
Editorial

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1 Introduction

This special issue on ‘Corporate Responsibility Innovations for Sustainability’ presents both theoretical and practical viewpoints from the annual, international Corporate Responsibility Research Conference (CRRC) 2009 held in Vaasa, Finland.

Academics and practitioners struggle defining Corporate Responsibility (CR) and sustainability. This special issue supports the notion of CR in its context. In addition, stakeholder involvement seems to characterise contemporary CR. By being responsible, firms can contribute to the sustainable development that is aimed at universal sustainability.

The concepts of context-dependency and stakeholder involvement seem to characterise also innovations in general, and CR innovations particularly. If CR innovations are perceived differently in different contexts, generated by and for different stakeholders, and considered dynamic, a sound, explicit definition of the concept is challenging to pinpoint. The papers of this issue support this argument. Paradoxically, the same papers help to understand the concept of CR innovations and hence contribute to defining it more explicitly.

2 Papers in this special issue

By CR innovations, firms can contribute to the development of sustainable development. Bianca Nieuwkamp designs organisational structures suitable for CR innovations from a social systems perspective. 'The essence of this tool is that interactions with stakeholders are analysed and designed in conjunction with the structure of the organisation'. This paper supports the importance of stakeholder dialogue and cooperation in 'high involvement innovation' and 'high involvement responsibility'.

Diren Bulut's paper focuses on a vital stakeholder group by studying the customer perceptions of Fair Trade in Turkey and Austria. This paper supports and dissects further the notion on the context-dependency of CR. According to Bulut, Fair Trade in Austria and Turkey are at two different adaptation stages: Austrians have higher level of awareness and acceptance while the concept of Fair Trade is relatively new for the Turkish market. This leads us to suggest that adopting CR values, words and/or actions can be innovative per se, and more innovative in some contexts than in others. In addition, as 'the fair payment to the producers usually causes a price increase of the fair trade products compared to the market averages', we pose a question if CR is becoming tomorrow's luxury? Further research is propounded on the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of this scenario.

Ulrike Gelbmann analyses experiences from developing and implementing innovative CR tools for small and medium-sized enterprises. The study compares an enabler and a visibility tool as criteria for selecting the appropriate tool to implement CR as an organisational innovation. 'Comparison shows considerable differences, as enabler concepts are harder to implement than visibility signals, but help enterprises gain the expertise to obtain a visibility sign. The more CSR has been mainstreamed within an enterprise, the more likely visibility tools will suffice'.

As a major contributor to CR comes from the cumulative impacts of extended supply chain business operation, and as simultaneously competition is moving increasingly from a single organisation level to a chain and network level, CR innovations must become developed and implemented at chain and network levels. Derek R. Whatling, Peter Hedges, Ross Brown and Philip Fermor investigate through a survey 'the extent of CR reporting in managing and publicising company biodiversity supply chain issues by reviewing a cross-sector sample of publicly available CR reports'.

3 Conclusions

Based on the presented papers, holistic CR innovation would consist of socio-cultural, environmental and economic responsibility and would hence contribute to every dimension of sustainability. The holistic CR innovation would line up corporate values, actions and

words. As the chains and networks of organisations are as responsible as their least responsible member, holistic CR innovation would take into consideration the whole chain or network of organisations. This would minimise the harmful impacts on the stakeholders (including the environment as an independent stakeholder) by taking both the contextual and universal needs into account.

This special issue supports the idea that CR innovations come in all forms and shapes and can relate to products, processes and organisations. For CR innovations, both contextual and universal challenges and opportunities are to be detected, and stakeholder involvement can offer means for this. As further managerial implications, we suggest that adopting a ‘CR state of mind’ that consists of sustainable values on the individual and organizational level provides a solid base for CR innovations. The CR state of mind enables managers and organisations to see inside the phenomenon (instead of trying to grasp it from the outside), leading to increased awareness of perceiving the needs of the future generations, i.e. what kind of innovations will create the greatest value tomorrow, and the day after.

We also propose that adopting CR values, words and/or actions can be innovative per se in some contexts. The studies of this special issue were conducted in the European business environment, especially in the UK, Austria, Turkey and Germany.

We hope that readers will find this special issue thought provoking and the insights valuable for their interests.