



Developing a foundation for Sole Classics' Sustainability Strategy

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to assist the Columbus-based sneaker boutique, Sole Classics, in developing a foundation for its sustainability strategy. In 2023, Sole Classics identified sustainability as a pillar of their business and expressed a desire to further integrate sustainability into the business. To achieve this, our capstone group conducted a materiality assessment and case study research on industry sustainability initiatives.

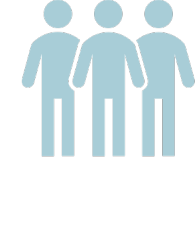
Key Definitions



Materiality assessment: a formal exercise that engages internal and external stakeholders to determine the importance of specific ESG issues



Internal stakeholders: business owner, executive leadership, managers, and employees



External stakeholders: customers, investors, community partners, and general consumer market

Objective I

- Investigate ESG issues relevant to the Apparel, Accessories, and Footwear industry for use in the primary data collection process.

Objective II

- Engage with internal stakeholders to understand which ESG issues are the most and least impactful to the business.

Objective III

- Engage with external stakeholders to understand which ESG issues are the most important to Sole Classics' customers, partners, community members, and general consumers.

Objective IV

- Provide Sole Classics with relevant and meaningful sustainability recommendations for future actions, initiatives, and research.

Methods



Peer company research	Internal and external stakeholder survey	Survey result analysis and materiality matrix creation	Case study research on sustainability initiatives
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Case Study Research

Corporate Got Em & Kith

- have strong commitments to community engagement and Social ESG issues aligning with the results of our surveys.

Reformation & Aldo

- have addressed customer demand to reduce waste by creating reusable bags & packaging made of recycled materials.

The Slow Factory

- is a community-centered organization that offers free education programs on sustainable fashion.

Patagonia

- promoted a line of T-shirts vocalizing their campaign to protect public land.

Nike's Community Climate Resilience Program

- creates awareness of climate-related inequities, particularly in urban communities that have limited access to green space.

