
Preface

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Biographical notes: Sergio Barile is a Full Professor of Management at Sapienza University of Rome. His areas of research range from business economics to systems theory, in particular with reference to governance and business management, decision theory, and complexity theory. He is author of many international and national scientific publications and one of the main authors of reference for the studies on viable systems approach (VsA) in its various forms. He is a member of AIDEA (Accademia Italiana di Economia Aziendale).

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“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs”. This classic definition of sustainability is contained in the Brundtland Report. The Report, provided by the United Nation Organization (UN), is dated 1987. Thirty years have elapsed since its publication. During these three last decades, the issue of sustainability has increasingly permeated the daily life of millions of human beings and organisations. Slowly but gradually it has gained the awareness that the advanced society has pursued innovation and progress by accumulating huge investments in technology, sometimes forgetting that they have to demonstrate their effective utility in widely solving problems of populations and environment. At the political level, in the scientific community and among the civil society it has gained the belief that a sustainable development requires a systemic view of three basic dimensions of human action: the social dimension, the economic dimension and the environmental dimension. The proposal of policies, rules, technologies and best practices to promote sustainable development is now a priority for all developed countries. In this cultural and historical context, during last years, the issue of corporate sustainability has urgently emerged. Many corporate decisions, strategic and operational, have a strong link with respect to sustainability challenges: the statement of the corporate

mission and vision, the corporate governance, the protection of the health and safety of workers, the product design, the management of the relationship with the territory, the management of the production, the supply chain management, the control quality management, the management of industrial waste etc. Corporate sustainability involves all these various decisions. Moreover these decisions are interdependent and should be considered according to a systemic vision that entails for companies to not only explicit economic costs but also costs in terms of: cognitive efforts (management of complex decision-making processes), cultural management, organisational learning and organisational re-design. For these reasons, developed countries have witnessed an increased awareness on the part of heterogeneous stakeholders – such as public policy-makers, consumers, trade union organisations and the scientific community – of the need to know how firms actually conceive ‘sustainability’: which aspects (economic, financial, social, cultural, reputational, etc.) they take into account when deciding about benefits and costs related to a sustainable behaviour, and when defining, implementing and communicating sustainable-oriented strategies. On the other hand, firms have become more and more involved in eco-efficiency strategies focused on reducing energy and resources consumption, minimising waste generation etc. In the next years, the true challenge for firms and their managers will be linking efficiency and effectiveness to viable sustainability. For these reasons, corporate aims and managerial decision-making processes should not be ignored in the effort to promote a sustainable economy.

The aim of this special issue is to offer to policy makers, managers as well as academics who are interested in the world’s current environmental challenges, deeper insights in understanding corporate environmental behaviour. The special issue is published in two parts, the first one is covered in this number, and the second one is covered in the next number (Volume 8, No. 1). Both of the two parts provide academic papers discussing political issues, theoretical frameworks and case studies related to a viable sustainability.

Going beyond the specific content of each papers, we wish that this collection of essays can promote the advent of a method of cooperation between several cultural views and between several disciplines and we hope that it can be acknowledged as a successful experiment of interdisciplinary reflections contributing to the progress in shared and complex issues.