

Edited Research Monograph

'Social Sustainability and Good Work in Organisations'

The rationale behind the edited monograph

The book answers to the megatrends of social sustainability and new understandings of what is quality work for employees. The applying editors are co-directing the research program “Organizing Social Sustainability”, a cross-departmental and interdisciplinary research program at the University of Southern Denmark. Both editors are experienced editors with a view to large and collective projects (e.g. The Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives; management revue – Socio-Economic Studies journal). We aim at exploring processes of *good work*, of organized well-being, fairness and inclusion as well as empowerment and engagement, within the frame of the sustainability paradigm. In bringing together the grand idea of social sustainable performance and the more tangible idea of good work standards, our book aims to provide the reader with

- a) critical insights into functional and dysfunctional work, based on both theoretical considerations and empirical cases,
- b) an up-to-date overview of how socially sustainable performance can be fostered in and by organizations, and
- c) introductions to contemporary frameworks of socially sustainable organizations and work processes.

The monograph “**Social Sustainability and Good Work in Organisations**” is dedicated to researching phenomena relating to how lasting social well-being and organization are interrelated. We aim to lay bare, through our collection of interdisciplinary contributions, social sustainability as a construct that is produced – but can also be hindered – by humans co-shaping social structures, that is, **organizing**. In consequence, we consider *processes* relating to social sustainability (e.g., negotiating and managing work structures) and their subsequent *institutionalization* in form of **organizations** (e.g. companies). Social sustainability means offering processes for creating successful places that promote well-being, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work at. Social sustainability supports social and cultural life, social amenities, opportunities for citizen and employee engagement, and space for people and places to evolve as to their belonging and identity. Social sustainability can be reached by aligning formal and informal processes; systems, structures, and relationships have to allow both current and future generations to create a healthy and durable living. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life. We are interested in how **organizations** of all types can contribute to a culture of social sustainability, and how these cultures can be **organized**.

Examples for problems, challenges, work practices and initiatives of interest to the social sustainability paradigm are, inter alia

- The reproduction and production of social closure and exclusion in organizations: starting from cultural and social bias in recruiting, over performance and promotion management (meritocracy, the seniority principle), to self-exclusion of certain demographic groups, work places have the power to further divide social groups – or potentially mend this gap.
- Private companies, taking an increased interest in alternative work standards in connection to technological progression: changes include agile, low-hierarchy digitalized workflows, and

liberal group and project management, especially in IT and high-tech, but also in other domains.

- Organizations increasingly encouraging issues of employee identity, belonging, (mental) health and psychological safety, cultural struggles and empowerment: such momentum can be explored and evaluated from different perspectives. While ethical considerations (e.g., overcoming racial discrimination) matter, the management of employee demands resulting from their identity and belonging as well as the integration of resulting practices in the business and management model (e.g. rewarding employee engagement appropriately), have to be equally thought through.
- The megatrends towards sustainability and new standards of good work have increased the “talk” about such issues: Organizations have professionalized their public verbiage, installed public corporate persona and have otherwise improved their image as to corporate consciousness and engagement. Team building measures and a focus of good and friendly work milieus are ubiquitous – however, whether or not such measures are indeed beneficial to employees or merely the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007) is to be explored.

As to existing scholarly work (for a list of the main competing books, s. 3), studying *social sustainability as well as standards and parameters of good work* has taken on momentum. However, these two dimensions are predominantly studied separately. In those rare cases of being discussed in unison – and in comprehensive book format publications - , organizations/ work and social sustainability are being boiled down to very specific matters (e.g. Amy Edmondson's highly innovative publications on psychological safety, Edmondson, 2019). A phenomenon of combining these two subjects of interest seems to be that their junction is being equated with corporate social responsibility (Leal Filho, 2019) or human resource management (Ehnert *et al.*, 2014). A similar phenomenon can be observed in recent article publications. Though there is an increased interest in social sustainability on the one hand, and in *good work* and the *good organization*, on the other, a thorough conversation is lacking. Though there is a steady increase impact by publication outlets specialized in matters of sustainability and organization/ work published articles either focus on specific aspects (Gálvez *et al.*, 2020) or treat our two phenpomena as two delimited units. We aim at departing from the increased demand for good work standards and social sustainability, and want to provide a comprehensive overview of ongoing important works and studies by renown scholars. Explicitly, our monograph will allow fellow scholars to get an overview of current research, and to integrate this into seminars and lecture series.