Results

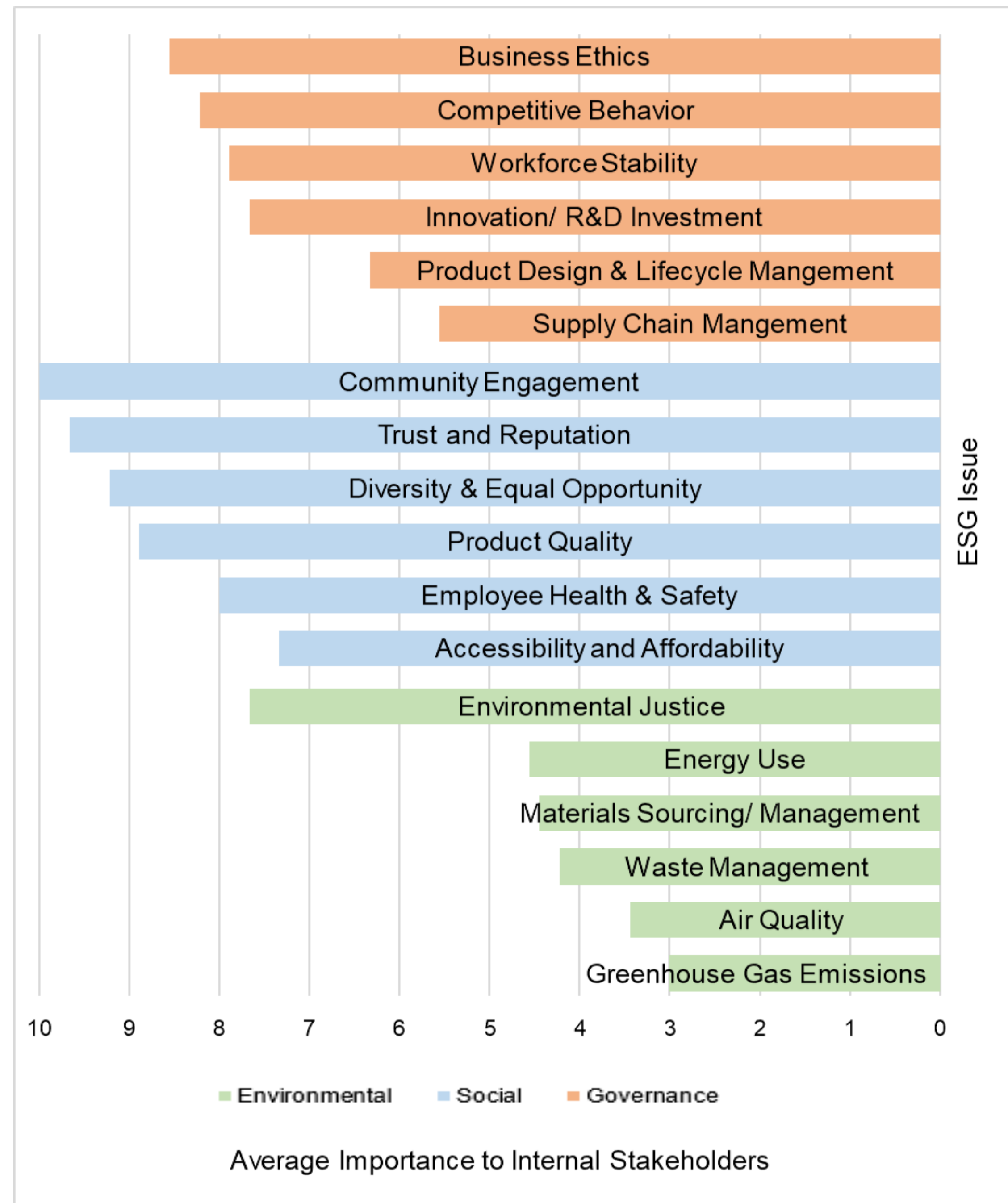


Figure 1. Average ranking of ESG issues by internal stakeholders

The internal survey was taken by 9 Sole Classics employees. Internal stakeholders rated social issues the highest with an average score of 8.85. Comparatively, environmental and governance issues received average scores of 4.56 and 7.37, respectively. Community Engagement was the overall highest-rated issue with all respondents rating it a 10 in terms of importance to the business.

