

Chapter 21

Sustainable Development and the Integration of Normative Standards

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability definition is still unclear, and requires more in-depth studies to expand their understandings and their effective implementations. One of the means by which to achieve organizational sustainability presented in literature is the use of the concept of Integrated Management System (IMS). Normative management standards such as ISO 9000, ISO 14000, OHSAS 18000, and SA 8000 stand out with large numbers of accreditation by the companies targeted for joint establishment of an IMS, and more recently, normative standards have been identified as mechanisms to ensure the sustainable development of organizations by the integration of economic development, social progress, and environmental quality. This chapter aims to show the evolution of concept of sustainable development; present a definition for the organizational environment; highlight the interaction term “organizational sustainability” with basic normative standards systems management; and guide organizations by describing how interactions between normative standards and the dimensions of sustainability can occur.

INTRODUCTION

In last two decades, sustainability concept has been expanding and gradually embraced by organizations and governments worldwide (Gibson, 2006; Mullerat, 2010).

Sustainability is a relatively new, evolving concept and no consensus exists regarding its definition and a true meaning. A great deal of research has been committed to developing the theme, and research-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3817-2.ch021

ers have created their own definitions and principles (Xu, Zao, Dawson, Hao, Zang & Tao, 2006; Siena, 2008; Singh, Murty, Gupta & Dikshit, 2009; Barron, 2010) what has caused difficulties in understanding and implementing the concept in the organizational environment.

The term sustainability has inflated, and it is becoming ambiguous with contradictory and obscure associations (Smeraldi, 2009). This conflation occurs due to different definitions and applications the term sustainability, sustainable development and organizational sustainability have received depending on the purpose of the study. Clearly, a precise definition of sustainability still lacks (XU et al., 2006).

Although the concept of sustainability does not present a common definition, John Elkington's 1987's definition, is widely used. It describes sustainability as mechanisms to ensure current actions do not limit the economic, social, and environmental options for future generations (Elkington, 1998).

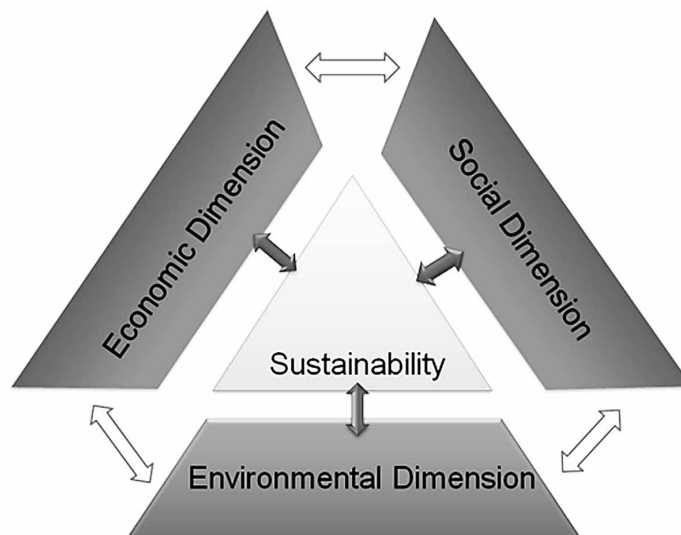
In the organizational environment, Barron (2010) explains that the key to sustainable development is to integrate economic development, social progress, and environmental quality. This integration is represented by the triple bottom line concept (Figure 1).

Economic dimension includes operating cost reduction through management of labor productivity, research and development expenses, and investments in training and other forms of human capital (Jamali, 2006). This dimension projects future prospects, as guided by the steady growth expectation; it also involves innovation concept as an essential element for its realization (Barron, 2010).

Environmental dimension primarily addresses the process, products and services impacts on the environment, biodiversity, and human health (Jamali, 2006). Performance improvement is associated to manufacturing and supply resources reductions in order to reduce pollution as much as possible (IISD, 2009; Dillard, Dujon & King, 2009).

Social dimension aims to guarantee workers' rights, promoting continuous improvement of workplace conditions through the establishment of adequate health conditions and safety. It involves effective engagement of stakeholders contributing to proactive participation of diverse actors, such as company, employees, associations, customers, government, and NGOs (Jamali 2006; IISD, 2009; Dillard et al. 2009).

Figure 1. Sustainability dimensions (adapted from Fresner & Engelhardt, 2004)



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