



Leading Companies Sustainably: A Case Study in Spain

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Opinion

The integration by companies of the three pillars of sustainability, i.e. economic, environmental, and societal practices, also known as the triple bottom line of sustainability, is a major issue in business sustainability. Through the development of sustainability business models and strategies, organizations play a key role in bringing about better societies. It is vital to integrate these principles into an organization's business so that it can remain competitive within its market and become a leader in its sector while also providing value and responding clearly to customer expectations as well as those of employees. Although the implementation of sustainable organizational practices may be costly and necessitate funding at the beginning, enforcing sustainability in the company will assure the corporation's financial viability in the long term, while supporting the carrying out of both social and environmental practices [1].

Avery and Bergsteiner [2] note that there are several other elements which may hamper the introduction of this type of change at the organizational level:

- There is a tendency for conventional wisdom to prevail.
- There are both financial and intangible costs involved in change.
- A majority of managers do not make decisions on the basis of evidence, but in accordance with their ideological beliefs or experience of what has been tried and trialed.

- The risks associated with major changes.

What is essential when implementing a sustainability strategy in a company is for it to be complemented and guided by an effective leader. Today, business leaders face new challenges which would not have been encountered in the past such as the increasing scarcity of the energy and resources needed to produce and distribute goods. Other organizational challenges that companies are currently facing, in addition to global policy uncertainties include an increased awareness of societal issues generated by digital media and consumer demands for better ethics from businesses as well as appropriate requirements on financial institutions and investors [3].

Sustainable leadership is a type of leadership that brings solutions to global challenges in the areas of environment, society, and economics. It recognizes leadership as a process of influence and breaks down silos to combine efforts towards change and transformation. Avery and Bergsteiner indicate that sustainable leadership may be perceived in the manner in which the company is organized, with respect to their principles, processes, values and working practices, [2]. The authors separate sustainable leadership into two main categories, referred to as (1) "locust leadership" and (2) "honeybee leadership". Making and maximizing profits at all costs is the basis for the locust leadership philosophy, even if it implies damaging the natural environment or harming

others. However, the philosophy of honeybee leadership, which also considers other factors such as environmental and social factors, brings great value to stakeholders. Although the honeybee sustainable leadership model has been perceived as being more profitable in the long-term, nowadays corporations still follow a more conventional locust organizational leadership model or a hybrid model that incorporates a mixture of both leadership approaches [4].

Avery and Bergsteiner's sustainable leadership model was examined among sustainability managers from different sectors in Spain. The results of the study showed that sustainability managers in Spain are increasingly leaning towards but did not fully follow the honeybee sustainable leadership philosophy, thereby adopting a hybrid approach. This result is very much aligned with most organizations that tend to adopt a hybrid approach, combining both locust and honeybee elements within their leadership models. This is shown in previous studies that evaluated the level of sustainable leadership in the insurance industry in Turkey [5], in the logistics industry in Spain [6], in the marketing sector in Spain, and among project managers in Spain [7].

A vision of social management with the involvement of all stakeholders is presented by the honeybee leadership approach. It is more holistic and based on the production of value for all stakeholders, in line with the 17th Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17) whose aim is to create stakeholder alliances. Although it has been shown that, in the long term, application of honeybee management is more sustainable and profitable for businesses, many national and international companies still use a more traditional model such as the locust model focusing on short term benefits. Companies nowadays are being pushed towards adapting sustainable strategies and changing towards a honeybee leadership approach, although it is appreciated, they might encounter a few different hurdles and obstacles along the way.

Generally, companies are now using their commitment to sustainability as a competitive advantage. They are going to continue to differentiate themselves from the competition, and they are going to incorporate corporate social responsibility into their strategy, as they did in the past. This approach may in some cases

be greenwashing, adopted simply as a marketing strategy for the purpose of generating its own image without really corresponding to the mission pursued by the company.

The research also demonstrates that organizations necessitate sustainability managers that have a settled down-to-earth vision+ of sustainability. In this respect the integration of sustainability in business should not just be carried out to generate profit and thereby be an additional lay of organizational checklist bureaucracy. The incorporation of sustainability in corporations will benefit them in the long term and ensure that profitability and success will be long lasting [4].

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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