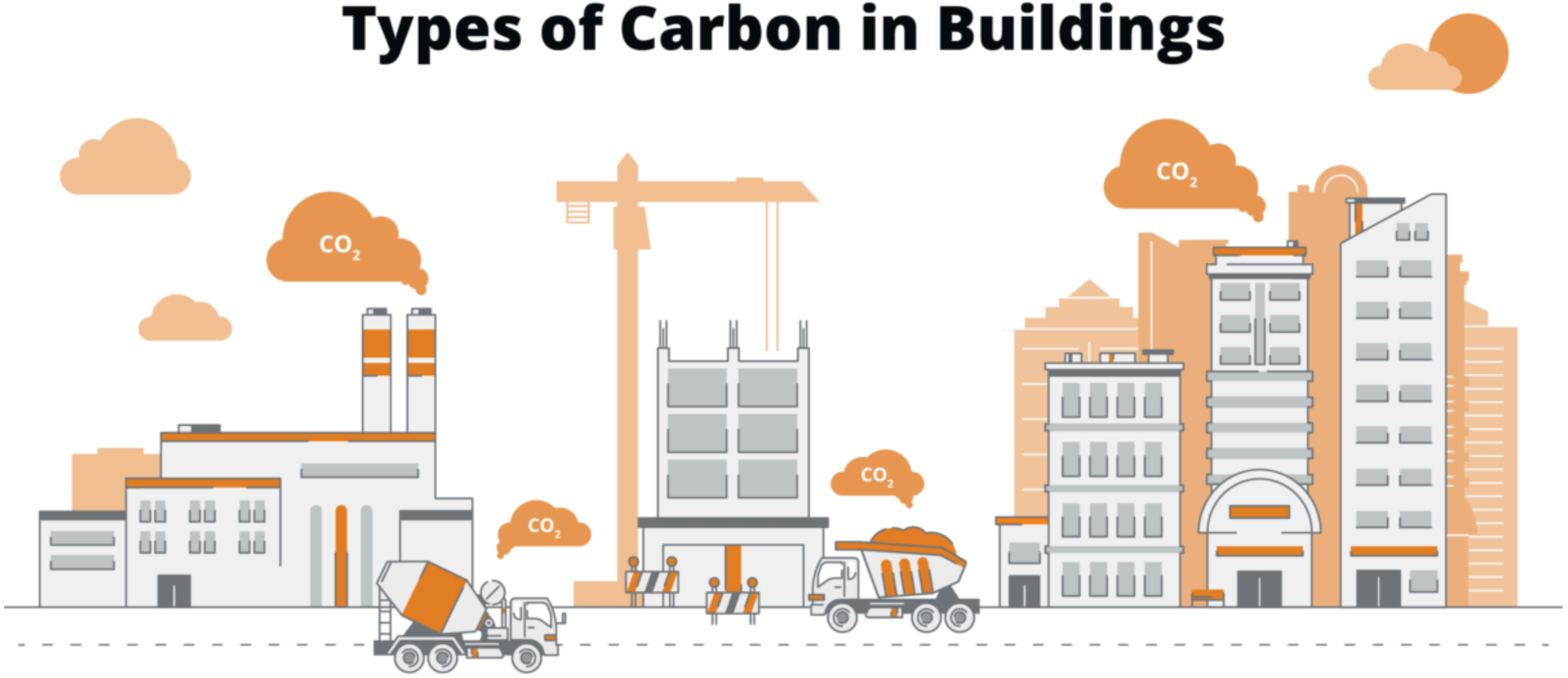




The Built Environment is responsible for 39% of the CO_2 Pollution Worldwide

Gettyimages.com; Gresb.com

Types of Carbon in Buildings



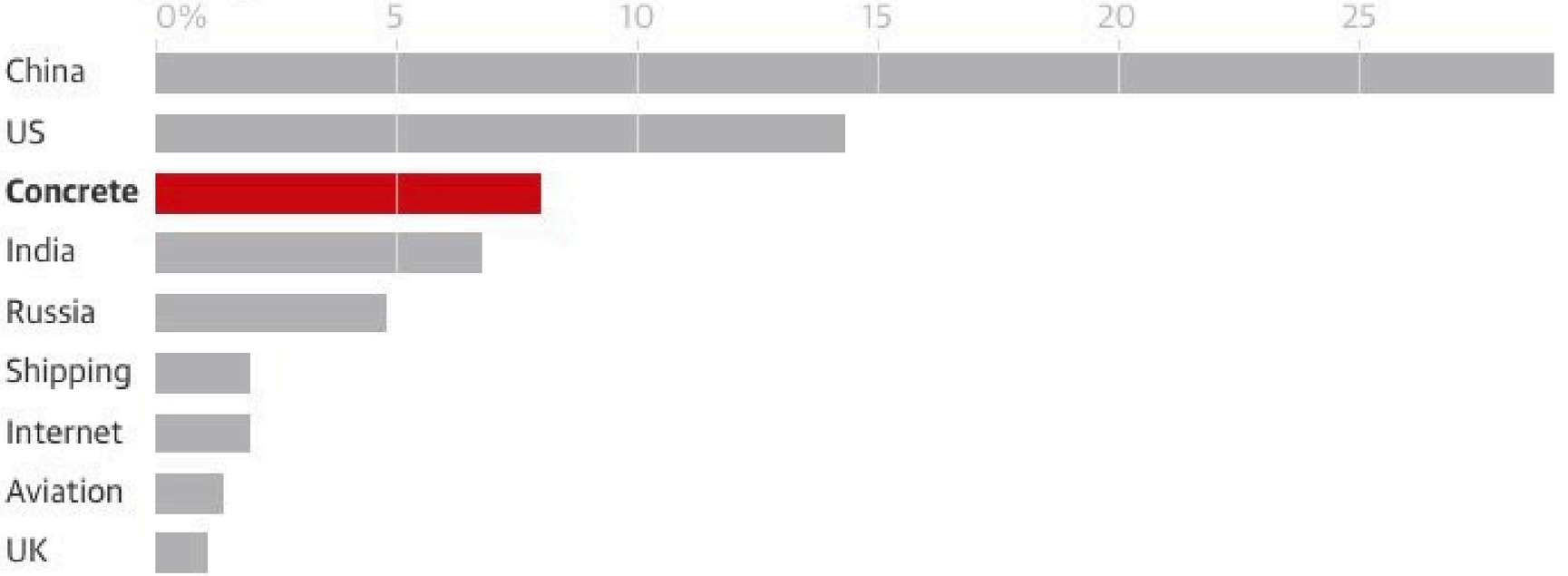
Embodied Carbon
The emissions from manufacturing, transportation, and installation of building materials.

Operational Carbon
The emissions from a building's energy consumption.

Carboncure., 2020

If concrete was a country it would be the third largest carbon emitter in the world

Percentage of global carbon emissions



Guardian graphic | Source: UN environment, Chatham House

“Grondstoffenschaarste dreigt: nationale strategie in ons maatschappelijke belang”



Leonie van der Voort, Directeur Cascade, vereniging van oppervlaktedelfstoffenwinners

Het dreigend tekort aan essentiële bouwgrondstoffen zoals zand, grind en klei stond op 26 september centraal tijdens het Cascade symposium “De toekomst van zand-, grind- en kleiwinning” op Landgoed Mariënwaerdt te Beesd. Experts, onderzoekers, beleidsmakers en andere genodigden bleken het roerend met elkaar eens over de urgentie en noodzaak van een landelijke integrale aanpak. Deze nationale strategie moet zorgen voor voldoende beschikbaarheid van deze grondstoffen, nu en in de toekomst. Het ministerie van I&W buigt zich momenteel over een integraal landelijk afwegingskader als beoordelingsinstrument voor toekomstige winningsactiviteiten. Wat maakt deze winningsprojecten en bijbehorend beleid noodzakelijk?

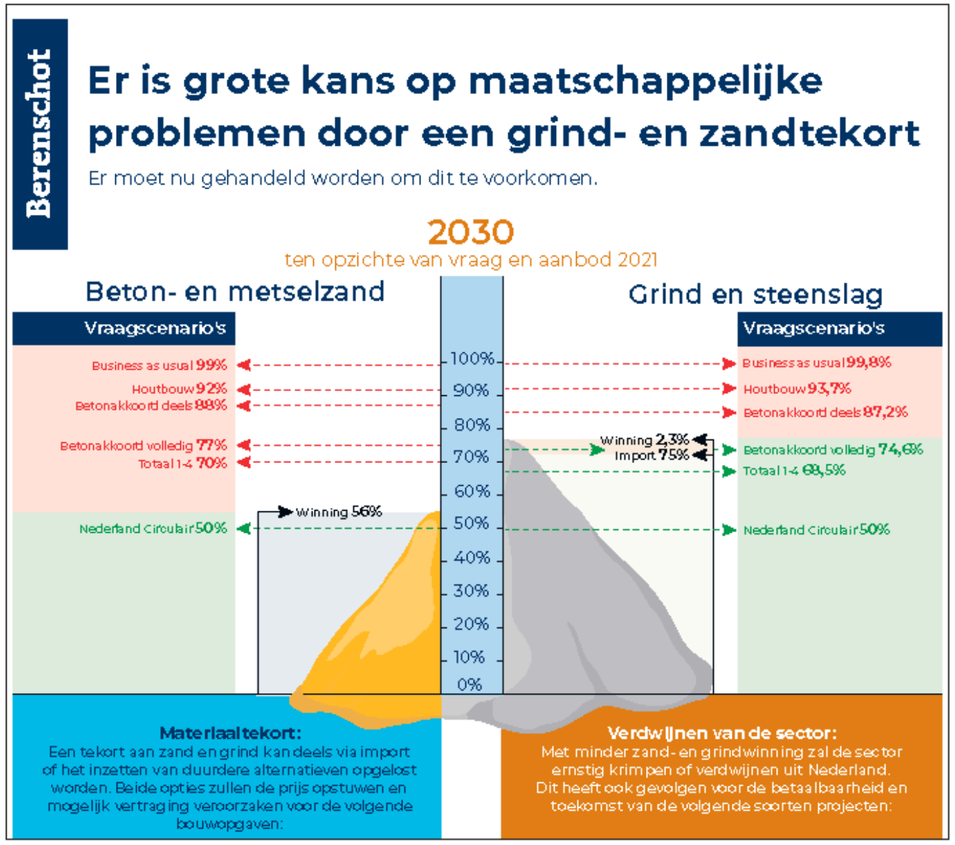
bouwambities voor de toekomst. Helaas stevent de bouwsector af op een grondstoffentekort. Dit is een direct gevolg van het ontbreken van een nationale strategie.

Externe onderzoeken onderschrijven tekort aan bouwgrondstoffen

Het is geen geheim dat het voor handen hebben én houden van voldoende essentiële bouwgrondstoffen niet langer gegarandeerd kan worden omdat huidige winningsvergunningen snel eindigen. Cascade luidt hierover al langer de noodklok. Ook de Rijksoverheid zelf erkent inmiddels het probleem. Experts van verschillende gerenommeerde onderzoeksbureaus hebben in opdracht van zowel het ministerie van I&W als van Cascade separaat onderzoek gedaan naar de toekomstige vraag naar deze grondstoffen. Daarbij zijn uiteraard ook alternatieve bouwgrondstoffen, materialen en hergebruik van materialen meegenomen in de resultaten.