Book contributions

00 Social Sustainability and Good Work in Organisations: exploring how and why a recent phenomenon is being enacted

Klarissa Lueg & Simon Jebsen

Abstract

This chapter elaborates on the concept of social sustainability, and its connection to possibilities and hindrances for good work. Social sustainability, in organizational contexts, emphasizes the long-term well-being of stakeholders. Organizational long-term strategies should prioritize employee well-being, mental health, community engagement, and ethical supply chain management, inter alia. Distinct from Corporate Social Responsibility, which responds to immediate stakeholder expectations, social sustainability emphasizes durable, institutionalized measures. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals have nudged many organizations to implement social sustainability. However, many organizations have come under scrutiny for acting merely ceremonial, and the line between genuine corporate mission and ceremonial lip services has to be critically observed. Key chapters of this book explore social sustainability in numerous areas, e.g., in higher education (as sustainable knowledge in business students), in corporate communication (employee identification, corporate volunteering, and corporate heritage), and in sustainable human resource management practices. Workplace toxicity, especially towards minorities, is explored, highlighting both the role of bystanders, and the financial repercussions of ignoring workplace harassment. Digital transformation's social implications, employee well-being, and the importance of psychological safety in startups are addressed. The chapters, all together, signify the relevance of meaningful work for long-term societal cohesion, and individual fulfillment.

Exploring the Relationship between Sustainable Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Skills, and Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention among First-Year Business Students

Simon Jebsen & Sylvia Rohlfer

Abstract

This study investigates the role of sustainable knowledge and entrepreneurial skill sets on entrepreneurial intentions and sustainable entrepreneurial goal orientation among business school students. Recognising the potential heterogeneity among individual students' intentions towards sustainable entrepreneurship, a person-centred approach is employed using latent profile analysis to examine students' sustainable entrepreneurial intentions. Six distinct student profiles are identified, each characterised by a unique combination of sustainable knowledge and entrepreneurial skills, resulting in varying entrepreneurial intentions and orientations towards sustainable entrepreneurship. While sustainable knowledge and entrepreneurial skills have a lesser impact on the latter, their combination positively influences entrepreneurial intention. In contrast, a lack of sustainable knowledge leads to a less pronounced entrepreneurial intention. These findings have practical implications for business schools' active role in fostering sustainable entrepreneurship intentions. Student-centred and holistic pedagogical approaches, such as experiential and problem-based learning, are advocated to cultivate sustainable knowledge, which can serve as a strong

foundation for developing not only multidisciplinary entrepreneurial skills but also contributing to building social sustainability.

Enlisting employees in social sustainability activities: How organisations discursively position employees as volunteers in their communication

Trine Susanne Johansen

Abstract

Employee volunteering refers to activities where organisations support, encourage, or organise employees' involvement with causes and issues promoting external and internal social sustainability. Externally, such activities support organisational claims related to legitimacy and citizenship while promoting societal welfare. Internally, they are said to foster commitment, engagement, and employee wellbeing. Volunteering is seen as an instrument in maintaining and enhancing employees' connections to the organisation. It acts as part of subtle, normative forms of control whereby management seeks to strengthen employee identification, i.e., the extent to which employees define themselves using the same attributes and values they assign to their place of work. The study addresses how online organisational communication focused on employee volunteering discursively articulates the role of the employee volunteer, making available different identity positions: the externalised, the economic, the empowered, and the absent employee volunteer. By providing insights into organisational communication in relation to employee identity and identification within the context of volunteer activities, the study contributes to discussions on social sustainability and good work. In particular, it addresses how organisations discursively position employees as part of organisational social initiatives and thereby enlist employees into the service of their employers' citizenship activities. It identifies possible advantages of communicating social sustainability in terms of promoting employee wellbeing: However, it also points to disadvantages that stem from either failing to communicatively recognise the contribution of employees to organisation-driven social sustainability activities or from communicatively pressuring employees to view their ideal employee identity as contingent upon doing volunteer work.

