

Chapter 7

Corporate Sustainability Management

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Abstract This chapter provides a practice-oriented introduction to corporate sustainability management for students. It first introduces a brief history of corporate sustainability in businesses with reference to selected critical incidents (e.g., accidents environmental pollution) and pioneering firms and (sustainable) entrepreneurs which have developed proactive sustainability strategies and practices already several decades ago. Then the sustainability triangle, a conceptual framework for corporate sustainability, is presented. It aims at economic, eco- and socio-effectiveness by integrating and linking the economic, environmental, and social dimensions through the concepts of eco-efficiency, socio-efficiency, and eco-justice. This heuristic helps to classify sustainability management practices, relate them to each other, check for their synergies, and discuss how to overcome potential trade-offs. For the implementation of sustainability management in practice, collaboration between various actors is necessary. The remainder of the chapter therefore introduces various forms of collaboration available to businesses in order to engage with value chain partners and broader societal partners. Ultimately, the collaboration forms are classified into interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. Each text part contains various questions addressing the readers for their own reflection of current practices concerning the introduced concepts. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion.

Keywords Sustainability management • Corporate sustainability • Stakeholder collaboration • Transdisciplinarity research • Corporate social responsibility

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1 Basic Questions

Let us start this chapter by looking at the basic questions. We invite you to sit down, take a piece of paper, and note down your answers to the following questions before entering into the content of this chapter:

- Which company would you consider to be a leader in sustainability?
- Why do you consider the company a leader in sustainability? To what degree does the company think and act differently from others?
- Why do you think the company engages in sustainability? What competitive advantages and other benefits might the company gain by being a leader in sustainability? Who else benefits from these actions?
- When and why did companies start to deal explicitly with sustainability?

To achieve improved sustainability performance, it is necessary to reduce negative environmental and social impacts, to create positive social and environmental impacts, and to do this in a way which supports the economic success of the company.

2 When Did Companies Start to Deal Explicitly with Sustainability? A Brief History of Sustainability Management

The *roots of sustainability management* go back quite far. Early exemplars are the anthroposophical and life reform movements with their related business activities. Anthroposophical businesses, often attached to Waldorf schools, biodynamic farms and gardens, anthroposophically extended medical practices, therapists, artists, scientists, colleges, and adult education centers (see the Directory of Initiatives at <http://www.anthroposophy.org/DoI/intro.html>), following Rudolf Steiner's (b.1861–d.1925) theories, focused on overcoming social and environmental problems long before sustainability was coined as a term and sustainability management became a consideration for mainstream organizations. Many decades later, environmental management was promoted strongly in the 1970s and 1980s as a consequence of the oil crises and the Club of Rome report. Committed people in business following their personal convictions, like Gottlieb Duttweiler, Heinz Hess, Claus Hipp, or Georg Winter, began to strive for economic success in their businesses through a combination of social, ecological, and market principles. Alternative business approaches, as discussed under the notion of social and sustainable entrepreneurship, have been invented and established new organizations looking beyond profit seeking (or maximization) alone. Apart from such sustainable entrepreneurs, various owners of large established (often family owned) companies (e.g., Henkel building community houses for their workers) had already begun applying practices more than 100 years ago and were philanthropically active, particularly to improve the

social situation of their employees (for a general positioning of philanthropy as a company activity see e.g. Carroll 1979, 1991).

Environmental issues became a particular focus in the 1980/1990s as the result of various accidents in the chemical and oil industry (e.g., the Icmesa accident in Seveso, the ICI accident in Bhopal, the Sandoz accident in Schweizerhalle, the Exxon Valdez accident in Alaska; see e.g. Schaltegger et al. 2003). The perspective on environmental technologies for pollution prevention, clean production, and environmental services became the main focus in the USA, Europe, and Japan in the 1980s, and managers of large conventional companies started ever more to consider eco-efficient production, product development and innovation, business model innovation, the creation of business cases for sustainability, and the design of sustainable supply chains. In the 1990s, business received further encouragement to be aware of environmental and later also social impacts through the introduction of environmental and social management systems and standards for organizations (i.e., ISO 14000 series, EMAS, and BS 7750) and labels for certified products and services (e.g., EU-certified organic produce, fair trade-certified products). Social, environmental, and sustainability management systems and performance can now be certified and communicated in a standardized way. Efforts to improve the sustainability of companies are furthermore supported by awards (e.g., the German sustainability management award), rankings (e.g., the Dow Jones Sustainability Index), and media coverage on specific sustainability innovations and performances.