Tijdens het Cascade symposium onder leiding van oud Tweede Kamerlid Erik Haverkort presenteerden de onderzoekers van de twee bureaus hun





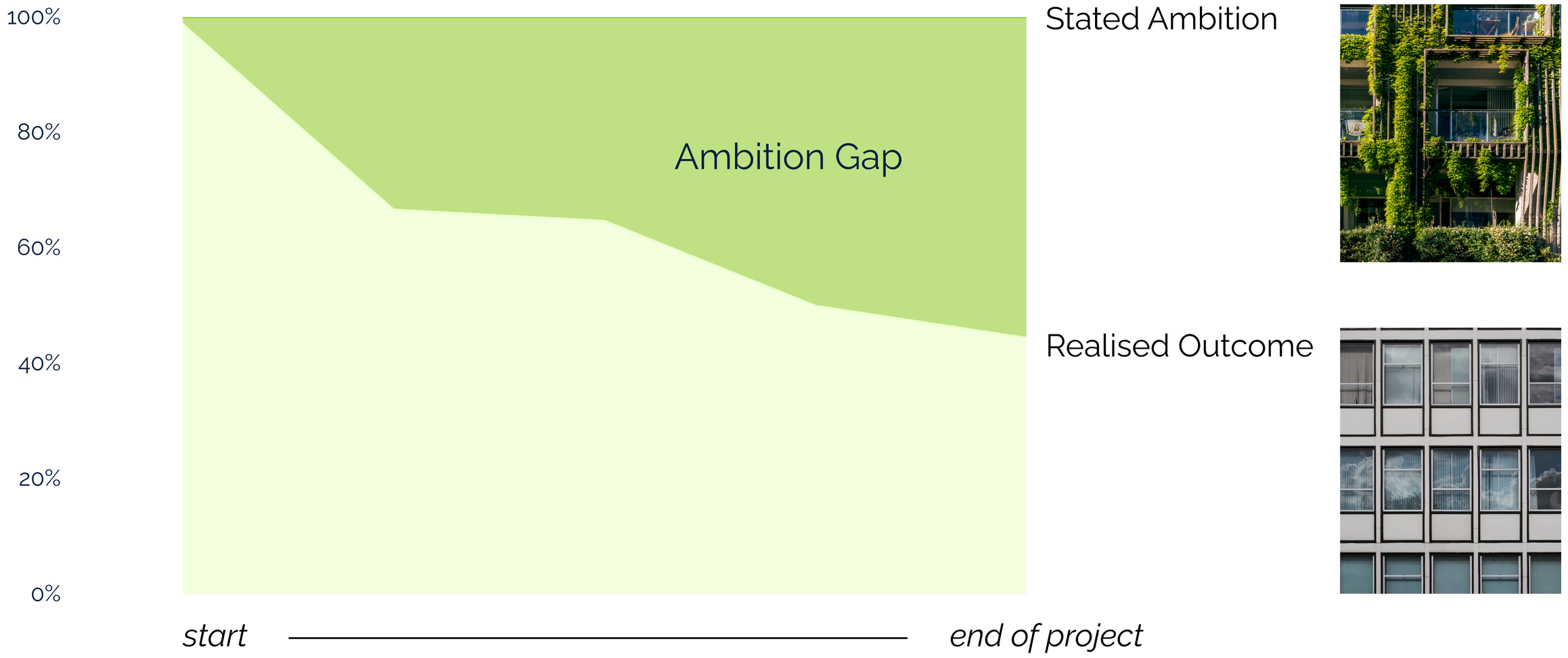
Samenvatting Toekomstperspectief zand en grind (Bureau Berenschot 2023)


Nations Unies
Conférence sur les Changements Climatiques 2015
SECRETAIRE EXECUTIVE CCNUCC
PRESIDENT
SECRETAIRE
Gettyimages.com

2015.


2026.
And Now What...?
Gettyimages.com


Gettyimages.com
ambition
outcome



Stated Ambition

Realised Outcome

Current Literature

"**progressive developers** often face **challenges** when engaging with **conservative stakeholders** who prioritize **established practices** over innovative sustainable methods"

"little attention has been given to **how 'soft' strategies interact with the measurable realisation** of sustainable ambitions, both on project- and organisation level"

"Apparently **translating** these '**soft skills**' into '**real' results** remains a challenge"



Eikelenboom & van Marrewijk, 2024; van Uden, 2023; Urton & Murray, 2021

Content

CONTEXT
RESEARCH QUESTION
CONCEPTUAL MODEL
METHODOLOGY
CASE
ANALYSIS
DESIGN CYCLE
FINAL STRATEGY
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION
REFLECTION