Corporate Heritage and Social Sustainability: The role businesses can (and should) play in maintaining heritage and culture

Klarissa Lueg

Abstract

This conceptual chapter introduces the idea of corporate heritage communication as a part of a corporate social sustainability program. Corporate heritage communication (CHC) is described as a company's strategic effort to bring together stakeholder and corporate history and to connect it to contemporary missions, values and practices. CHC can assume an important sociocultural role as it can e.g., engage in and allow for storytelling that is not prominent enough to justify public archiving in form of large museums, but still has relevance for the communities a corporation is embedded in. For rural and remote areas especially, CHC can make a difference in collective memory and heritage preservation. The role of small and middle-sized companies is emphasized, as is the potential and feasibility of the 'micro-museum'. CHC as a form of stakeholder-oriented corporate responsibility is discussed against the dark sides that come with the megatrend of corporations engaging in sociocultural causes: the chapter discusses corporate legitimacy and isomorphism as the theoretical

background for the corporate megatrend towards social sustainability and points to the risks of 'heritagewashing' consorting with the numerous ceremonial practices of corporations.

The role of bystandership for socially sustainable and inclusive police organizations

Jens Rennstam & Katie Sullivan

Abstract

This chapter seeks to explore the intersections between occupational cultures, bystanders, and social justice and inclusion based on the empirical example of policing. Specifically, we pursue the question: what is the role of police officers as bystanders to occupational police culture and how does that influence inclusion? Against the backdrop of occupational culture, we put forth four key aspects of policing (social legitimacy, hierarchy, loyalty, masculinity) that are relevant for making sense of bystandership with respect to inclusion/exclusion in police occupational culture. Further, we present four stories about the experiences of police officers contending with the inclusion of minorities, each featuring a different type of bystandership (silent, indifferent, whistleblowing, and powerless). We argue that bystander engagement plays an essential role in maintaining the social legitimacy of the police, and in particular processes of inclusion and exclusion. Yet, due to the particularities of police organizations, including norms that prescribe, hierarchy, loyalty, and that privilege traditional masculinity, speaking up as a bystander may be complicated. In other words, the organizational culture and structure surrounding policing creates challenges for bystanders and for creating occupational cultures that support bystander engagement. We therefore – in contrast to individualized solutions such as bystander training – call for a stronger focus on occupational culture for facilitating bystander engagement.

How do investors react to problematic social issues in organizations? Evidence from the literature on workplace sexual harassment

Yassin Denis Bouzzine & Rainer Lueg

Abstract

This chapter assesses how investors react to public disclosures of problematic social issues in organizations by reviewing the literature on workplace sexual harassment. Based on a systematic review of 9 event studies examining stock price reactions to public disclosures of workplace sexual harassment, we find unanimous support for abnormal stock losses to firms that employ the individual(s) accused of sexual harassment due to profitability and reputation losses. Furthermore, authors detected stronger stock losses in case an executive is implicated, while corporate culture might be a moderating factor. The authors also dealt with the spillover effect of sexual harassment on organizations not directly implicated in an accusation and detected abnormal stock losses to organizations with female-unfriendly organizational culture and abnormal stock gains for female-friendly organizations. These findings come with important implications for organizational social responsibility engagement and wider social sustainability. We use these findings to point at implications for future research regarding current research gaps and methodological limitations.

“Digital transformation is 20 percent about technological issues and 80 percent about social issues” – Negotiating social sustainability in the course of organizations’ digital transformation

