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Sustainability Management: A Management Viewpoint

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Abstract

This paper presents a conceptual approach on sustainability management and explores the research implications from the perspective of management. It demonstrates that sustainability management a) tackles a certain type of duty, b) responds to the needs and expectations of particular c) makes reference to specific responsibility objects d) employs specific tools, and e) develops as the interaction of specific responsibility roles that can demonstrate agency for sustainability.

Key words: stakeholders, agency, life-cycle viewpoint, and value generation.

Introduction

For many years, the notion that businesses, managers, and management have obligations beyond their fiduciary duties to the company's owners (Friedman, 1970) has been developed (Abrams, 1951; Buckingham & Venkataraman, 2016). Numerous ideas are explained related but marginally different viewpoints on this matter, such as the idea of sustainability (Epstein, 2018) in addition to the concepts of ethics (Adobor, 2006) and personal accountability (Abrams, 1951; Prahalad, 2010). In order to create a research review and agenda for the field of sustainability management as viewed from the standpoint of management, this paper aims to bring various viewpoints together.

From a sustainability, ethical, or responsibility perspective, such tangible issues as the abuse of factory workers or the contamination of a water system by corporate pollution equally generate concerns. Reflecting these linkages in real life, recent additions to the Scholarly discussions on responsible management have modeled the interaction of these three viewpoints using a framework that charts the various ways that ethics, responsibility, and sustainability may overlap (Laasch, 2018). Realizing the values of ethical, sustainable, and responsible behavior at the same time is the greatest level of responsible management in this context.

By examining how the field of sustainability management defines the overall viewpoint of responsible management, this paper expands on this work and goes beyond the idea of overlapping concepts.

Responsibility of Sustainable Management

Delineating what constitutes the distinctive role of individual managers and organizations when it comes to managing sustainability is made possible by three fundamental contributions to the development of the sustainability concept. (1) Hans Carl von Carlowitz coined the term "sustainable" at the start of the 18th century to refer to a basic idea for contemporary forest management, marking the first significant contribution (Caradonna, 2014). According to him, "sustainability" meant harvesting timber in a way that preserves the forest's productivity so that its resources may be used indefinitely. In terms of economics, Carlowitz described sustainability as relying on profits rather than spending money (Beckmann, 2016). According to this reasoning, sustainability highlights how crucial it is to take long-term effects into account when making decisions today.

(2) The Brundtland definition of sustainable development (Brundtland et al., 1987), which defined the introduction of the sustainability concept into a more extensive and international conversation, represents a second turning point in the sustainability discussion (Beckmann, 2016). Early in the 1980s, The WC on Environment and

Development was founded by the UN and is led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the PM of Norway. The goal was to initiate a more fruitful dialogue regarding social and economic development as well as environmental protection. Using a long-term view, the Brundtland Commission emphasized the interdependencies between human needs and the environment by utilizing the sustainability concept. Development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is what the commission described as sustainable development (Brundtland et al., 1987).The Brundtland concept, which emphasizes human needs, enables managers to clarify their responsibilities and management to inquire about how current decision-making impacts the demands of existing and future stakeholders. When considering needs, managerial choices can have two essential yet conflicting impacts. On the one hand, businesses can design and implement solutions that benefit their stakeholders, such as by producing high-quality goods and services, giving their workers opportunities and jobs, or bringing in money for their suppliers, investors, and communities. In actuality, this value generation role can be seen as the company's core responsibility and the main duty of management (Freeman, 2010; Höisch et al., 2014; Pies et al., 2010).

(3) By emphasizing human needs, the Brundtland concept helps managers to understand their roles and ask how decisions are currently being made in relation to the needs of current and potential stakeholders. Taking demands into account, managerial decisions might have two crucial but opposing effects. On the one side, companies can create and execute solutions that benefit their stakeholders, such creating high-quality products and services, providing opportunities and jobs for their employees, or generating revenue for their communities, suppliers, and investors. Actually, the primary task of management and the company's primary obligation can be viewed as this value generation role (Freeman, 2010; Höisch et al., 2014; Pies et al., 2010).

Whom to be accountable to: Other people in the social and ecological contexts

(1) Individual business owners and managers are the first set of "others" that influence sustainability and set standards for ethical conduct at the micro level of corporate decision-making. These people are not affiliated with the company. However, at the same time, they incorporate their own sustainability motivations into their work. In light of this, research on eco- and social innovation, as well as sustainable entrepreneurship, examines how individual incentives influence corporate behavior and innovative tactics (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018). In a similar vein, social intrapreneurship study explores how normal employees of the company assume accountability for sustainability enhancements due to their personal beliefs (Venn & Berg, 2013). Thus, the function of personal ethical incentives offers a useful connection between the domains of responsible management and sustainability management.

