MOTIVATION OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY – THE CASE OF A LARGE INDUSTRIAL COMPANY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The topic of Motivation of Organisations for Sustainability has been already studied from various angles. However, it is recommended by related literature to try to understand more the real reasons why organizations are motivated for sustainability. What do employees at different levels of the organizational hierarchy think about the motivation for the sustainability of their company (employer)? And how individual motivations for sustainability differ based on various levels of the organizational hierarchy, focusing on manual workers, administrative workers as well as different levels of management within the same company?

This paper studies how motivations for sustainability vary from the perspective of different internal stakeholders: Their motivations as well as their view of their employer's (large industrial company in the Czech Republic) motivation for sustainability.

Qualitative research – sixty semi-structured interviews – was used.

There was particularly interesting information found during in-depth interviews regarding the opinion and views of employees interviewed concerning different motivators for the sustainability of them as individuals as well as their perception of the sustainability motivators of their employer. In some aspects, similarities were found, in some other aspects, specific differences were observed.

Keywords: Motivation, sustainability, large organization, stakeholders, motivators

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Introduction

Organizations are facing different pressures from various stakeholders, including questioning their sustainability or responsibility. What are the most important motivations for organizations to be sustainable?

How the motivations for sustainability change when focusing on different selected stakeholders - different levels of management of an organization and employees (administrative and manual)?

This paper looks at motivations for sustainability from different levels – various stakeholders, primarily diverse levels of management and employees.

The definition of Sustainability in this paper is connected to all three commonly known aspects, environmental, social, and economic. Sustainable development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.", according to the document *Our Common Future*[1].

1 Literature Review

There is a lot of literature on sustainability-related matters globally, including motivations of organizations for sustainability. In a paper written by Windolph et al., the relevance of three selected motivators is analyzed: Seeking corporate legitimacy, market success, and internal improvement. There are described challenges of how different motivations are relevant. "… call for further profound analyses of ... the reasons why companies care about sustainable development – or why they do not… it is of vital importance that researchers keep in touch with practice..." (Windolf et al., 2013) This study focused only on German companies and was getting data from CSR or Sustainability or EHS (Environment-Health-Safety) responsible.

Another paper classified motivators in five dimensions and ranked those motivators according to their impact on sustainability: Organizational practices, media and reputation, excellence and awards, technology and innovation, and attitudes. (Khan, 2018)

The results from a different study revealed that "relational and moral motives are key drivers, and that firms exhibiting high levels of moral obligations tend to outperform those primarily driven by amoral considerations." (Paulraj et al., 2015)

From the conducted literature review, there was not encountered a source particularly on differences in motives for sustainability based on various stakeholder groups, different levels of management, and employees in the context of a large industrial organization.

2 Methodology

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[1] United Nations General Assembly (1987). Sustainable development

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (qualitative research) with 60 people with the duration of 30-60 min per interview were conducted with representatives from management at different levels (33 interviewees) and manual (8) as well as administrative (19) workers.

Data is gathered especially by recording and sometimes also taking notes during interviews which were conducted via MS Teams and Zoom applications (using camera most of the times) or mobile phone when previous tools were technically not possible for the interviewee (in case of some manual workers). There was only one worker (from Production) not agreeing with recording, thus more detailed notes, including important citations, were taken.

Interviews were carried out individually, one by one, except for one case when the interview was done with two people at the same time (as they requested to do it together - co-workers from the same team).

Deductive, as well as Inductive Coding for analyzing interview data, was used, depending on the concrete interview questions. Inductive Coding was used most of the time - for interview questions for which frequent answers were more difficult to predict.

The focus was on the thematic content analysis of interview data to highlight important aspects from the interviews and trying to find common patterns across the data set. A data matrix (codebook) was used to analyze the data - an example can be seen in *Table 1* below. Furthermore, narrative analysis was also conducted to show the additional important points (citations) found during the research.

Tab. 1: Coding Example (Inductive - from the responses)

Questions	1. What motivates your employer/ company for sustainability?				2. What motivates you personally for sustainability?			
Provided answers - Codes	EU legislation: 1	National legislation: 2	Customers/ market: 3	Community/ media: 4	Nature: 1	My children: 2	My upbringing: 3	Interest: 4
Respondent 1	1	2			1			
Respondent 2	1		3				3	4
Respondent 3				4	1	2		

Source: Created by the author

Data was gathered by me, the author, via interviews with selected people from a large industrial organization in the Czech Republic.

3   Findings

Selected findings of the research are to be presented in this part of the paper in different sub-sections. Generally, most interviewees view sustainability as primarily connected to environmental topics, or as a broader concept including also economic and social aspects. Nevertheless, when discussing details, the majority mentioned examples and situations from the environmental area (except those working in more socially oriented spheres like *Human Resources*).

3.1 Motivation for Sustainability of the Individual

One of the general observations from the interviews regarding employees' motivations for sustainability is that those who have been critical about the organization's efforts in sustainability are usually very self-motivated for the topic themselves and thus see the gaps more clearly than the other workers.

