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P O N T U S C E R I N

Turning Corporate Behaviour into Sustainability: Challenges of Environmental Strategies in Industry

Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

Unlike the situation a few decades ago, today in the first years of the 21st century environmental concerns have spread to many groups of society. Even the formerly stubborn resistance pockets in industry have turned around 180 degrees, advocating the greening of industry. In this new agenda: industry is sometimes perceived as the socially responsible guardian of society and actors within industry and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) continually reinforce each other's trustworthiness. Notwithstanding this progress major leaps in environmental improvements have failed to appear. This thesis contributes to an understanding of how and why actors treat environmental aspects and the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development. The phenomenon of corporate environmental concerns, both empirically and theoretically, is critically analysed. How do firms handle environmental issues internally, how do external actors evaluate firms' transmitted images and what are the economic and environmental results? It is indicated in the papers constituting the thesis that a discrepancy exists between what firms state in their external communications compared to the real environmental and economic outcomes from their organisations' operations. There exists, however, also a tendency of blind faith in firms' statements among actors that for a living inform the public about industry's societal commitment. As such, sustainability indexes may – due to erroneous selection criteria in the indexes – appear as environmental ideals, leading environmentally conscious customers to invest in large and dirty firms. The voluntary stage which the environmental and sustainable reporting is faced with ought to receive policy support to make reportees report consistently from year to year and comparable to other reporters. Moreover, in order to retain the environmental and economic win-win situations laying around to be picked up by firms as advocates of win-wins have claimed since the mid 1990's, and nothing much has happened yet, the papers in the thesis argue for policy actions that will take transactions costs into consideration by signing property rights responsibility – e.g. to emit – to those actors who can use the resources most efficiently, turning the problem of open access into a production factor. Then the firms can receive private economic benefits for innovating societal improvements. The papers in the thesis suggest, hence, to delimit the need and possibilities for decouple corporate external information and to promote innovative activities for a better environment by increased public support in extended responsibility, public procurement as well as to spread environmental information to actors that have deficient knowledge of such. One can always call for companies to act more or less altruistic for the benefit of our environment, as is often done, but we have to recall that the common consumer has in many cases proven not to be willing to promote such solutions, nor the companies providing services to them. Consumers, hence, have to take an active position in the rôle of voters, influencing politics to take a stance by the powerful means of the public to promote innovations that are beneficial to society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: Asymmetric Information, Corporate Environmental Reports, Corporate Social Responsibility, Environmental Management, Environmental Policy, Information Bridges, Opportunistic Behaviour, Public Procurement, Property Rights, Sustainability Indexes.

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