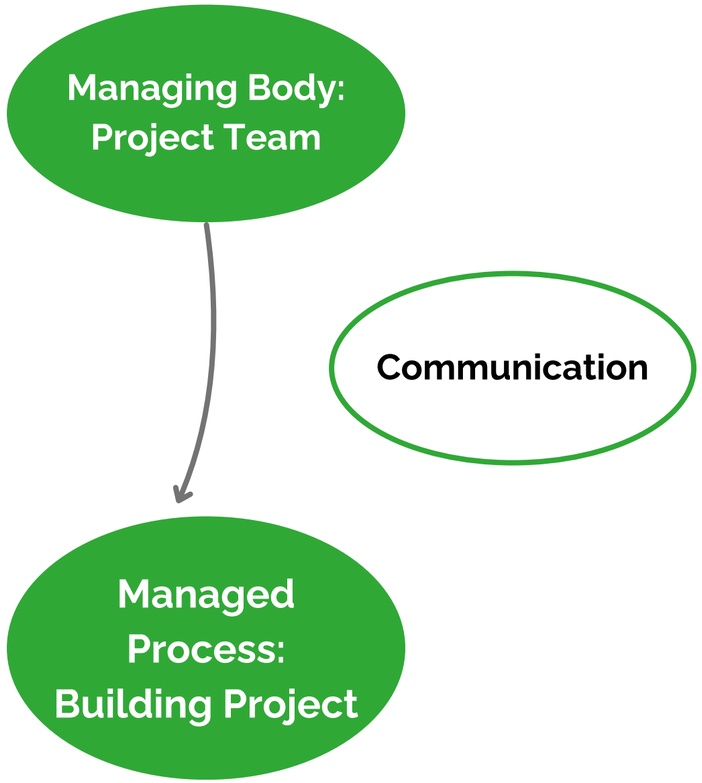


Managing Body:
Project Team

Managed
Process:
Building Project

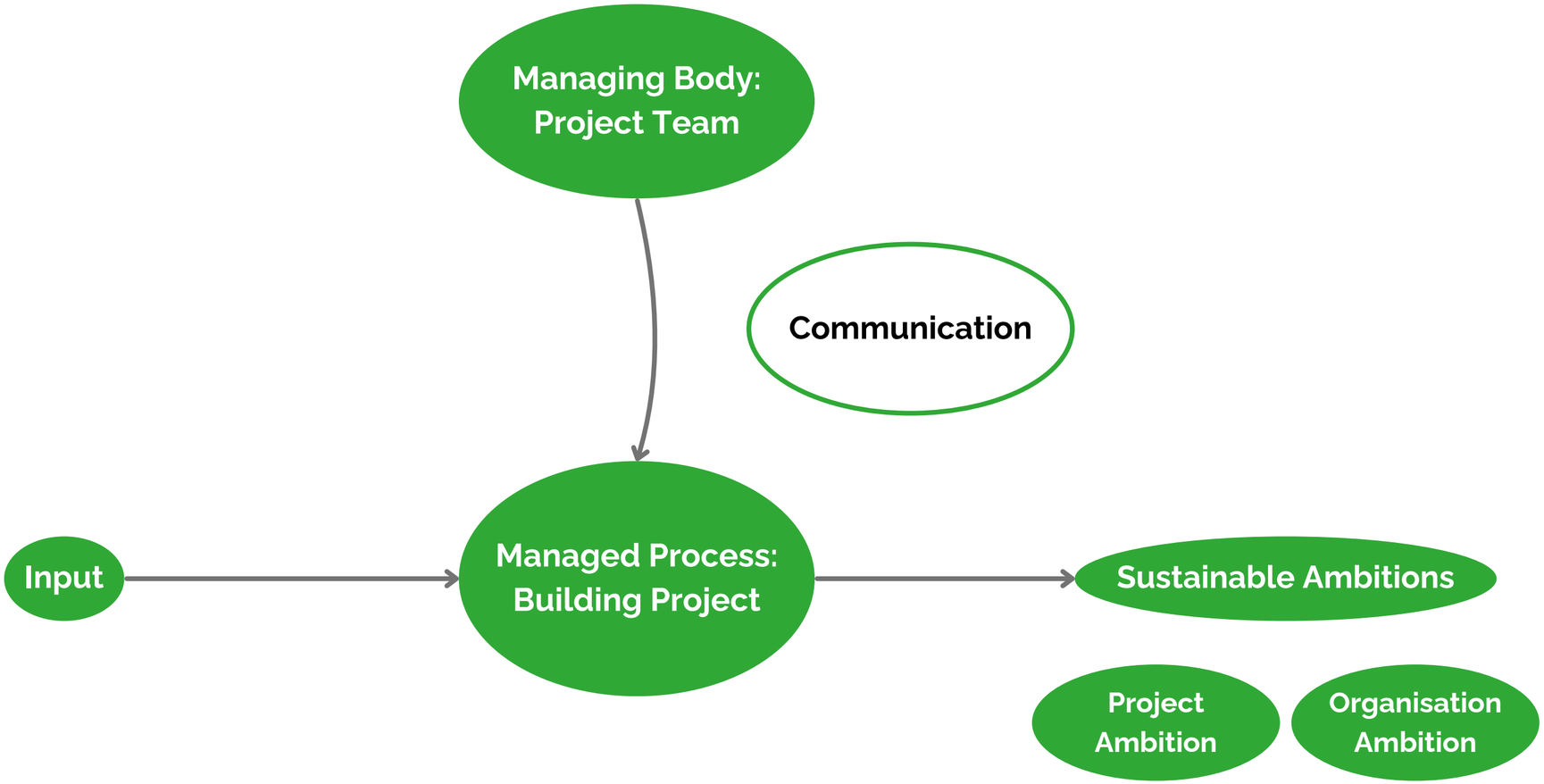


Contextual Model



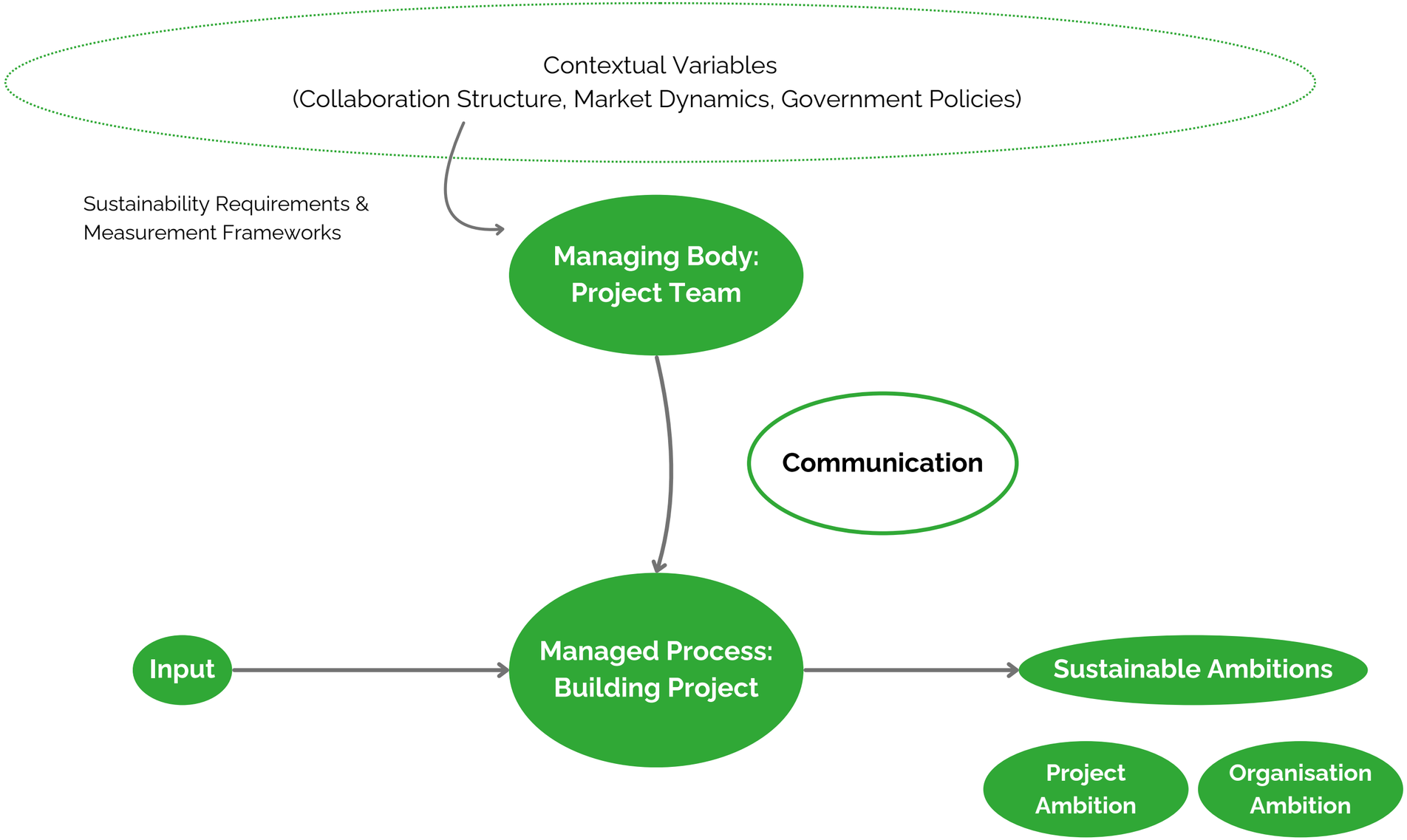


Contextual Model





Contextual Model





Contextual Model

Research Question

"How can **communication steer** the **realisation of sustainability ambitions** in the front-end phase?"



01
Methodology



1. What does **existing theory** reveal about how communication influences the realisation of sustainability ambitions on project- and organisation level?

2. How has **communication been applied** in the **selected project** to shape the realisation of sustainability ambitions?

3. **Why** did certain **communication** strategies **succeed or fail** in realising measurable sustainability ambitions?

4. **How** can communication **strategies be designed** to engage conservative stakeholders and operationalise sustainable ambitions?

Research Sub Questions

Subquestion 1

Subquestion 2 & 3

Subquestion 4



Theoretical Overview



Documental Analysis of Process



Reasoning and Perspectives of Stakeholders

1



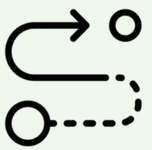
Guidelines

2

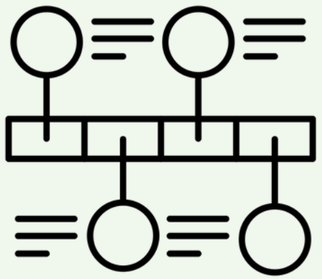


Workshop: First Design

3



Validation: Strategy



Final Strategy

Rigor Cycle

Relevance Cycle

Design Cycle
3 iterative rounds

Output

Design Science Framework

02
Literature

Subquestion 1



Research Question

"How can **communication steer** the **realisation of sustainability ambitions** in the front-end phase?"



Communication → Realisation of Sustainable Ambitions



Communication → **Realisation of Sustainable Ambitions**

Mediating Variables

- Stakeholder Alignment
- Goal Clarity
- Perceived Value



Communication → **Realisation of Sustainable Ambitions**

Mediating Variables

- Stakeholder Alignment
- Goal Clarity
- Perceived Value

Communication Actions:

Active Information Sharing
Feedback Loops
Alignment Actors
Alignment Project
Resolution of Conflict
Visualisation
Performance Measurement
Risk Mitigation
Evidence of Succes



tool:
Communication Actions (9)

How can **Communication** Steer the **Realisation of Sustainable Ambitions**

output:
critical moments in the project (tensions)

03
Case Study

Subquestion 2 & 3





Appelaar, Geldrop




• CO2 and Nitrogen Reduction
• Circular
• Mass Timber Construction
• Biodiversity
• Nature Inclusivity
• Social Inclusivity
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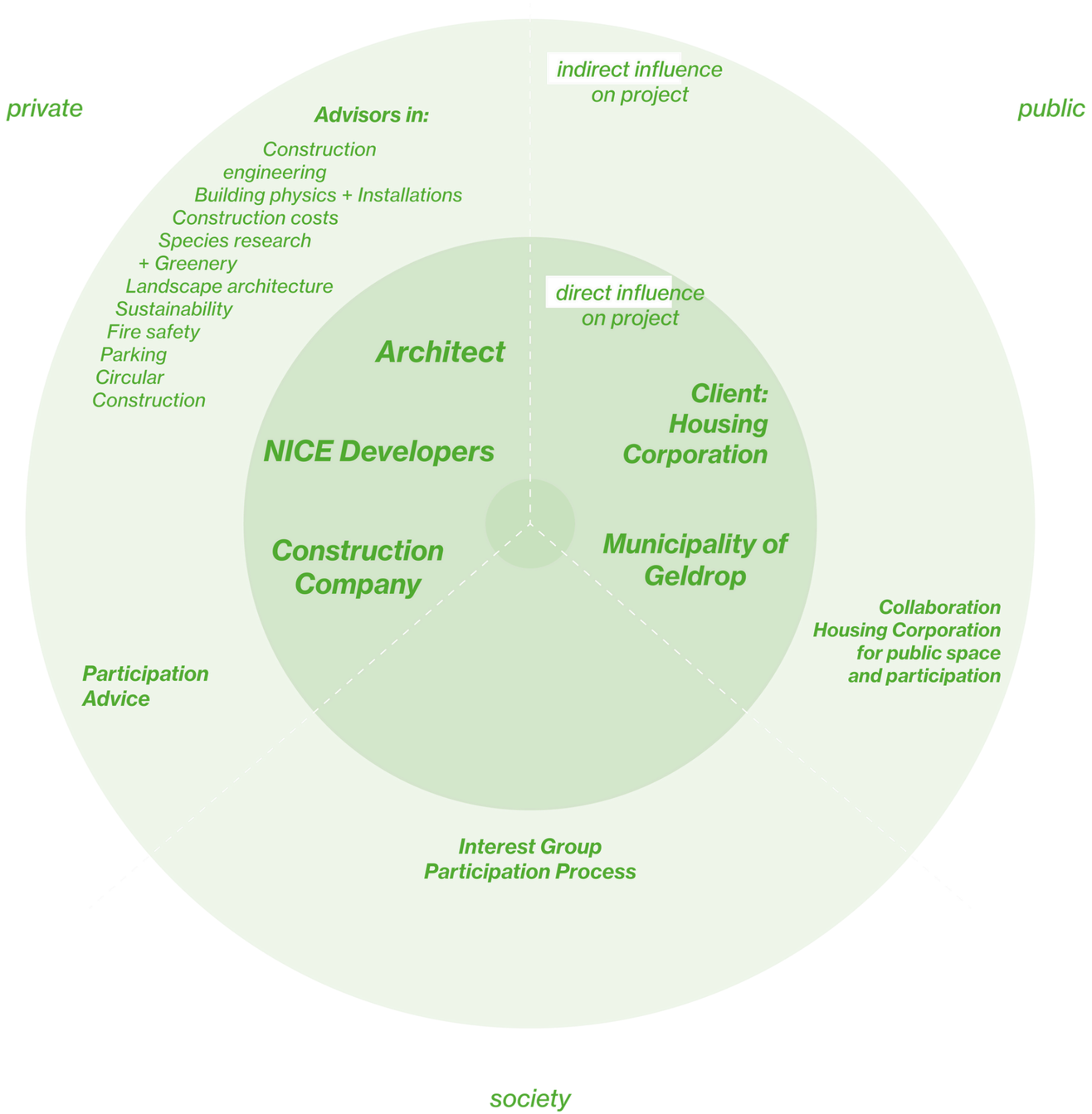
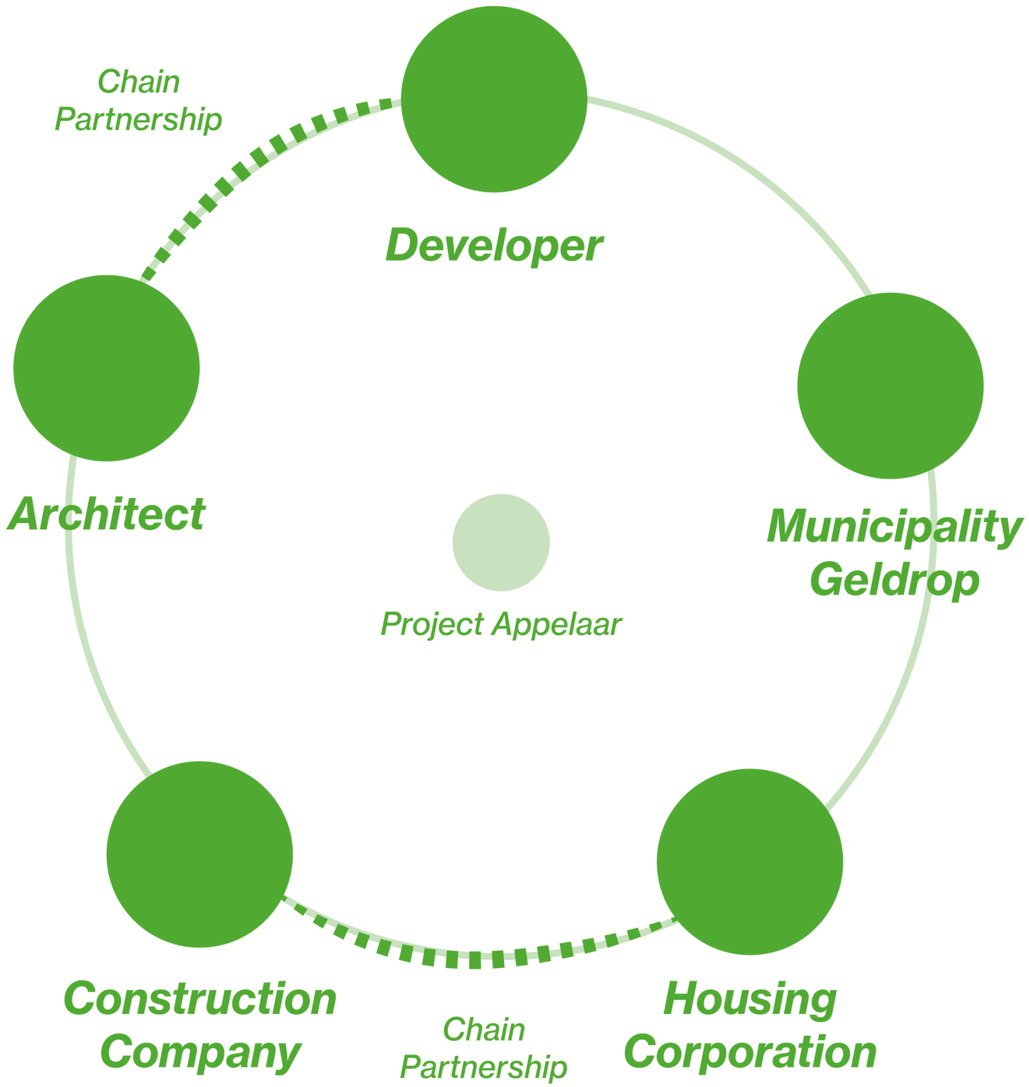
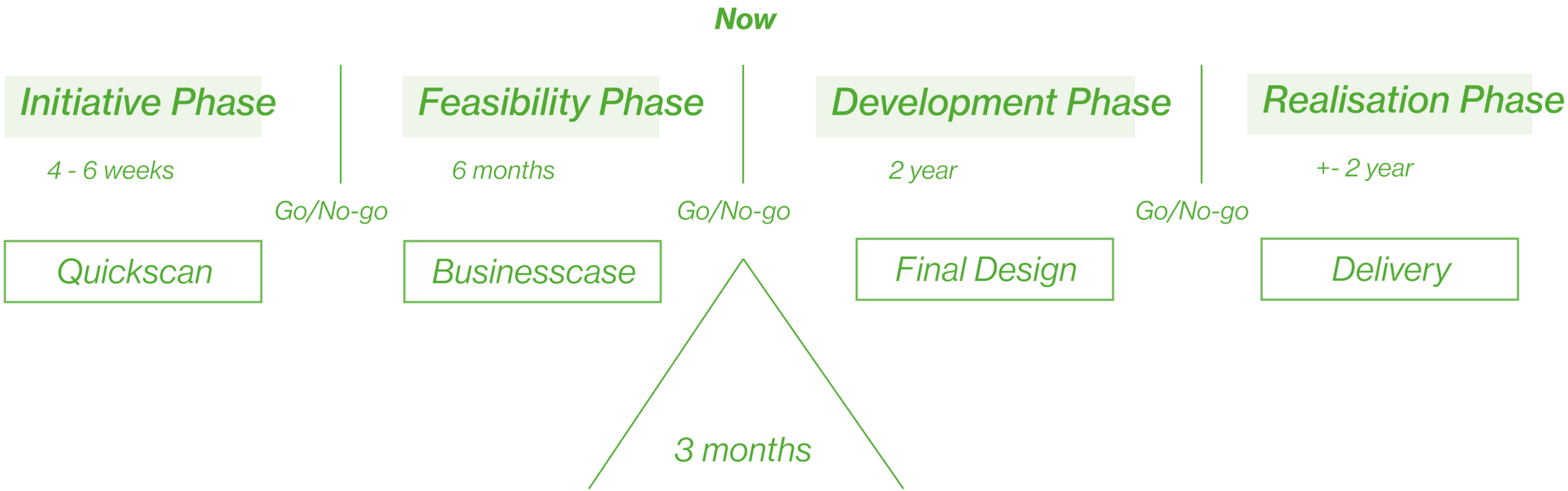