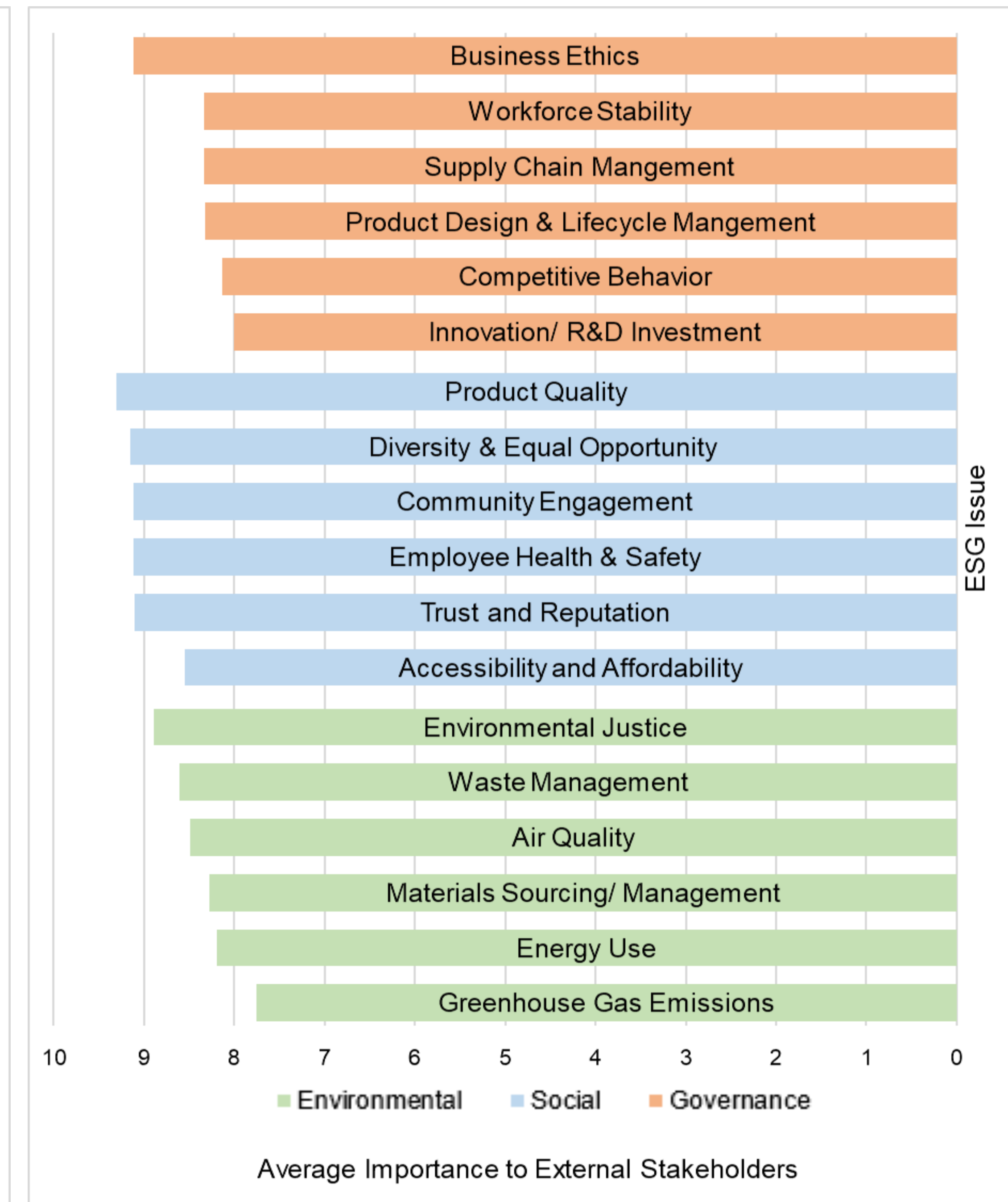


Figure 2. Average ranking of ESG issues by external stakeholders

137 individuals participated in the external survey. Social issues received an average score of 9.06, compared to environmental and governance, which received an average score of 8.36 and 8.37, respectively. External stakeholders rated ESG issues overall as more important than internal stakeholders did.