Exposed to concerns about the social and environmental impacts of their organizations and products, management has realized that social acceptance and legitimacy are part of sustainability management and that the consideration of stakeholder expectations is key to good strategic management (Freeman 1984; Stead and Stead 2008). Furthermore, operational management has not only understood that reducing energy consumption and pollution can go along with cost reductions but that sustainability considerations can be a basis for innovation (Hansen et al. 2009). Sustainability has thus become an argument in product and organizational development as well as in sustainable entrepreneurship and strategic management (Schaltegger et al. 2003).

The International Corporate Sustainability Barometer, a survey of the largest companies in 11 developed countries worldwide (Schaltegger et al. 2013c), shows that the main reasons for dealing with sustainability issues are to secure legitimacy (i.e., social acceptance) and to improve internal organization of the company, whereas the market forces are of clearly lower relevance than societal issues. Among the main stakeholders who are considered to be supportive of corporate sustainability engagement are NGOs, governments, and media, whereas banks, insurance companies, and suppliers are not perceived as supportive (Fig. 7.1).

A longitudinal study of the Corporate Sustainability Barometer for German companies, however, shows that market drivers seem to be of increasing (though still not paramount) importance in dealing with sustainability. This is also supported by a recent study by BCG and the MIT Sloan Management Review, who determined the primary reasons that companies embrace sustainability in their business models (Haanaes et al. 2012), as depicted in Fig. 7.2.

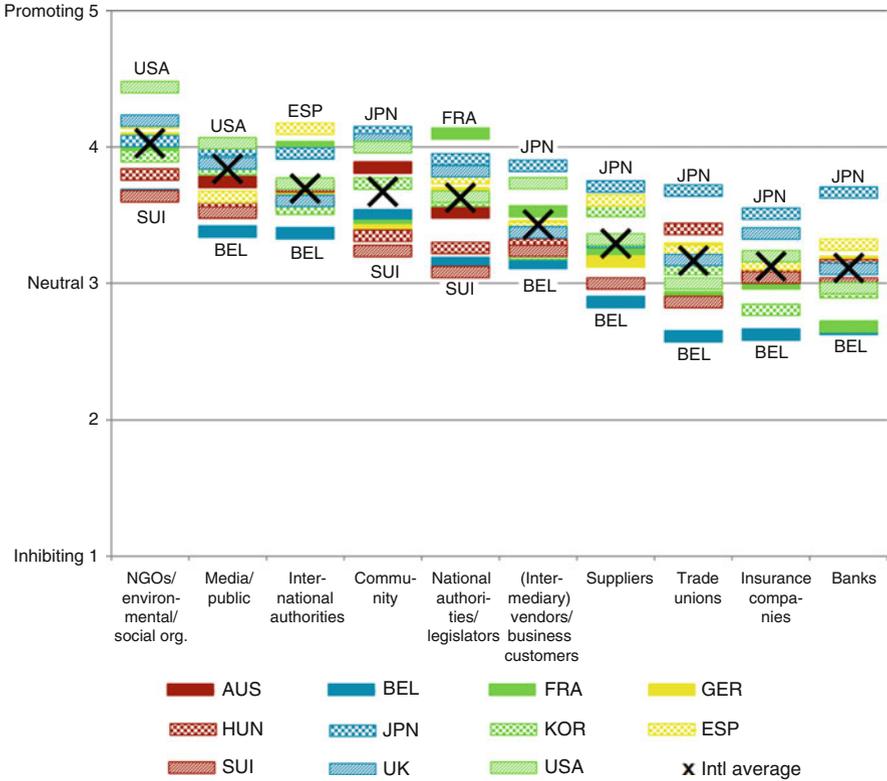


Fig. 7.1 Who motivates large companies to deal with sustainability issues? (Source: Schaltegger et al. 2013a, b, c, 19)

Overall, this shows that corporate management may be motivated by various reasons, including intrinsic, personal reasons (as is the case among the pioneers of sustainable entrepreneurship), seeking social acceptance and legitimacy, reducing risks and costs in production processes, or striving for market success (see also Schaltegger 2010; Hansen 2010, pp. 28ff.; Schaltegger et al. 2012).