Stakeholder Map



Stakeholder Map

Project Phases



Decisions on:

- *type of agreement: bouwteam or turnkey*
- *pricing*

More research on several design topics

04
Case Analysis

Subquestion 2 & 3



Documents

1. Which communication actions already appear in the project (documents)

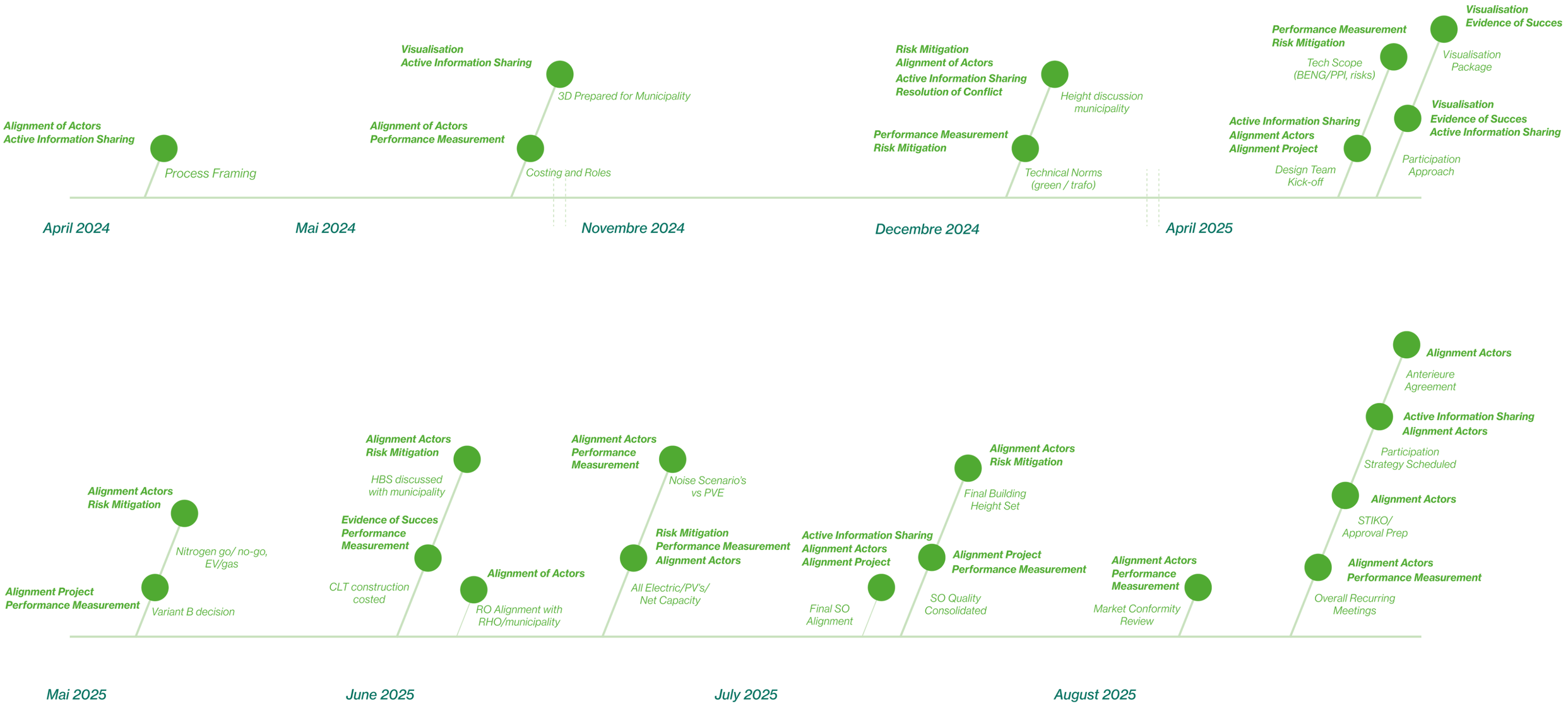
2. What lessons can we take from these documents

Interviews

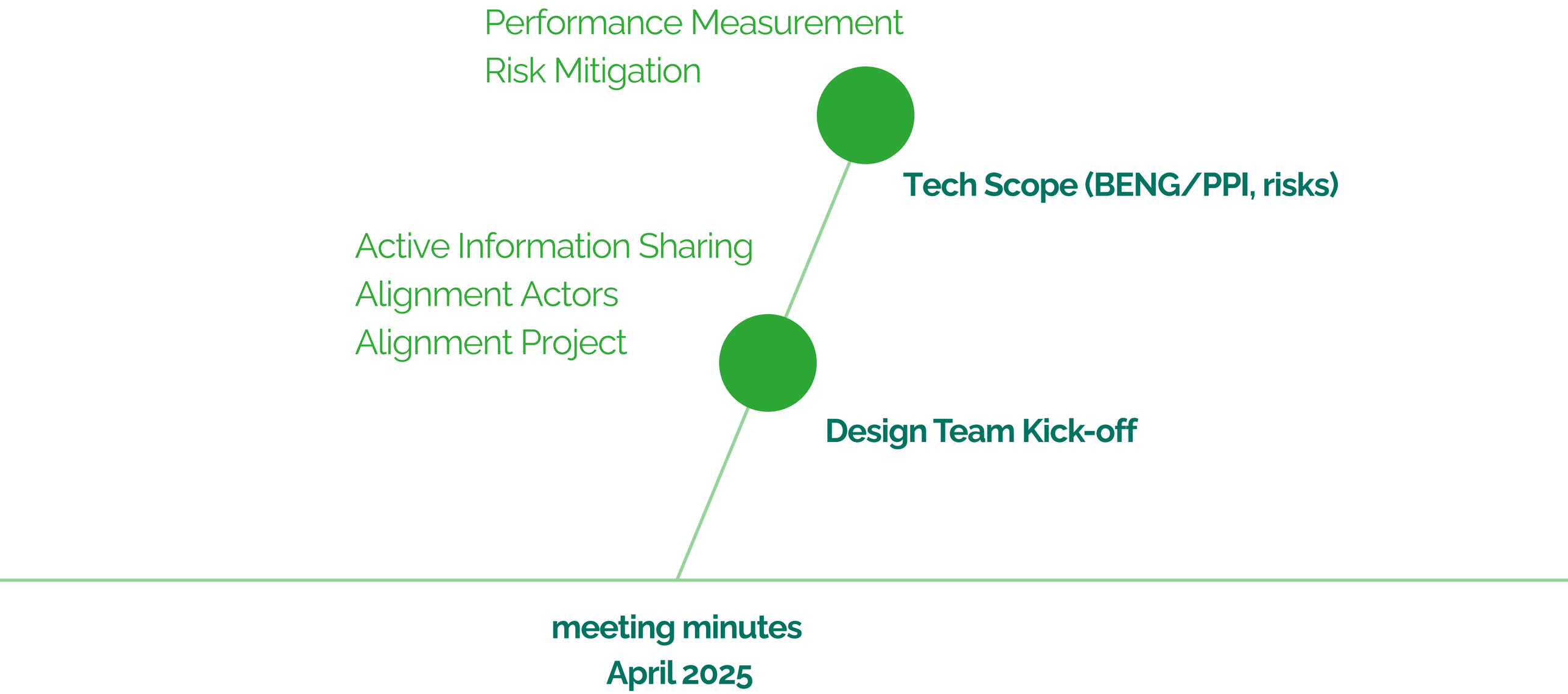
3. What are broad obstacles within the project?