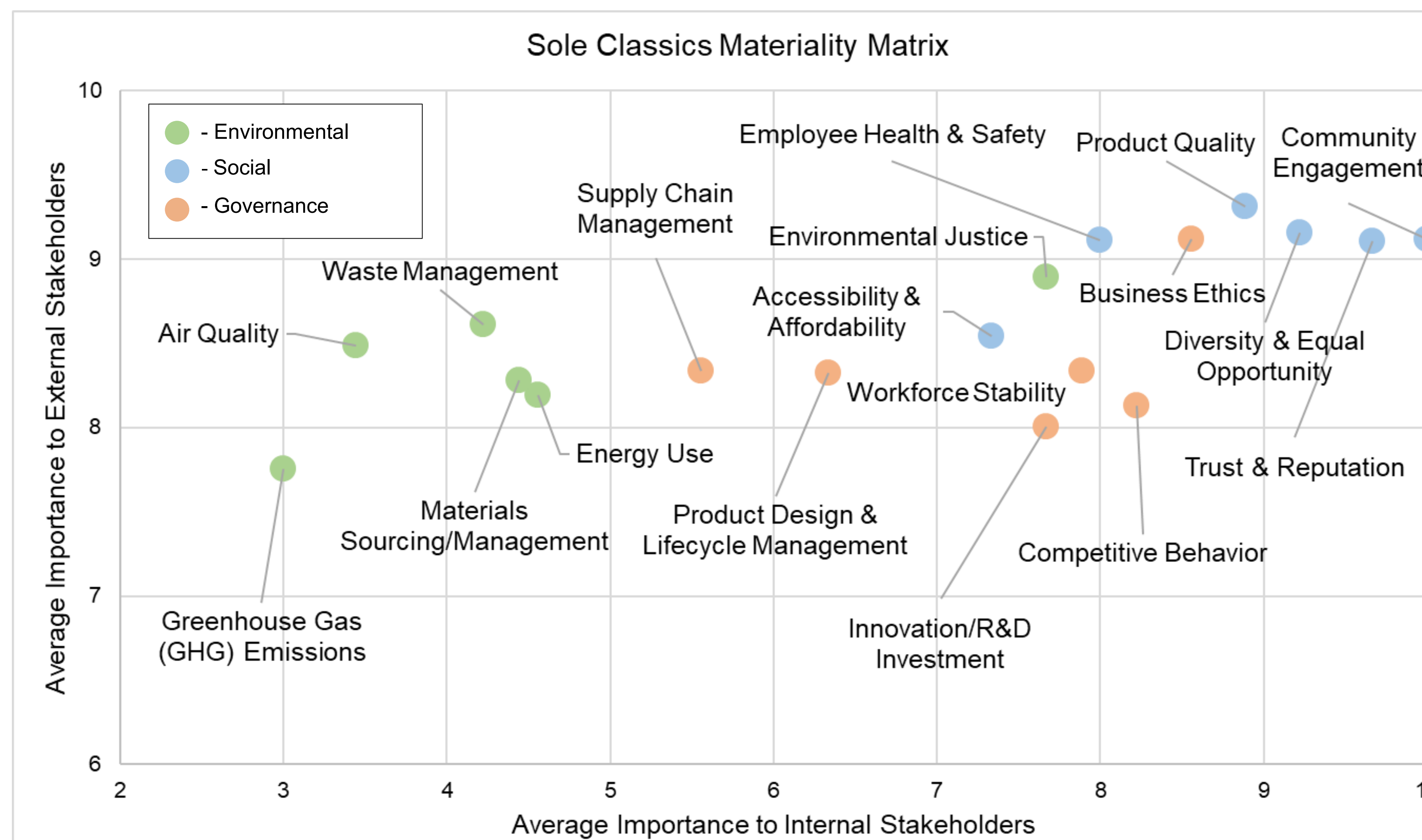


Figure 3. Sole Classics Materiality Matrix.

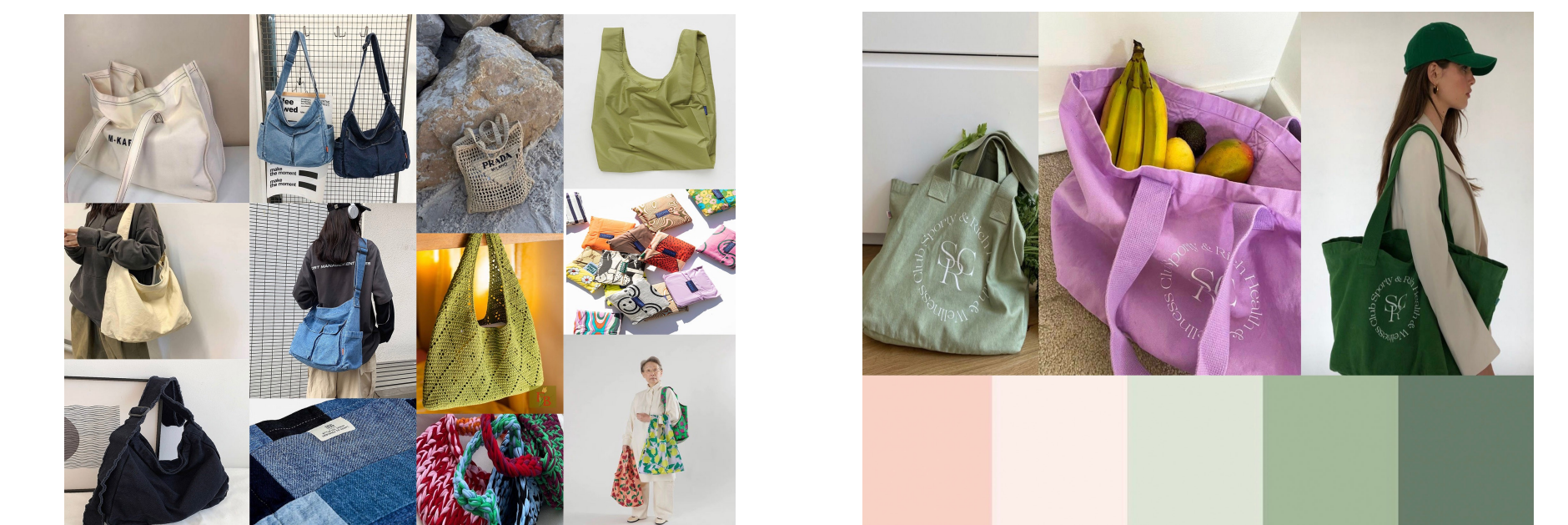
The highest-rated ESG issues for both internal and external stakeholders are in the top-right quadrant. This area is dominated by social issues. Environmental Justice emerged as a top environmental issue for both groups, signifying its potential to serve as a sustainability focus area for Sole Classics. The stakeholder groups agreed on Business Ethics being the most important governance issue, while other governance issues were more widely distributed across the matrix.