(2) The firm's social environment, its different stakeholders, and local repercussions in the natural environment are the second driver that generates the relevance for sustainability management and formulates responsibility expectations on the meso-level of a firm's external connections. Because both value creation and disvalue creation have effects beyond the company, responsible sustainability management is necessary. Supported by stakeholder theory, sustainability management uses a relational perspective to study enterprises as social entities (e.g. Hörisch et al., 2014). Since stakeholders are described by Freeman (1984) as more than only those impacted by the company, the interaction between the firm and its stakeholders is a two-way interactive space (inside-out perspective).

(3) Lastly, two ideas are worth mentioning in relation to the structuring of responsibility expectations on the macro level of the global sustainability discourse: the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the concept of planetary boundaries. The idea of planetary boundaries highlights the need for a safe operating environment for human activity on this planet in terms of vital ecosystem parameters, such as a stable earthly climate, biodiversity, or an intact ozone layer (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). According to Steffen et al. (2015), it is arguable that at least three of the nine crucial planetary limits have already been crossed.This has sparked a continuing conversation on how the planetary boundaries define new guidelines that ethical corporate conduct must adhere to (Whiteman et al., 2013). Respecting the planet could be a component of responsible management. On the one hand, limits are a limitation on the development of value. However, given the limits of the earth, responsibility may also entail promoting eco-innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship, which would eliminate current unsustainable market and governmental failures (Schaltegger et al., 2018b). The

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The Sustainable Development Goals offer a worldwide framework for establishing expectations with regard to sustainability, much like the planetary boundaries do. The Sustainable Development Goals which were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, have 17 objectives that provide a vision for a sustainable future for the world's population (UN, 2015). The SDGs comprise targets that combine many sustainability dimensions, as well as social (e.g., SDG 1 on eliminating poverty) and ecological (e.g., SDG 13 on climate action). Along with the first 16 Sustainable Development Goals which outline what humanity hopes to accomplish by 2030, SDG 17 focuses on "partnership for the goals" and explains how these objectives will be met.

The life-cycle, value chain, and wider indirect effects are the objects of accountability

The topic of how the context and scope of responsible management are defined is connected to the first two sections. Three criteria differentiate the objects of accountability in this case: the company itself, the product throughout its lifecycle, and the overall commercial logics and consumption patterns.

(1) The organization itself is the first entity that sustainability management may be accountable for. Individual management choices and procedures have a significant influence on the social and ecological effects that occur within the company. On the inside, Therefore, controlling a company's own manufacturing processes, labor practices, energy use, etc.—all of which can have a big impact on the environment and society—is referred to as responsible management. From the standpoint of responsible management, sustainability management Responsible management with relation to sustainability, however, is not limited to internal organizational consequences. The concept of sustainability itself broadens the purview of accountability in at least two additional ways.

(2) Every business should accept accountability for its goods and services. The fundamental process of creating value and disvalue in sustainability management necessitates a deeper comprehension of product responsibility. Product responsibility often refers to the standard of quality and safety of the product after the customer purchases and uses it. However, sustainability effects can happen at any point in a product's life cycle (Finkbeiner et al., 2010). The creation or extraction of raw materials, the transportation and distribution of materials, the manufacturing process, the use, and the end of a product's life all have an impact on social and environmental issues (Seuring & Müller, 2008).

(3) A third area of responsibility pertains to the company's impact on sustainable designs and associated lifestyles, while sustainable manufacturing or sourcing examines the methods of value creation. The goals of value creation are so crucially reflected in it. In this case, accountable Management refers to the reality that the goods and services that businesses provide have an impact on lifestyles, consumer trends, and the general evolution of markets and society. To adequately capture these consequences, a life-cycle perspective alone is insufficient.

Tools for sustainability management

Values, management systems, and additional tools for conscientious sustainability management In addition to other people to whom an actor reacts, responsibility also requires agency, or the capacity to respond in a particular manner. The management tools that are available and have an impact on how responsibility is assumed are a crucial factor in this respect. Various sustainability attributes are addressed by specific techniques used in sustainability management. One of sustainability's first peculiarities is that its characteristics usually make information asymmetries more difficult to overcome (Akerlof, 1978). The location of a T-shirt's production cannot be sensed by the buyer by taste, smell, or touch. In this case, businesses are better informed than customers.