4. What are obstacles per moment?

5. How do we overcome these obstacles?



Action Overview


Performance Measurement
Risk Mitigation
Tech Scope (BENG/PPI, risks)
Active Information Sharing
Alignment Actors
Alignment Project
Design Team Kick-off
meeting minutes
April 2025

1.

Actor alignment and **Active Info Sharing** are the **foundation** for sustainable outcomes.

3.

Clear goals and **measurable standards** guide **decisions.**

2.

Sustainability convinces through **Visualisation,** but **Feedback Loops** and **Conflict Resolution** are **missing.**

Lessons Learned Emperical Documents

Interview Analysis

Stakeholder Perspectives

Fears & Best Outcomes

Main Obstacles in the Project

Output: Obstacles on Timeline and Remaining Gap



Developer

“Als we het niet op die manier kunnen doen, doen we het helemaal niet. Dus we doen geen betonnen projecten... Dat doen we gewoon niet. Nee”

Quote Developer



Housing Corporation

“Dit project is een pilot, dus we hebben ruimte nodig in plaats van strenge eisen om te zien hoe het verloopt.”

Quote Housing Corporation

Stakeholder Perspectives

Contractor

"Neem als Nice dan de verantwoordelijkheid voor het hele ontwerp, want dan durf je er toch achter te staan? Maar dat gebeurt niet. Wij moeten de ontwerpverantwoordelijkheid nemen, dus dan zijn wij de bepaler."

Source: Quote Contractor

Municipality

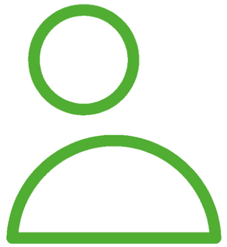
"Dit project heeft hoge duurzaamheidsambities, dus het maakt niet uit als dingen niet lukken ... woningnood is belangrijker dan de milieuambitie."

Source: Quote Municipality

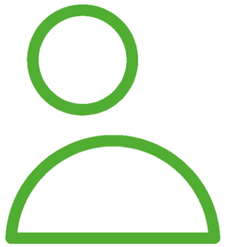
Stakeholder Perspectives

Comparing Perspectives

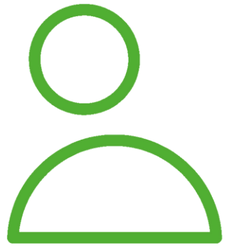
	Construction Company	Housing Corporation	Developer	Architect	Municipality
Biggest Fear	•Financial surprises and additional costs •Taking on design responsibility for timber construction without sufficient control or compensation	•No financial feasibility •Complaints from renters •Problems on maintenance after delivery	•The project not adhering the 5 core values •Lack of trust from other parties and conflict with the construction party	•Too much consession on architectural and sustainable quality •Beng used as sale pitch for sustainabiity, while not reaching this	•Compromise on established policy •A project that is financially not feasible and does not tackle the housing challenge
Best Outcome	•Clear agreements on shared responsibilities and risks •The opportunity to influence the design •Early distinction between “must-haves” and 'nice-to-haves' in sustainable ambitions	•Feasible plan •Appelaar as example project for other developments •Happy residents and no complaints •Construction party taking on design responsibility	•Realisation of 5 core values •Collaboration succes which ends up in long term relation •Inspiring and changing the rest of the building sector	•Realisation of sustainable ambtions in combintion with aesthetic architecture •Long term chain integration with the developer.	•Minimum sustainability standards of Municipality achieved or higher, without financial help of Municipality •Affordable houses which tackle the housing challenge



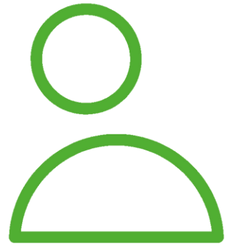
Construction Company



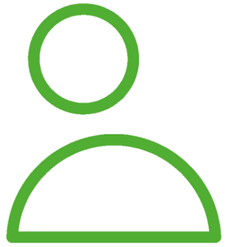
Housing Corporation



Developer



Architect

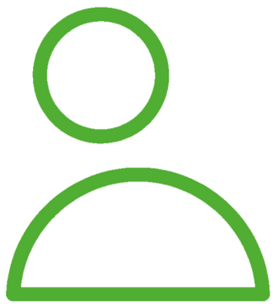


Municipality

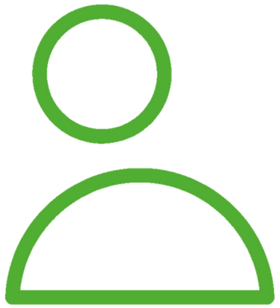
Biggest Fear

Financial Surprises & Additional Costs

No Adherence to 5 Sustainable Values



Construction Company



Developer



1.

Different views on costs and risks **prevent joint investment** in sustainability.

2.

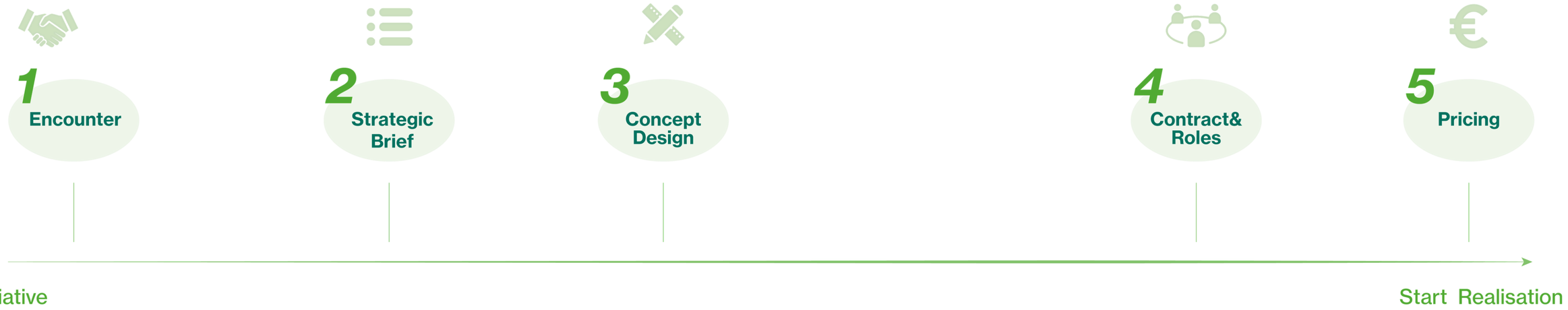
The municipality supports circular building, but **does not require it.**



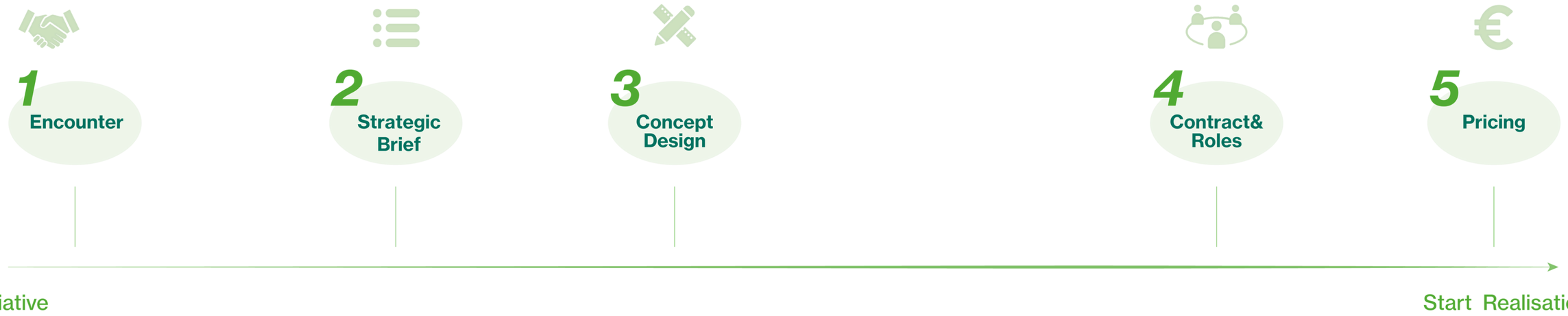
3.

Unclear roles and **changed responsibility** results in defensive behaviour.