Recommendations



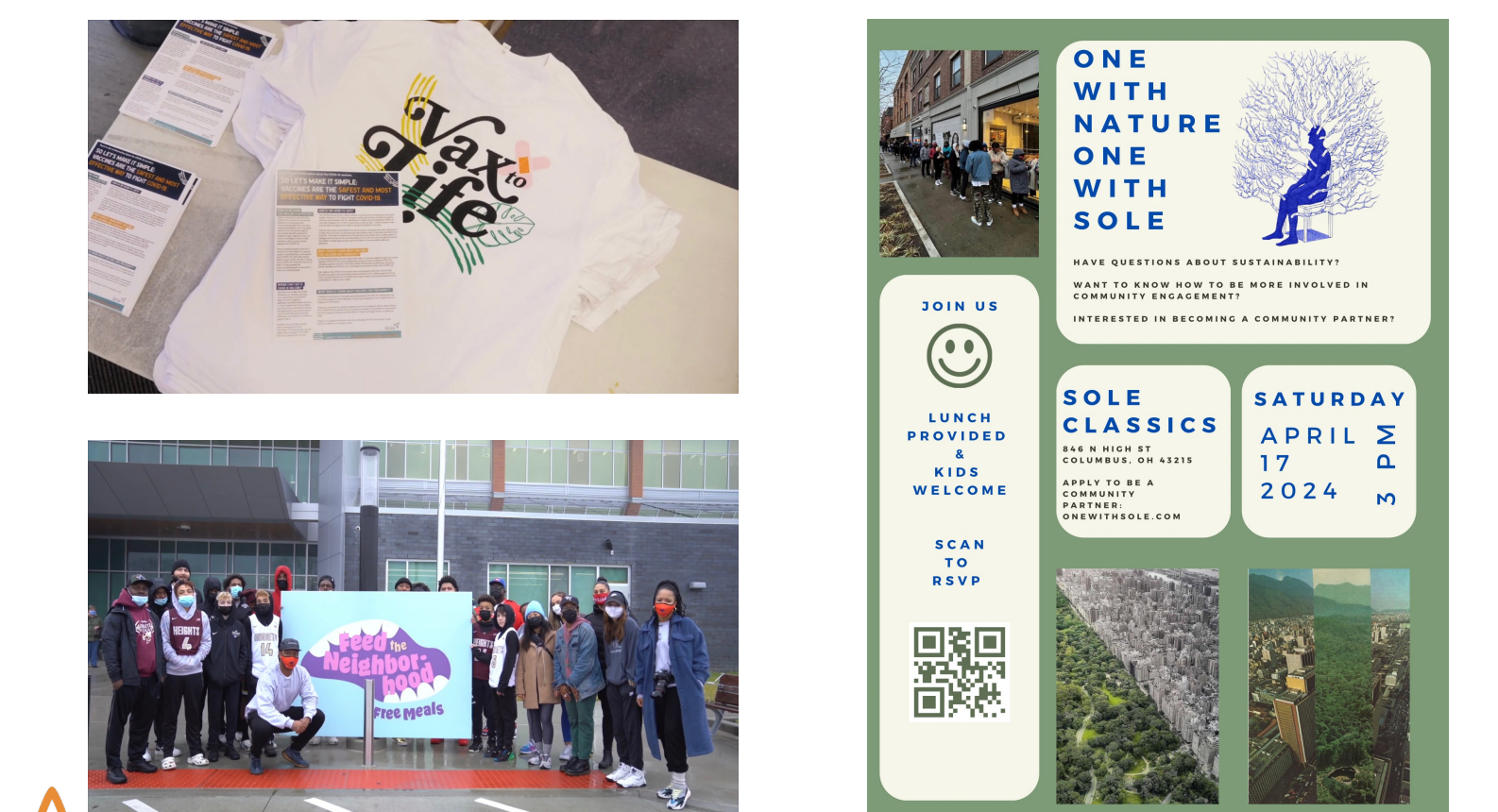
Circular Packaging

Reusable bags are a viable method for reducing waste while improving brand exposure. Sole Classics can bring awareness to the impacts of single-use plastics by designing a tote bag. Future projects can perform cost-benefit analyses of alternative fabrics, dying methods, and printing processes.



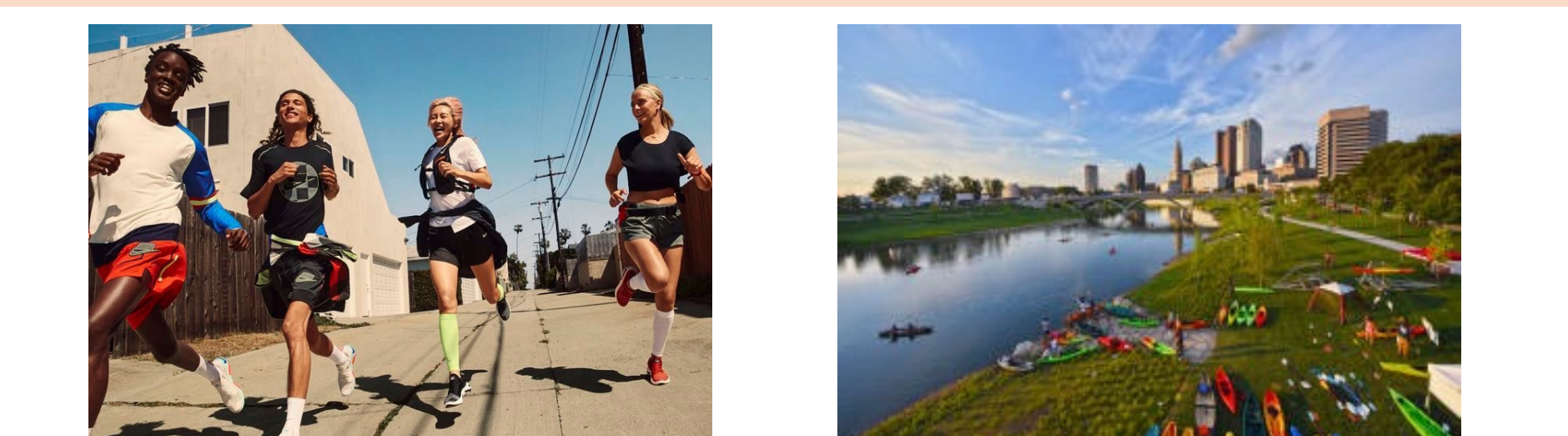
Educational Campaigns

Leveraging Sole Classics social equity strengths by promoting educational campaigns through community events. Creating connections and gaining support from local government, retailers, and community groups. Future projects can work to design presentations or digital media to effectively transfer and share learning content beyond the event.



Investing In Green-space

Participate in funding or organizing projects that improve air quality and waste management. Future projects can develop focus areas, research grants, and potentially develop a nonprofit entity as an extension of Sole Classics.



References



Scan the QR code or visit the link to see the full reference list.
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TzwEHqxFuNGMVflmL13m87zV87T9NOiv3kVvNr1PZ0/edit?usp=sharing>