3 What Do Sustainability-Oriented Companies Do Differently? Conceptualizing Sustainability Management

Sustainability management has been informed by the vision of integrating environmental, social, and economic perspectives into corporate management. The “Sustainability Triangle” (Fig. 7.3) represents this concept of sustainability management (similar to BMU et al. 2002; Dyllick and Hockerts 2002; Schaltegger and Burritt 2005).

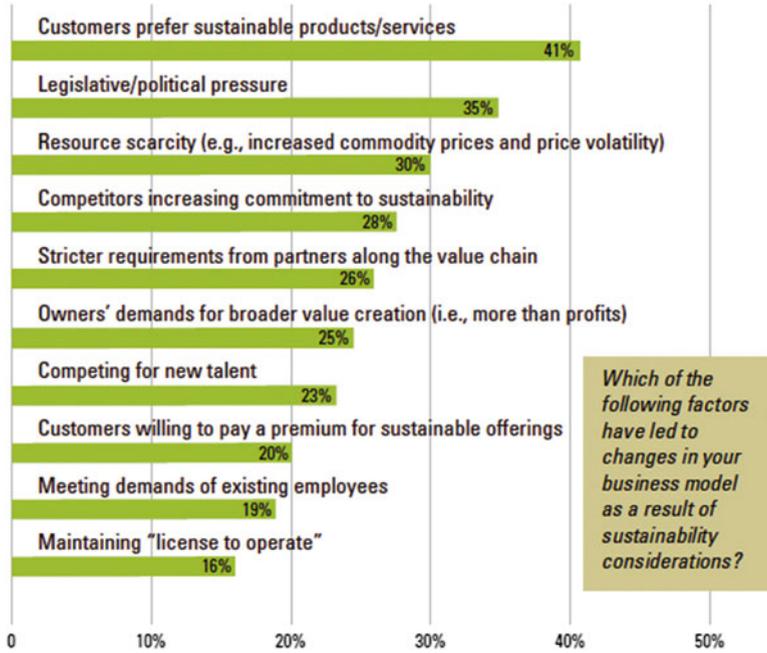


Fig. 7.2 Factors motivating companies to consider sustainability in their business model (Source: Haanaes et al. 2012, p. 7)

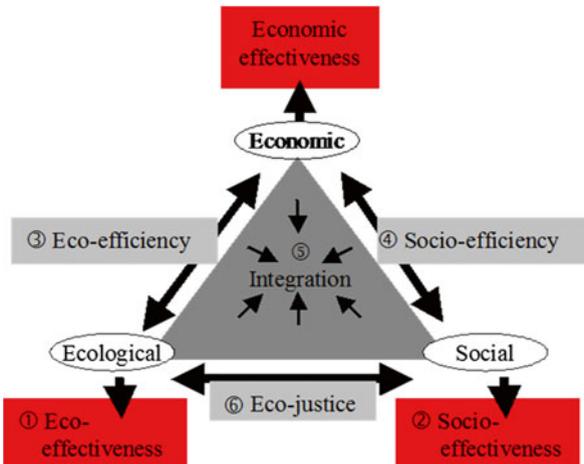


Fig. 7.3 The sustainability triangle of perspectives of corporate sustainability management (Source: Schaltegger and Burritt 2005, 189)

The Sustainability Triangle is designed both to help explain the three generally recognized components of corporate sustainability – the social, environmental, and economic perspectives, as well as the interrelationships between them – and to identify where a contribution is needed from sustainability management in order to support management with relevant information as to where performance contributions can and should be made. In the Triangle, each component is represented by one of the three corners, whereas the interrelationships are represented by the lines which connect each corner together. The corners therefore represent the company's effectiveness in achieving each component individually and are measured in absolute terms, whereas the lines represent different ways in which eco- and socio-efficiency, as well as eco-justice, can be defined by taking different combinations of the three perspectives and expressing the results as relative indicators. Effectiveness, measured in absolute terms, is the goal whenever management strives for the improvement of a single dimension (e.g., tons of waste avoided, additional income in poor regions), whereas efficiency, measured in relative terms, describes the relationship between different dimensions, e.g., socio-efficiency for the relationship between the social and economic dimensions (e.g., additional income in poor regions per unit of additional turnover).