Main Critical Themes



Timeline Critical Moments



Timeline Critical Moments

05
Design Iterations

Subquestion 4



Subquestion 1

Subquestion 2 & 3

Subquestion 4



Theoretical Overview



Documental Analysis of Process



Reasoning and Perspectives of Stakeholders

1



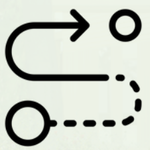
Guidelines

2

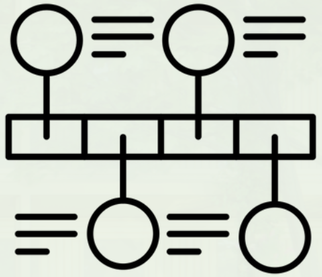


Workshop: First Design

3



Validation: Strategy



Final Strategy

Rigor Cycle

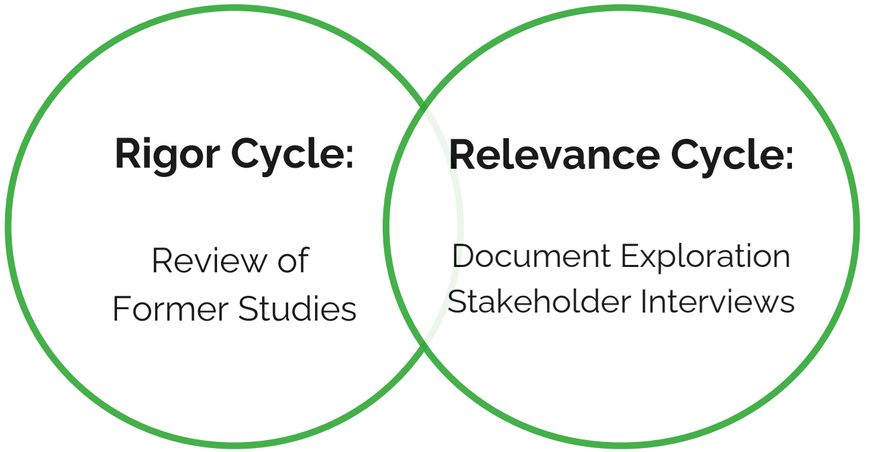
Relevance Cycle

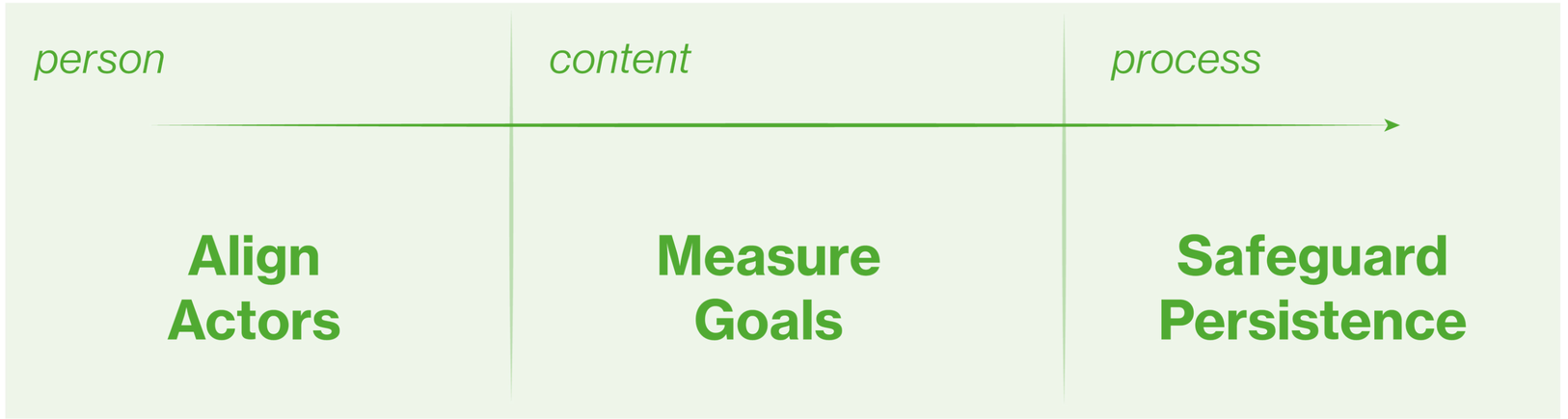
Design Cycle
3 iterative rounds

Output

1. **Informal trust and alignment first** to heighten commitment**, measurement next**
2. **Radical transparency** in costs and risks
3. **Evidence-led decision-making**
4. **Clear governance** and **role clarity**
5. Structural **conflict safeguards** and **feedback repetition**

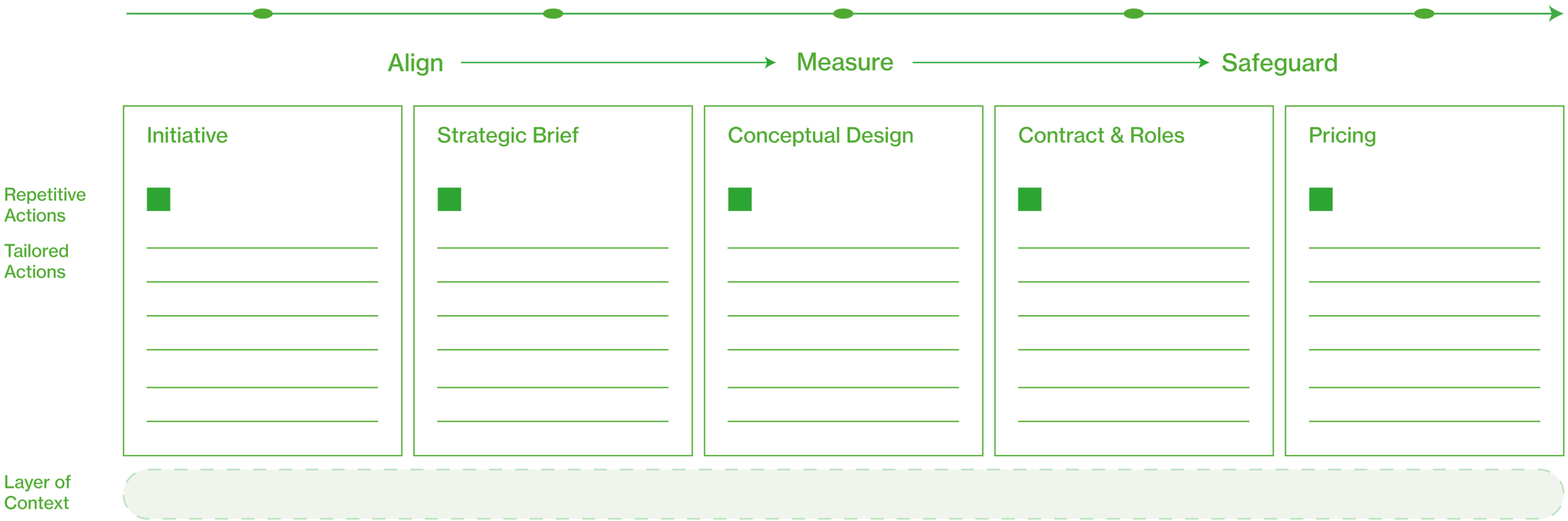
Main Tasks of the Strategy



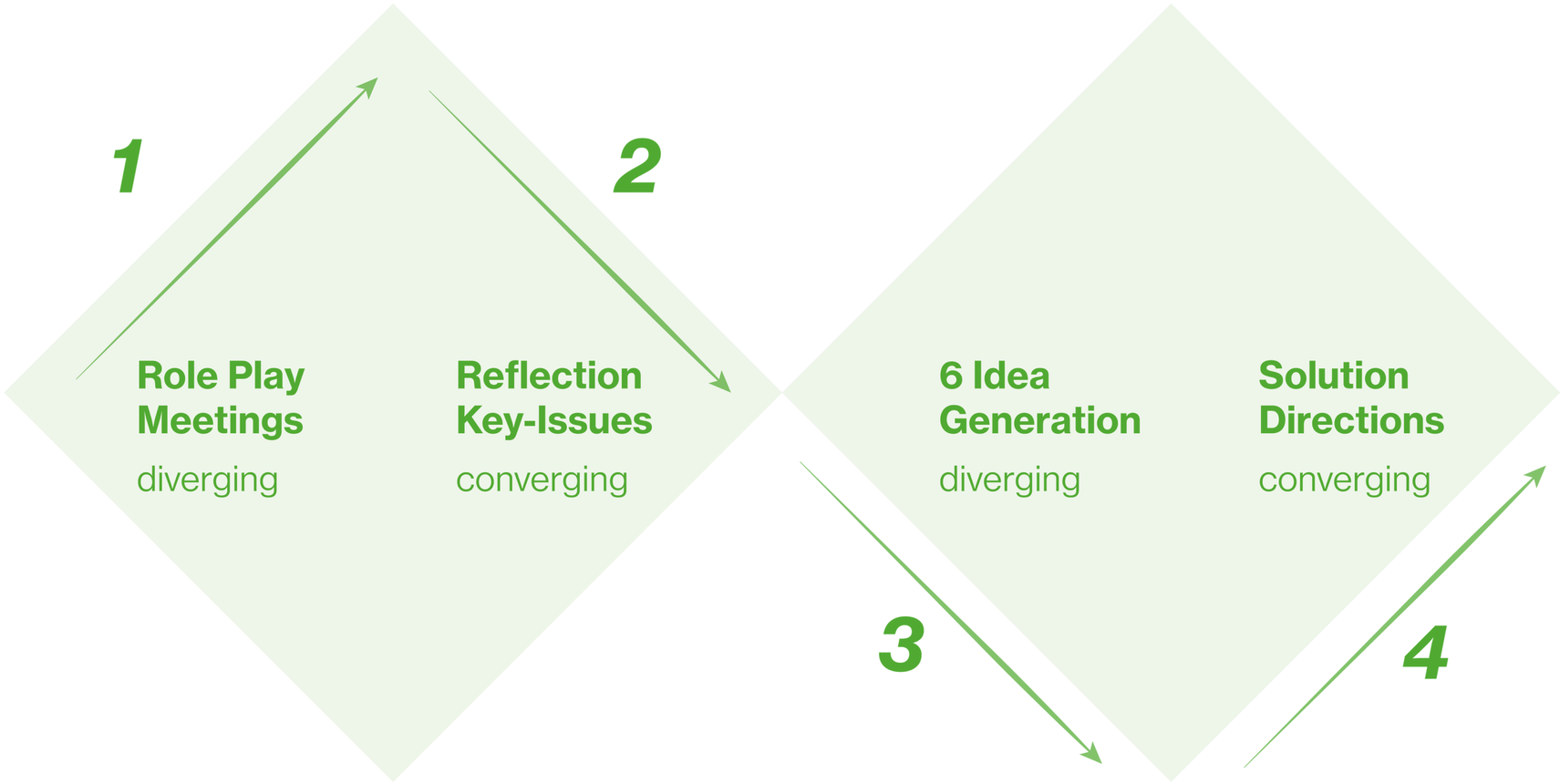


1

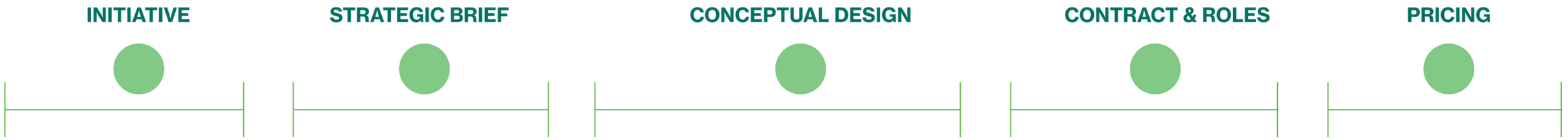
Approach 1st Iteration



Output 1st Iteration



Approach 2nd Iteration - Design Workshop



Analysis

Discuss Risk Mitigation
Align Perspectives of Actors
Visualisation
Show Evidence of Success

Align Perspectives of Actors,
Performance Measurement,
Visualisation

Performance Measurement,
Discuss Risk Mitigation,
Show Evidence of Success,
Visualisation

Share Information Actively,
Align Perspectives of Actors,
Show Evidence of Success,
Discuss Risk Mitigation

Discuss Risk Mitigation,
Performance Measurement,
Show Evidence of Succes,
Share Information Actively

Explaining the why,
Making Sustainability
Practical, Involving All Levels

Prioritising Roles & Ambitions,
Repetition,
Open communication culture

Repetition,
Explaining the why, Making
Sustainability Practical

Open communication culture,
Involving all hierarchical levels

Involving all hierarchical Levels,
Explaining the why,
Communicating Financial
Arguments