Angela Graf

Abstract

Digital transformation (DT) implies far-reaching organizational changes and holds potential to affect an organization at its fundamental core by raising the question ‘Who are we – and who do we want to be in the future?’ It not least challenges the previous constitution and opens up avenues for new management concepts, work modes, and corporate culture. Thus, it sparks (re)negotiation processes entailing matters of organizational identity and identification. Understanding social sustainability (SoSu) in the organizational context as a collective construct defined and negotiated among organizational members, that enables enduring well-being, I argue that DT implies rethinking how organizational members want to work together in the future and therefore concerns issues of SoSu (‘In what kind of organization do we want to work in?’ ‘What should our organization look like in the future?’). DT opens up the stage for discussions about what an organization must be like to ensure social well-being and offer an agreeable work environment. (Re)Shaping organizational structures and processes in the course of DT may therefore foster, but also decrease SoSu in different respects: On the one hand, DT holds the potential for co-shaping an organization aligned with organizational members’ needs and desires and thus allows for (more) SoSu. On the other hand, digital transformation may also impede SoSu, for example by overburdening employees. By referring to an in-depth case study, this contribution sheds light on the interrelationship between DT and SoSu and investigates how SoSu issues are addressed and negotiated during DT processes.

Psychological safety and social integration in a start-up context

Mia Thyregod Rasmussen

Abstract

This chapter applies the concept of psychological safety to a study of new employees’ entry in start-ups. This is a context where innovation is important, and both newcomers and the emerging organisations undergo learning processes. Psychological safety is defined as a group phenomenon, with consequences for interpersonal encounters, and the unique empirical context of the study facilitates an enquiry into perceptions of how psychologically safe environments are built in new organisations where groups are forming. Through interviews with managers and newcomers in five Danish start-ups, and a thematic and discourse analysis, a ‘social’ repertoire with two interrelated nuances labelled ‘functional social’ and ‘pure social’ was found, focusing on functional social aspects and collegial bonding, respectively. The discussion highlights interfaces of these two nuances, as well as theoretical and practical implications, with a view to social integration and social sustainability.

Leading for better health: using signalling theory and German panel data to explain leader's role in social sustainability

Lydia Bendixen

Abstract

A company's internal focus on social sustainability includes maintaining and promoting the occupational health and safety of its employees. The company's role in the occupational health of

employees is partially recognised and implemented. However, societal changes, such as social acceleration and the blurring of the boundaries between work and life, threaten employees' recovery. A lack of recovery in turn hinders health. To promote social sustainability in companies, it is necessary to support employees' recovery both at work and outside work. Supporting recovery is therefore the responsibility of companies through their duty of care. Leaders fulfil this responsibility, at best, through recovery-supportive leadership behaviour. The question of whether leadership behaviour supports employee recovery and thus maintains employee health is part of this chapter, which looks at social sustainability in organisations, particularly in relation to health and safety at work, through the lens of work and organisational psychology. This issue is addressed through theoretical models such as signalling theory and empirical findings. A four-year longitudinal study (2015-2019) based on a German representative sample (N = 3864) from the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health confirms that supervisor support buffers stressful work circumstances. The results show that the importance of leadership behaviour in the form of supervisor support for employee recovery is important for maintaining and promoting occupational health in terms of social sustainability.

The Sustainable HRM-SDG Nexus: Contributions to global sustainable development

Paul Baldassari, Michael Muller-Camen, & Ina Aust

Abstract

As companies are under pressure to show their commitment and progress to sustainability goals, they align their strategy and activity to globally accepted initiatives like the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This raises the question how SDGs could be connected to HRM strategies and practices to combine the global sustainable development transition with the transition of developing more sustainable organisations. Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) is a key element for companies' sustainability strategy and transformation. While research on the dimensions and different types of Sustainable HRM is increasing, practitioners are striving to evolve their HRM systems to include elements that advance overall goals like the SDGs. This chapter bridges the main elements of Sustainable HRM and potential contribution to SDGs by highlighting the wide range of interconnection of Sustainable HRM practices to the SDGs and their 169 targets. Based on previous research we derive the areas of Business Human Rights, Green HRM practices, support of migrants, diversity and inclusion management, health and well-being and learning as core elements of Sustainable HRM. This chapter further explores how each of these elements can support the SDGs and their corresponding targets. We estimate that they have links to all 17 SDGs and more than 40% of 169 corresponding targets. This highlights the importance of Sustainable HRM for advancing the SDGs. Finally, it indicates practical implications for HR professionals while encouraging future research of direct and indirect effects of Sustainable HRM on achieving the SDGs.