The conventional aim of business management is economic effectiveness. The challenge for sustainability management is to support business leaders on the other aspects. A company's eco-effectiveness (i.e., ecological effectiveness) reflects how successful environmental management as part of sustainability management has been in reducing its impacts on the natural environment. This is usually expressed in terms of the absolute amounts of physical quantities, such as CO₂ emissions. Socio-effectiveness reflects how a company has performed with regard to social and cultural demands and to legitimate its activities. Therefore, topics such as stakeholder management (Freeman 1984) and how to respond to societal demands (Spitzeck 2009a) become important and can be measured, e.g., by reputation indexes, positive and negative media reporting, and the capacity of companies to create trusting relationships with nonmarket stakeholders. The economic challenge of business is to maximize its financial returns (profits) relative to financial resources such as capital invested. The equivalent challenge to sustainability management is to achieve the maximum environmental and social performance as economically as possible (see the "triple bottom line" approach by Elkington 2004), and these are measured by eco-efficiency and socio-efficiency, respectively. Eco-efficiency is defined as the relative proportions of an economic (monetary) measure and a physical (ecological) measure (Schaltegger and Burritt 2005; Schmidheiny and BCSD 1992; von Weizsäcker et al. 1997, 2009). It can be defined as the ratio of value added to environmental impact added per unit (e.g., 300 Euro sales per 1.2 kg of CO₂ impacts for one mobile phone). Environmental impact added is defined as the sum of all environmental impacts which are generated directly or indirectly

by a product or activity, e.g., value added per tonne of CO₂ emitted. Similarly, socio-efficiency can be defined as the economic value added relative to social measures, such as the number of staff accidents. Eco-justice reflects the ratio between environmental and social objectives or indicators, e.g., environmental impacts relative to poverty.

The main challenge for sustainability management is to integrate all these different aspects. A good example is C&A's attempt to introduce organic textiles to the mass market (see Box 7.1). This integration challenge goes along with the observation and development that CSR and corporate sustainability have become ever more similar, although they were originally different approaches with similar goals related to sustainable development (see, e.g., Marrewijk 2003). Integration requires the consideration of all sustainability aspects and the links between them. Sustainability management can therefore also be seen as the art of overcoming trade-offs between social, environmental, and economic perspectives and the search for ways to integrate improvements in all dimensions. With regard to the links to the economic dimension, this also addresses business cases for sustainability (Schaltegger and Synnsetvedt 2002). Several studies point out that sustainability leaders have a better reputation, counting on brand value, client fidelity, and preference, and better stakeholder relations, and therefore fewer risks, as well as positive and free media reporting (e.g., Hansen et al. 2010). In purely financial terms, sustainability management pays off in cases in which clients are prepared to pay a higher price (think of organic products), costs are reduced (e.g., with lower energy consumption), and attractiveness as an employer is improved, as well as access to capital markets being facilitated. The degree to which companies investigate and develop the business case for sustainability differs and is conceptualized as stages of organizational learning on a continuum from defensive, compliance, managerial, and strategic to civil (Zadek 2004).

To support sustainability management, a multitude of tools have been developed in theory and corporate practice, some addressing single aspects of sustainability management, others addressing two or more aspects. So far, the application of fully integrative sustainability management tools (see 5 in Fig. 7.3) is rare, but on an increasing trend. The future challenges of sustainability management may thus relate to the broad integration of sustainability aspects to overcome trade-offs and create multi-win solutions without compromising the effectiveness in one dimension. This challenge may seem unachievable, but as a vision, it provides direction and can serve to express ambition and enhance innovation for sustainable development.

Question Read the article by Simon Zadek (2004) which treats the issue of child labor at Nike. Now, imagine a large energy provider for electricity in your country. Analyze their corporate reports and website and identify their top three sustainability-related challenges. Position them into the organizational learning matrix and see if they represent a risk or opportunity for the company.