Workshop

Align Perspectives of Actors
Transparency
Involving All Levels
Evidence of Succes
Prioritising Roles and
Ambitions

Ensure Project Alignment
Prioritising Roles and
Ambitions
Transparency

Offer Several Options
Transparency
Evidence of Succes
Communicate Financial
Arguments
Prioritising Roles and
Ambitions

Explaining the Why
Implement Informal Moment
Transparency
Ensure Project Alignment
Discuss Risk Mitigation
Implement Actions Early

Transparency
Show Evidence of Succes
Ensure Project Alignment
Implement Informal Moment
Involve All Levels
Offer Several Options
Communicate Financial Arguments

Output 2nd Iteration



DCM

Action Categorization



Team Collaboration

Context Base & Role Clarity



Strategy Design

Lay-out, Elements & Readability



Communication

Implementation & Practibility

Approach 3rd Iteration - Expert Validation

INITIATIVE	STRATEGIC BRIEF	CONCEPTUAL DESIGN	CONTRACT & ROLES	PRICING
Analysis				
Discuss Risk Mitigation Align Perspectives of Actors Visualisation Show Evidence of Success	Align Perspectives of Actors, Performance Measurement, Visualisation	Performance Measurement, Discuss Risk Mitigation, Show Evidence of Success, Visualisation	Share Information Actively, Align Perspectives of Actors, Show Evidence of Success, Discuss Risk Mitigation	Discuss Risk Mitigation, Performance Measurement, Show Evidence of Succes, Share Information Actively
Explaining the why, Making Sustainability Practical, Involving All Levels	Prioritising Roles & Ambitions, Repetition, Open communication culture	Repetition, Explaining the why, Making Sustainability Practical	Open communication culture, Involving all hierarchical levels	Involving all hierarchical Levels, Explaining the why, Communicating Financial Arguments
Workshop				
Align Perspectives of Actors Transparency Involving All Levels Evidence of Succes Prioritising Roles and Ambitions	Ensure Project Alignment Prioritising Roles and Ambitions Transparency	Offer Several Options Transparency Evidence of Succes Communicate Financial Arguments Prioritising Roles and Ambitions	Explaining the Why Implement Informal Moment Transparency Ensure Project Alignment Discuss Risk Mitigation Implement Actions Early	Transparency Show Evidence of Succes Ensure Project Alignment Implement Informal Moment Involve All Levels Offer Several Options Communicate Financial Arguments
Experts				
Sign Commitment Act Establish Feedback Loop	Establish Feedback Loop Informal Moment	Establish Feedback Loop Sign Commitment Act	Involve All Levels Establish Feedback Loop Informal Moment	Involve All Levels Establish Feedback Loop

Output 3rd Iteration: Final Strategy

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
Realising Sustainable Ambitions

Align

INITIATIVE

Start Initiative

Repetitive Actions

Information Transmission Actions

1a **Explain and Align Purpose**
State the Shared Purpose Clearly
Check Project Alignment

2a **Make Sustainability Tangible**
Turn Ambition into Concrete Examples
Show Importance for Actors

3a **Share and Visualise Information**
Use Visuals to Build Clarity
Share Proof to Increase Belief
Make Information Accesible to All

Team Strength Actions

6a **Align Roles and Ambitions**
Surface Ambitions Before Solutions
Compare Priorities Openly

7a **Engage and Commit the Team**
Include All Organisational Layers
Mark Shared Commitment Openly

8a **Discuss and Manage Risks**
Make Risks Shared Early
Link Risks to Responsible Actors

STRATEGIC BRIEF

1b **Explain and Align Purpose**
Translate Ambition into Brief Requirements
Check if All Actors Agree

3b **Share and Visualise Information**
Use Visuals to Structure Choices
Make Assumptions Explicit Early

4a **Demonstrate and Measure Success**
Define Indicators for Later Evaluation
Link Goals to Measurable Outcomes

6b **Align Roles and Ambitions**
Clarify Who is Responsible
Compare Priorities Before Finalising Brief



Assess

DESIGN

2b **Make Sustainability Tangible**
Link Design Choices to Impact
Show Practical Consequences of Ambition
Connext Choices to Cost Logic

4b **Demonstrate and Measure Success**
Test Concepts Against Key Metrics
Use Data to Compare Proposals

5a **Offer and Evaluate Options**
Present Multiple Design Variants
Visualise Trade-offs for Discussion

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Assure

CONTRACT & ROLES

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Start Realisation

Communication Actions

Context Setters

A **Transparency**
B **Repetition**
C **Open Communication Culture**

★ Informal Moment to Build Trust
↻ Establish Feedback Loop

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
Realising Sustainable Ambitions

Align → Assess → Assure

INITIATIVE

Start Initiative

Repetitive Actions

Information Transmission Actions

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Check if All Actors Agree

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Use Visuals to Structure Choices
Make Assumptions Explicit Early

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06

Discussion & Conclusion



1.



Chain Partnership

2.



System of Context-Dependent Actions

3.



Developers Motivation

4.



Ambition Change

Discussion - Considerables

How can **communication** steer the **realisation of sustainability ambitions** in the front-end phase?

Conclusion

through:

Aligning actors,
Assessing goals,
Assuring commitment

Further Research

1.

Investigate **Interdependencies** between **Communication Actions**

2.

Incorporate **Multiple Stakeholder Responsibilities** in Future Research

3.

Research Influence of **other Management Tools**, **Organisational Levels** or **Programm Management**

- **Embracing ambiguity** – Iteration and uncertainty became sources of insight.
- **Value of feedback** – Divergent input sharpened my argument.
- **Informal processes matter** – Informal moments and trust proved crucial for sustainability. Sometimes the magic happens in between the lines.
- **Professional mindset** – Management means alignment, not control.

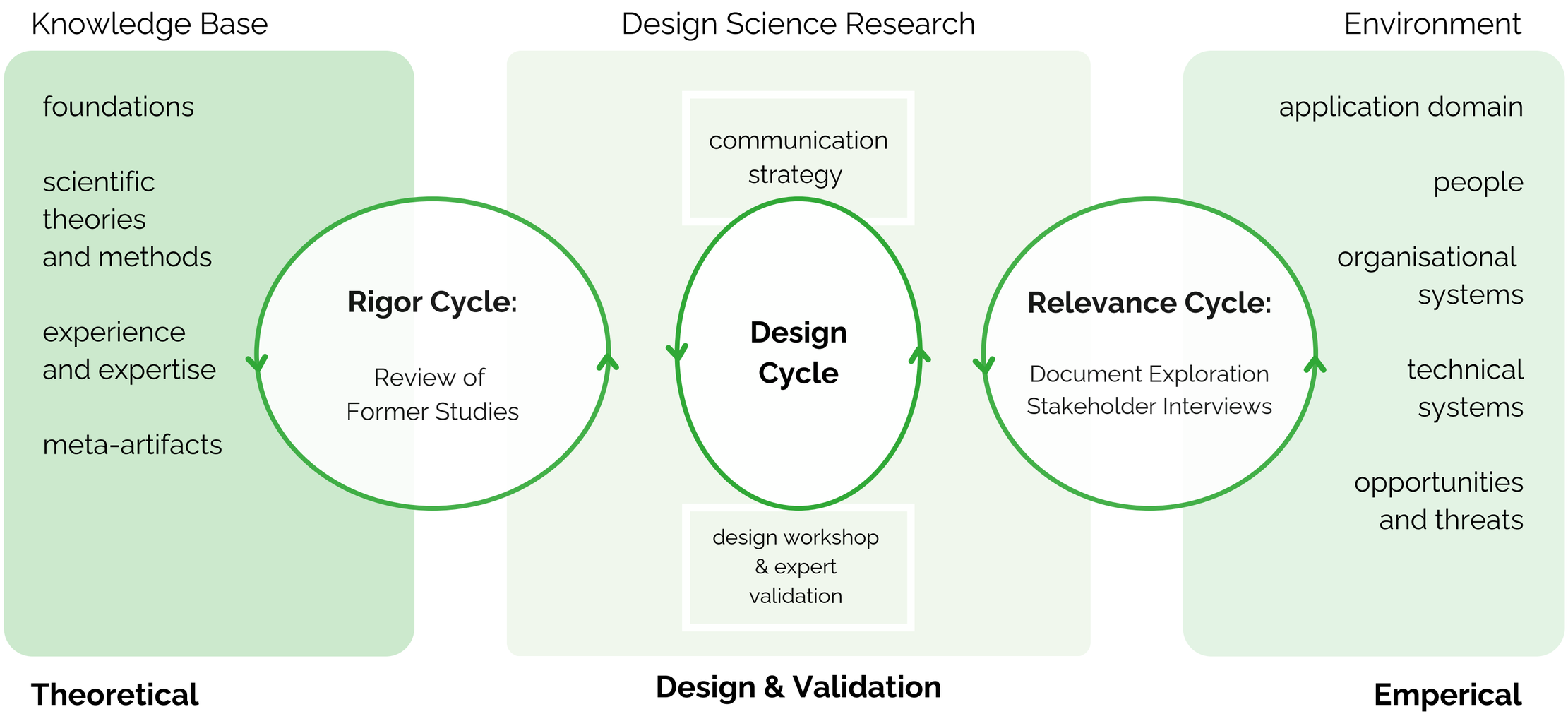
Reflection

Thank You & Questions



P5 Presentation - Isis Eva Sophia Bourgonjen

Delft University of Technology | Nice Developers B.V.