Lastly, satisfying stakeholder expectations and gaining legitimacy are key components of sustainability management (Schaltegger & Hörisch, 2017). Managers must be aware of the requirements for legitimacy and be ready to address them with reliable solutions. In reference to the former, Stakeholder consultation and communication tools are available to management. In relation to the latter, standards and norms have a significant role in sustainability . Usually, the result of multi-stakeholder initiatives, these standards capture external expectations while also providing options for responsible management to satisfy them. To put it briefly, studies on responsible management for sustainability can look more closely at the kinds of resources and instruments that are required to increase agency and enable managers to assume accountability for sustainability.

Who are the responsible parties involved in sustainability management?

From the standpoint of responsible management, sustainability management characterizes a specialist role that is solely in charge of handling the organization's ethical issues, whereas the latter (ethical manager) incorporates moral behavior into their everyday management procedures. Expanding on this viewpoint, we may identify at least three actors are groups of people that can and should be in charge of a company's sustainability management in order to make the biggest impact on sustainable development.

(1) Managers of explicit sustainability as an integrative role in the company. Nearly all significant corporations have set up specialized corporate responsibility or sustainability departments over the last few decades (Schaltegger et al., 2014). In these divisions, specific In all facets of sustainability management, sustainability managers carry out crucial coordination, communication, integration, and strategy tasks with the goal of integrating ecological, social, and economic impacts. To enhance sustainability performance, central sustainability managers can play a cross-functional role inside their organization by coordinating various departments and functional units that must communicate with one another.

(2) Managers who are functional and have a commitment to sustainability. Although specifically trained sustainability managers include sustainability inside and operate as a visible interface with the outside world, they are usually not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of value processes of creation. However, this is where sustainability is ultimately impacted by management choices. In light of this, implicit sustainability managers—that is, specialized functional managers that incorporate sustainability into their functional logic—are also required for responsible sustainability management. Implicit sustainability managers include supply chain managers who concentrate on sustainable sourcing or production managers who oversee environmental concerns in manufacturing.

(3) Throughout the company, there are sustainable managers in regular management positions. Development that is sustainable is a shared responsibility. The organization and execution of sustainability management cannot be left to a small group of committed, qualified managers. Actually, to be Every manager in the company needs to be held accountable for good sustainability management. In order to become sustainable conventional managers, explicit and implicit purposeful sustainability managers must inspire and incorporate majority managers into sustainability management. To put it briefly, responsible management in the sustainability space would be wise to establish both explicit and implicit sustainability management roles in addition to supporting and enabling mainstream managers who are sustainable across the company. The latter combine ecological and social factors into both their personal choices and standard managerial procedures. Therefore, sustainable managers are crucial to adopting, promoting, and possibly even advancing the sustainability of the entire business in addition to dedicated sustainability managers.

Scope for future research

Sustainability business models and business cases. Business justifications for sustainability, which are perhaps one of the most effective means of encouraging agency for responsible value creation, seek to lessen disvalue and/or generate social and/or environmental value while balancing with corporate goals and encouraging the production of value .In contrast to previous analyses of the existence of a business case for sustainability (e.g. Hart & Ahuja, 1996), it is important to note that there are two types of business cases for sustainability: first, a business case does not simply exist or not.

From the standpoint of responsible management, sustainability management (where a replacement investment is required). This begs the question of what attitude, vision for accountability, and strategy managers employ when addressing sustainability concerns. Second, a very limited perspective usually presumes that there is only one kind of business case, which is typically perceived as being in conflict with social and environmental objectives, either directly or implicitly (e.g. Salzmann et al., 2005). This corpus of literature discusses the advantages and disadvantages of (the) business case(s) for sustainability, taking into account the distinction between direct and indirect stakeholders. According to Barnett (2019), the commercial case for sustainability is more likely to be among the main concerns of stakeholders.

Conclusion

The research implications of a conceptual approach to sustainability management from the standpoint of responsible management have been created and examined in this paper. Sustainability management has been demonstrated to a) handle a certain type of duty (to integrate the long term management of value generation and disvalue reduction in the ecological, social, and economic dimensions),b) responds to the needs and expectations of particular scopes (life-cycle, value chain, and consumption-related effects); c) refers to specific scopes (life-cycle, value chain, and consumption-related effects); d) employs specific management tools; and e) develops as the interaction of specific responsibility roles (explicit and implicit sustainability managers as well as sustainable managers).

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