Box 7.1 Example: Clothing Made from Organic Cotton in the German Retail Industry (e.g., Hansen and Schaltegger 2013)

A very good example of voluntary sustainability management practices can be seen in the German clothing retail industry. Some of the large players have embarked on a transformation journey in which they change their product portfolio towards products with improved environmental and social performance. For example, C&A, Germany's largest textile retailer, engages strongly in the development of organic cotton practices, which has both environmental and social benefits compared to conventional cotton. C&A has increased its share of organic textiles – sold under the brand name “Bio Cotton” – to more than 20 % annually. By systematically developing alternative supplier structures together with CottonConnect (see <http://www.cotton-connect.org>), a nongovernmental organization (NGO), they are able to increase their organic cotton products year by year and thereby increase pressure to peers in the industry to invest in changes themselves.

Mostly, large industry players are not the first ones to develop more sustainable practices. Often, they adopt new processes, organizational structures, and products from smaller entrepreneurial companies – usually operating in niche markets. In the case of the textile industry, Hess Nature (<http://www.hessnatur.com>) was the first company to develop strictly environmental textiles, having already begun doing so in the 1980s. For example, they were one of the first to develop production standards to assure chemical-free end products, introduce organic cotton production in pilot projects, and adopt strict labor practices in textile production plants in developing nations.

Last but not least, large companies in industry often do not fully voluntarily transform their businesses – in the case of the textile industry, Greenpeace, particularly through its Detox campaign (<http://www.greenpeace.de/detox>), has played a major role in pushing the industry towards more eco-friendly production.

4 Collaboration as Key to Advance Sustainability Management

As the Nike example and the case of organic cotton demonstrate, sustainability management usually cannot be done successfully by individual actors alone. Developing solutions to sustainability-related problems, whether environmental or social, requires not only interdisciplinary (e.g., environmental experts and engineers working together on a solution) but usually transdisciplinary efforts, i.e., collaboration within firms, between firms, and across sectors (e.g., Schaltegger et al. 2013a).

4.1 Collaboration Within the Firm: Integrative Approach to Sustainability

In order to achieve this, sustainability management examines production processes and, also, all support functions, such as planning and control, human resources, financing, and organization. Sustainability management is therefore a multifunctional activity stretching right across the company. In fact, its success often depends on cooperation between different functions. To reduce waste at a construction site, a company needs to engage its architects responsible for planning, the purchasing departments sticking to orientations by architects, and construction workers trained to use the material provided effectively.

The need for *solutions based on cooperation* challenges management with issues of institutionalizing sustainability management, so that ecological and social objectives become an integral part of all management areas in all business functions. Sustainability management is often dealt with in a separate internal group or department within the company. Without a sustainability manager to lobby and cooperate with other managers, there is a danger that environmental and social interests will not be integrated into business thinking. Sustainability management is mostly introduced through project groups or permanent cross-functional teams (e.g., production, marketing, and waste handling).

In practice, various ways of institutionalizing sustainability expertise into management demonstrate that no single answer to the question about *how to organize* sustainability management exists. At worst, sustainability management can become an isolated and poorly funded function. At best, organizational structures exist that define social and environmental key performance indicators which are linked to executive compensation. This only happens if there is support and commitment from top management, who provides resources to ensure that sustainability management practices are integrated throughout the organization and in the core business model and processes. Other good examples are “sustainability committees” consisting of decision-makers from various functions (e.g., production, R&D, marketing, procurement, strategy) coming together on a regular basis in order to drive sustainability management practices in the company, as well as across value chains. But the necessity of collaboration does not end at organizational boundaries – it is also the engagement with external stakeholders which enables holistic solutions for sustainability (Spitzeck and Hansen 2010).

4.2 Collaboration with Value Chain Partners and Other Societal Actors

Once the company has a clear sustainability strategy, it can leverage results by engaging with partners along the value chain (suppliers and customers). In order to create sustainable products, it might be necessary to brainstorm with suppliers in the

Table 7.1 Examples of multi-stakeholder initiatives for solving sustainability-related problems

Issue	Resolution	More information
Child labor	Fair Labor Association	www.fairlabor.org
Conflict diamonds	Kimberley Process	www.kimberleyprocess.com See also the film Blood Diamond
Deforestation	Forest Stewardship Council	www.fsc.org
Overfishing	Marine Stewardship Council	www.msc.org

value chain. British retailer Marks & Spencer, for example, asked suppliers of light bulbs to come up with more energy efficient lighting solutions, which reduced energy costs significantly (Spitzeck 2009b). The same company encourages its clients to wash their clothes at 30°, as it realized that the highest emissions impact regarding washing powder rests with the consumer.