Design Science Framework

Hevner, 2007

Nice Developers
Organisational Structure



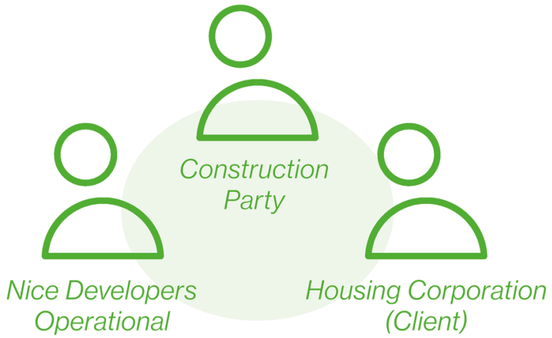
Strategic Level



Operational Level

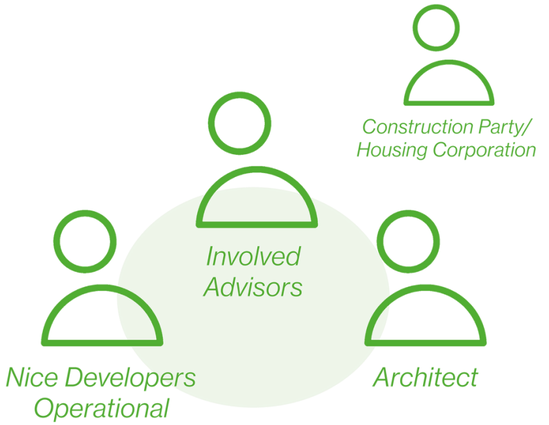
Klimaatvriendelijk	Toekomstgericht & Circulair	Biodiversiteit	Inclusief	Haalbaar & Flexibel
				
CO_2 Reductie & Paris Proof	Open Building & Losmaakbaar	Nestkasten, Natuur & Bodem	Betaalbaar, Gezondheid & Delen	Concurrerend & efficiënt

Nice Developers
Team Appelaar



Project Team

1 meeting per 2 weeks



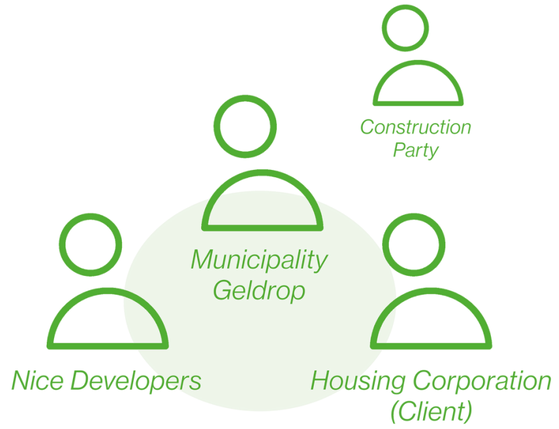
Design Team

1 meeting per 2 weeks



Internal Team

Informal and flexible



Municipal Team

1 meeting per 4 weeks

Interview Quotes - Align

“Look, if that business case doesn't hold up... then it can also be that the choice is made for it not to go ahead.”
(Housing Corporation)

“... but it's just that when we set up Nice, we decided that's how we would do things, and if we can't do it that way, we won't do it at all. So we don't do concrete projects, or projects that don't contribute to neighbourhood diversity or that aren't socially inclusive. We just don't do them. No.”
(Nice Developers)

“When are we expected to take action? Of course, both parties are used to working in a certain way, and I notice that this is still causing some friction.”
(Contractor)

“We have clearly stated that the ambition of the housing association to develop a circular building is an ambition of the housing association and not an ambition of the municipality.”
(Municipality)

Interview Quotes - Assess

“No, you definitely need that. Yes, you need to set a goal on the horizon, otherwise no one will go anywhere.”
(Architect)

“If we don't lay it down in writing, it often ends up not being very ambitious.”
(Municipality)

“I think if you set your ambitions very sharply from the beginning... This is a must-have, and this is a nice-to-have... And that you also steer on that... that's an important one, I think.”
(Contractor)

Quantities - Checklist Communication Actions

Direct Action	Happened (% of 8)	Important (% of 14)	Gap (%-punten)
Active Information Sharing	87.50%	85.70%	−1,8
Feedback Loops	0.00%	57.10%	57.1
Stakeholder Alignment	50.00%	64.30%	14.3
Project Alignment	75.00%	57.10%	−17,9
Conflict Resolution	50.00%	50.00%	0.0
Visualisation	100.00%	78.60%	−21,4
Performance Measurement	75.00%	71.40%	−3,6
Risk Mitigation	37.50%	78.60%	41.1
Evidence of Succes	87.50%	78.60%	−8,9

Conclusion Results - Overview Table Critical Moments

Critical Moment	Abstracted Problem	Responsible Actors	Applied Approach	Applied Actions	Used Tools	Remaining Gap
1. Encounter	High sustainability ambitions are set immediately without assessing feasibility and risks, so ambition may be diluted later on.	Developer Client	Communicate high ambitions early; inspirational storytelling and measurable targets; involve multiple organisational levels	Active information sharing, Alignment actors, Alignment project, Performance measurement, Evidence of success	Presentations & visuals, quick scans, measurable KPI's, informal alignment meetings	Communication creates enthusiasm but no credibility: Risk mitigation is missing. No structured dialogue on feasibility or barriers, leading to over-ambitious framing without trust foundation.
2. Strategic Brief	Municipality distances itself from ambitious goals → responsibility shifts and goals are not secured.	Developer Client Municipality Architect	Facilitate dialogue through ateliers and visual option studies; communicate spatial principles and record in the NvU document.	Active information sharing, Alignment actors, Alignment project, Visualisation	Atelier sessions, visual drawing of variants, mail updates, meetings and NvU doc	Dialogue is open but diffuse: responsibilities and ownership are not explicitly communicated; lacks Feedback loops and Performance measurement to maintain clarity and accountability once ambitions are set.
3. Conceptual Design	Design choices under pressure from practical/cheaper solutions. Risk of sustainability ambitions diluting.	Developer Client Architect Contractor	Maintain intensive communication and frequent coordination meetings; refer to the NvU as a shared reference point during design conflicts; document decisions	Active information sharing, Alignment actors, Alignment project, Resolution of conflict, Performance measurement, Risk mitigation	Meeting notes, SO booklet, NvU references during meetings, direct email comm., involving subcontractors	Communication supports inclusion but lacks Feedback loops and Evidence of success; design decisions are not systematically reflected upon or supported with data /benchmarks /value.

Conclusion Results - Overview Table Critical Moments

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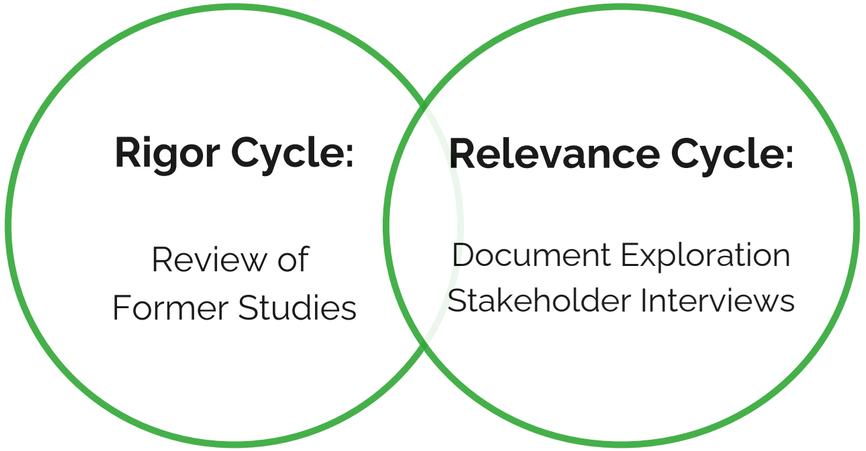
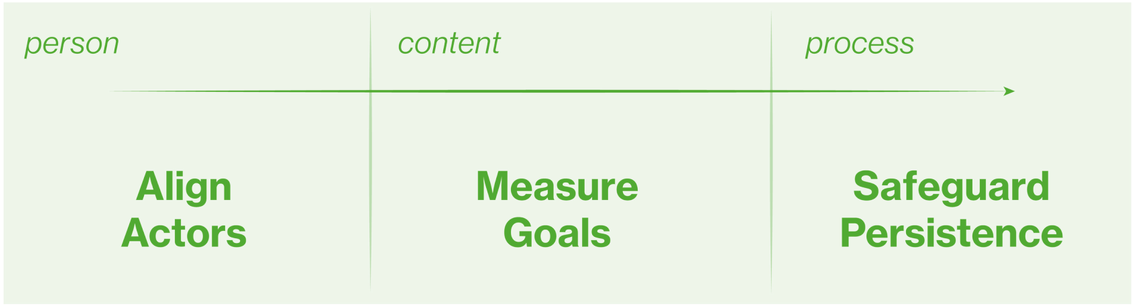
4. Contract Forming and Roles	Innovative timber construction changes roles. This creates uncertainty about the distribution of risks and responsibilities undermines trust.	Developer Client Contractor	Conduct open discussions about collaboration and risk-sharing; use declarations of intent to frame trust and shared direction; iterative negotiation meetings.	Alignment actors, Alignment project, Resolution of conflict	Minutes of negotiation meetings, letter of intent, informal conversation records	Cooperative effort but weak structure: lacks Active information sharing (full transparency of contracts and decisions) and Risk mitigation (explicit role and risk communication); trust depends on personal goodwill, not system.
5. Pricing	Costs are higher and risks are counted separate per actor. This results in mistrust and pressure on sustainability ambitions, threat of a return to traditional construction methods.	Developer Client Contractor Municipality	Promote transparency by openly sharing budget calculations and explanations; hold clarification meetings to discuss cost overruns; attempt to maintain ambition through design optimisation.	Active information sharing, Alignment project, Resolution of conflict, Risk mitigation	Open cost sheets (STIKO), budget conversation, optimisation sessions, explanation on tail-end costs	Communication is reactive: lacks Feedback loops (structured reflection) and Evidence of success (proof that sustainability can be cost-effective). Without shared risk communication, mistrust and price stacking persist.

Main Tasks:

1. **Informal trust and alignment first** to heighten commitment, **measurement next**
2. **Radical transparency** in costs and risks
3. **Evidence-led decision-making**
4. **Clear governance** and **role clarity**
5. Structural **conflict safeguards** and **feedback repetition**



Main Approach:



Approach 1st Iteration

Deductive Action Evaluation

Actions that need improvement	**How to make main prioritisation**
Feedback Loops	Decision review after critical moments including decision log and go/no go of ambitions
Risk Mitigation Communication	Joint risk register and meetings, risk workshop, explicit mitigation discussion per decision, informal moments to express worries
Performance Measurement	standard KPI-set per variant, communication on cost and future value of options
Evidence of Succes	standard realistic references ready for discussions and communication with price/performance per option, more information provision on how to
Conflict-resolution protocol	meetings to express worries and misalignments, more informal meetings to ‘bond’ and prevent conflicts
Actions that are working well	**How to persist standardisation**
Active Information Sharing	An open document drive, changelog per decision, clear information update for all stakeholders
Visualisation	aligning visualisations with phases, direct impact of decisions on images
Alignment Actors	formal more ownership per ambition and responsibility division, informal moments to build trust
Alignment Project	conversation on prioritising of ambitions and goals, referring back to this during meetings

Inductive Action Evaluation

Action	Effect on MV	How it Influences Steering on Realising Ambitions
Open communication culture	Stakeholder Alignment	Transparency → trust → joint decision-making → sustained ambitions
Involving all hierarchical levels	Perceived Value	Vertical coherence → shared ownership → consistent implementation
Explaining the why	Goal Clarity, Perceived Value	Purpose clarification → legitimacy → maintained ambition level
Repetition	Goal Clarity, Stakeholder Alignment	Continuous reflection → learning → ambition safeguarding
Prioritising Roles and Ambitions	Goal Clarity, Stakeholder Alignment	Clear ownership → reduced ambiguity → coherent sustainability focus
Making Sustainability Practical	Goal Clarity, Perceived Value	Measurability → actionability → realisable outcomes
Communicating Financial Arguments	Perceived Value	Value framing → risk acceptance → investment in sustainability

How can **Communication Steer** the **Realisation of ...**

what: Communication Actions

- information provision
- building strength
- context setting

what:
Mediating Variables

- stakeholder alignment
- goal clarity
- perceived value

how:
align people
asses goals
assure commitment

what:
critical moments
(tensions)