If somebody was more interested in social aspects, he/she usually viewed the company to be doing too little in this area. On the contrary, if somebody was more into environmental areas, he/she often viewed the company to be doing more in the social area than in the environmental one.

Middle and top management

Most of the middle and top managers interviewed mentioned they have internal motivations for sustainability, few stated their children as their main driver for sustainability, and some (compared to other groups) mentioned as their motives that it is a trend and a must these days. Two managers were not much motivated for sustainable behavior, one of them stated a pragmatic view on his motivation that "all that is done has to pay off" and the other one not wanting to limit himself/herself. Few citations are stated below.

- "Corona was like a mirror - what can happen in 50 years with climate change. When COVID was just in China, nobody cared… It is the same with climate change - you cannot smell or see it. Even now with the Corona virus, people are saying it does not exist. When it starts to affect a concrete person, then that person is willing to make a change."

- „In the past, the Czech Republic was locked up in communism, because of that people are even less willing to make a change - since they needed to fight so hard to get freedom and to be able to do what they want freely."
- „It is the only right way - and it is the responsibility of each person. It is our moral duty… - „to be able to look myself in my eyes in the mirror".

Lower management

In general, respondents from lower management were more critical: Some were critical concerning the organizational efforts of the organization to be a sustainable company. More than a half of them did not show much motivation for sustainability - they seem to not care so much about it, in comparison to other employee groups. Two people stated that they do something in sustainability just because they have it among obligations at work.

One interviewee from this group mentioned that he/she does not like that there are subsidies from the state - not knowing about the existence of market failure of negative externalities. „I do not like ruining the planet but I still have high diesel consumption and it doesn't bother me at all. I do not sort out waste at all. I try to enjoy money according to my mood, my way of life. The role I play at the company at the position I am at is different from me as a private person." This expression shows how important for sustainability efforts of a company is to set the direction top-down as some people are behaving at work how they are expected to by their employer and they do not personally care if it will be in the sustainable or unsustainable way (they follow the set rules regarding that).

Few representatives of lower management however also see sustainability as an important topic for them and are motivated internally, because of their children or clean nature.

Office workers:

Internal motivation and interest were the most frequent reasons to behave sustainably for office workers who were interviewed. Being motivated by their surroundings, or media, was a specific motivator particularly in this employee group. This was the most represented group within the sample (19 people) and from this group, only one person showed not much personal motivation for sustainability - he/she mentioned that he/she needs money to secure himself/herself and have free time so more basic needs are to be met.

People being internally motivated for sustainability often at some point go through a frustration phase specifically regarding the environmental issues. Frustration was shown as well during some interviews with especially office workers, for example:

- „I do work which is not needed on this planet. Then I buy a useless thing to improve my day… People follow trends from psychical discomfort. Satisfied people do not do it, they do not buy like that. Stylish people are unhappy people."

- „It is caused by maturity, I feel like I have already achieved everything. Each young person has to come to such a knowledge himself/herself. And when all has been achieved, it is time to think 'Is this all?' And then start to think how much time he/she spends with all things (cleaning, moving things around, etc.)"

Manual workers:

Children as the main motivation to behave sustainably were mentioned the most by manual workers (by nearly half of them) - to be able to go with them in a clean forest without waste, for their future, to function as a good role model for them. Furthermore, their upbringing was the second most important motivator for them. Nature was also mentioned as a reason - connected to spending their free time.

One interviewee named saving costs as the motivator for him (all interviewees in this group were men) to behave sustainably and one was not much motivated for sustainability and even not knowing the term either.

The majority of manual workers interviewed are motivated for sustainability but at work, they are in their opinion not able to influence things in this matter and that sometimes causes their demotivation. Thus, they need to have sustainability-related rules from above and provide them with the facilities to be able to easily follow such rules. As they have to work quickly, without any spare time, so if proper facilities are missing, they cannot behave sustainably even though it is against their natural pro-environmental and common-sense behavior (e.g. providing enough containers for sorting waste out at the proper locations).

The set rules play a key role in motivating for sustainability also the ones who are not much self-motivated: „If I do quality work according to what I should do, I will be economically well and my future will be better".

3.2. Motivation for Sustainability of the Selected Organisation (perception of the Individuals)

Middle and top management

In the middle and top management group of interviewees, mostly legislation (Czech, EU - incl. the Green Deal) and regulations were mentioned as the main reason for the company to behave sustainably. Some also named Paris Agreement as some sort of motivation on the higher level.

The second most mentioned motivator was PR/ brand/ image and perception of the topic as an important one by the whole society. If the company is perceived as sustainable, it is expected by some of the interviewees that it will help to increase sales.