Other companies need to engage with their value chain and other societal actors because of risks. Nike was confronted with the risk of child labor in the value chain and cofounded the Fair Labor Association (FLA) in order to eradicate this social problem in the whole industry. In most cases, different actors come together in order to resolve an issue (see examples in Table 7.1).

No company or organization could resolve these issues alone. Only by cooperating on issues such as overfishing can they be addressed effectively. The research by MIT and BCG (Haanaes et al. 2012) also identified that sustainability leaders collaborate more intensively with customers, suppliers, governments, industry associations, local communities, NGOs, and competitors.

4.3 Towards Transdisciplinary Collaboration

In fact, sustainability-related challenges are often transdisciplinary in nature, meaning that not a single sector (e.g., industry, politics, society) nor a single discipline (e.g., business administration, environmental science) or business function (e.g., marketing, production, procurement) can solve them alone. Transdisciplinary collaboration in which various sectors and disciplines work together on solutions is necessary (e.g., researchers from universities engage with industry experts in order to implement more sustainable solutions in practice). Different generic approaches, more or less close to transdisciplinary collaboration, exist (Fig. 7.4).

Question Take the energy company which you selected before and analyze which forms of collaborations they pursue on the three levels: within the organization (e.g., different corporate functions), across the value chain (e.g., with energy producers or consumers), and on a broader societal level (e.g., NGO collaboration). Which forms of collaboration seem to have real impact and which are rather superficial or even greenwashing?

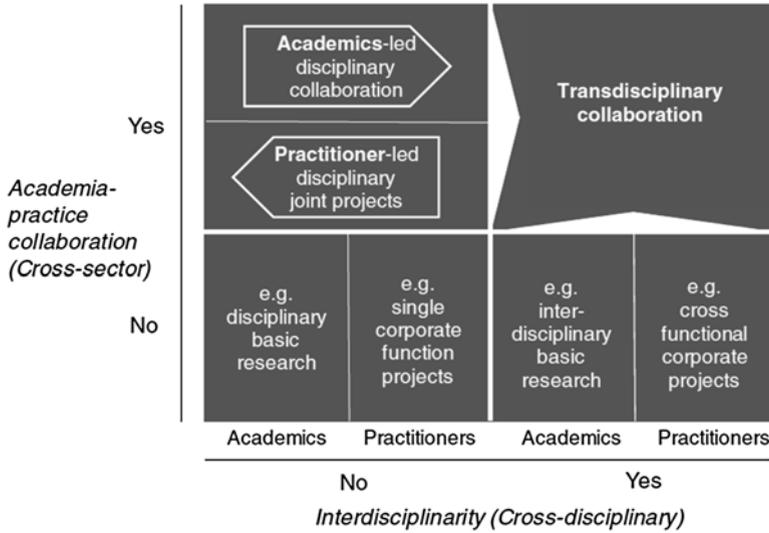


Fig. 7.4 Approaches to transdisciplinary collaboration in the context of corporate sustainability (Schaltegger et al. 2013a, b, c, p. 225)

5 Conclusions

Sustainability is one of the largest, if not the largest, challenge to today’s industry and economies. If sustainability challenges are not sufficiently addressed in the near future, existing economic practices, as well as societal well-being, will become increasingly constrained. Sustainability management is a concept which has developed over the last two decades to support companies in overcoming trade-offs between economic, environmental, and social interests. To make sustainability management successful in corporations, collaboration is key, not only within the organization but, in a transdisciplinary sense, also across organizations, sectors, and disciplines.

Check your initial notes. Do you recognize the similarity between your list and the content of this chapter? What do sustainability leaders do differently from other companies? Examine how they implement social and environmental indicators in their management system to evaluate eco-/socio-effectiveness and efficiency. They engage with partners in the value chain such as suppliers and customers, as well as with other societal actors. Why do they do it? Sustainability management lowers risks (e.g., protests, bad publicity) and creates opportunities (e.g., higher prices, lower costs) and thus can create competitive advantages for sustainability leaders. At the same time, their actions create value for communities, the environment, and society as a whole – a notion that has recently been termed “creating shared value” (Porter and Kramer 2011). So in sum, sustainability management attempts to create value for the company and society alike.

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