A bad image combined with a financial penalty was mentioned as a driver for current efforts in sustainability by an interviewee. Another manager stated that he/she would like the state to discuss with the company how the regulation should work and to bring it up at the right moment for the company. One interviewee added as a motivator the countries where the company exports to. Expectations of stakeholders and employee happiness and health were mentioned just once. There was also an interesting thought by one interviewee that workers are individuals and they do sustainability for themselves, to feel ok. Some concrete citations:

- „Only if this has been established as a rule, it would be done. Or it would be done but in faraway future like 10 years - by very small steps.“
- „They do not want to, they have to“
- „Sustainability is a sexy topic. In the past, it was not sexy and even though some things were financially ok, they were not supported much.“
- „It is a market trend. And we cannot go against the market trend. Changing society. You cannot survive without sustainability now - competitors would eat us.“
- „The company is only negatively motivated for sustainability - by legislation. So the negative motivation works.“

Lower management

Mostly, existential motivators (for the company to survive) were mentioned by the respondents from lower management. About a half of respondents named legislation (EU, Czech) as the main motivation for sustainability, compared to the previous group proportionally much less. However, profit/ to do good business was mentioned relatively more by this group as the reason for sustainability, compared to other groups. Selected citations:

- „The company does not want to be seen as one of the few companies which are not following the environmental regulations - media image is crucial for business.“
- „For environmental things, motivation exists when it is tangible - to be able to show something. Image is the reason for the volunteer activities, to boast of it. Always money and benefit is the mix to get approval from management (Return on Investment, PR benefit) – we have difficulties to justify and get something approved otherwise...“

- „There needs to be a positive or at least neutral Business Case for the company otherwise it is very difficult to justify such a product/ initiative. The state is 'helping' us in this - by subsidies or sanctions: Rather than to pay a fine, it is better to make it more sustainable (i.e. the fine gets into the Business Case as a potential cost)"

Office workers:

Legislation and PR are mentioned the most by office workers as motivators for the sustainability of the company. Several office workers were very critical to its sustainability efforts and perceive them to be only pushed by external forces (the EU, competition, customers), others are seeing the company's responsibility in caring for its employees and keeping up the tradition of the business. The majority of office workers would like the company to be more motivated, to be able to do more in sustainability.

Few interviewees view motivation from the EU negatively. One stated: „Sustainability means for the company adapting to the pushes from the EU. The company adapts to those „sticks under its feet" and thus survives." Further selected citations are as follows:

- „To show off. Market shares and profit are the only motivators. They are making it (e.g. product) to only look sustainably. I have to present something sustainable five times to get one little point through. The company thinks: *Why change if the current status quo (product) works?* "

- „Raw materials are not inexhaustible. There will be a tendency to be more self-sufficient because of that."

- „Without sustainability, the company will not survive to run next 50 years."

- „It is needed to keep the company at any price - it also brings money for the public budget, suppliers… To keep the brand image, the company wants to comply with all regulations. But since workers get sustainability as a direction and to be done immediately, they do not like it. People are not thinking about sustainability as they do not have time for it and are under pressure and their feedback is not taken much into account."

Manual workers:

Existence was mentioned as a motivator for the sustainability of the company the most by manual workers, connected to keeping the tradition of the company and complying with Czech as well as the EU legislation. Compared to the other stakeholders' groups interviewed, it was

stated more often, that the company is also motivated for sustainability because of its responsibility for the employees. Selected concrete citations:

- „They are not trying to save the planet, but a lot of people hear the green wave and like green products… - that is why the company is doing it too.“

- „Shareholders don't care if the company is green, but they want money. However, to be friendly to nature is now 'in', so it starts to be seen.“

- „The company cannot afford to pollute nature. The EU is pushing it. The company must behave sustainably. - That's right of course.“

4   Limitations

From factors regarding demography, only hierarchy was taken into account in this paper, not the age, gender, or the number of years working in the organization.

Interviews were voluntary so interviewees were not picked ad hoc from a list of employees. Workers who were contacted through contacts of the department cooperating on the research nominated themselves or were appointed by their manager (the latter was the case for some of the manual workers, as stated above).

As qualitative research - interviews - was used in this paper, the findings are opinions of people interviewed, not facts, and it is not possible to generalize the findings in a broad sense.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that individuals' motivation is mainly dependent on their internal state, their attitudes. However, we can see some differences comparing different hierarchical layers - e.g. manual workers in production have, as the main reason to behave sustainably, their children (such as to be a good role model for them) and having it from their upbringing, whereas office workers have the main reason their internal motivation and interest in the topic. Most people not being much motivated for sustainability are in lower management. In middle and top management, the individuals' motivation for sustainability again in the selected organization within our sample raises, being mainly motivated internally and seeing it as a must or a trend.

The perception of the company's motivations for sustainability is connected to the hierarchical layers at the selected company - their focus differs (more strategical versus more operational - with different levels of detail). From the information from all layers about the motivation of the selected organization, it can be concluded that without an external push for

sustainability, the company would not be motivated for sustainability to such an extent and at such a pace like it is currently.

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