Call for Papers
Please Circulate Widely!

Transdisciplinarity in Corporate Sustainability

Guest-Editors: Stefan Schaltegger, Markus Beckmann and Erik G. Hansen

Background

A GROWING NUMBER OF BUSINESSES ARE DEALING WITH CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES. AS CORPORATE sustainability covers a wide range of complex topics such as emission reductions, biodiversity management, sustainability-oriented product and service innovation, sustainable supply chain management, or corporate influences on communities and regional development, its successful implementation depends on the contributions of experts from various disciplines in management, environmental science, psychology, sociology, economics, and related disciplines. In fact, the complexity of many sustainability challenges requires problem-solving approaches that transcend not only boundaries between academic disciplines but also between academics and practitioners. This is what transdisciplinarity is about. Transdisciplinary approaches, however, are just being developed. Both managers and academics are only beginning to learn to organize joint transdisciplinarity processes of analysis and solution creation. This is why a special issue on approaches to and experiences of transdisciplinarity in pursuing corporate sustainability is needed and timely.

Though transdisciplinarity relates to and shares aspects with other existing concepts and methodologies, such as action research, participatory enquiry, insider–outsider research, design thinking, cross-functional/interdisciplinary teams, amongst others, transdisciplinarity has some specifics and can be characterized by the following key points:

• Real life challenge as starting point. The starting point is not a theoretical problem but a concrete case of a complex sustainability challenge (e.g. a company has a large number of complex supply chains with substantial ecological, social, and economic risks which shall be reduced effectively). While many conventional research approaches are often model- or theory-driven, transdisciplinary research is phenomenon-driven and does not draw on prior assumptions.

• Complexity requires collaboration. Transdisciplinary approaches focus on complex challenges that cannot be fully solved within a single perspective or discipline. As a consequence, the creation of real, effective, and lasting solutions requires collaboration, both between academic disciplines and between researchers and practitioners.

• Joint clarification of the challenge at hand and collaborative problem definition. Given many complex sustainability challenges, the precise problem definition is often not clear-cut but difficult to specify in advance. Transdisciplinarity means that researchers and practitioners collaborate in a joint effort to describe the chosen real-world phenomenon and to specify the research problem to be addressed.

• Iterative joint problem-solving process. Following the joint problem definition, the analysis of the problem(s) and the development of solutions is not the job of academics or of practitioners only, but a co-evolutionary process between academics and practitioners. Transdisciplinarity involves practitioners not just as interview partners or

The journal Business Strategy and the Environment invites contributions for a special issue on ‘Transdisciplinarity in Corporate Sustainability’ which addresses the development of theoretical and practical perspectives.

Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment
receivers of reports but as providers of expertise. Thus, academics conducting research and corporate practitioners interact strongly and are not divided as much as it is traditionally the case. Research and the application of research methods have a ‘rolling character’.

- No strict separation between knowledge production and knowledge transfer. The created knowledge and practical solutions often do not fit into the traditional scheme of a discipline. In interactive transdisciplinary processes, these results are often directly tested, contested, modified, and advanced. The diffusion of the results is part of the interactive process and project development in the way that reality is changed through, for example, the modification of organizational practices and policies. Thus, knowledge production and diffusion happen in parallel, not after each other.

Theoretical and empirical papers are sought which focus either on one or both of the following (overlapping) aspects: (i) a corporate phenomenon (i.e. sustainability challenges) dealt with by applying a transdisciplinary approach (e.g. the development of more sustainable business models for private mobility through interdisciplinary academic–practitioner collaboration) or (ii) a transdisciplinary methodology itself (e.g. the actors involved in, processes applied to, and success factors inherent in a transdisciplinary method).

Taking a transdisciplinary perspective, papers could also study phenomena or methodologies stemming from various corporate functions (or cross-functional areas) where corporate sustainability could be advanced, including corporate strategy, research and development, accounting, performance measurement, supply chain management, human resources, etc.

Contributions may address but need not be limited to the following aspects:

- Theoretical and empirical papers are sought which focus either on one or both of the following (overlapping) aspects: (i) a corporate phenomenon (i.e. sustainability challenges) dealt with by applying a transdisciplinary approach (e.g. the development of more sustainable business models for private mobility through interdisciplinary academic–practitioner collaboration) or (ii) a transdisciplinary methodology itself (e.g. the actors involved in, processes applied to, and success factors inherent in a transdisciplinary method).

- Transdisciplinary approaches for integrating sustainability into the development of business models, corporate strategy processes, research and development, accounting and performance management/measurement, supply chain management, etc.
- Transdisciplinary approaches to the management of internal company sustainability (management) processes and multi-stakeholder processes.
- Case studies of companies involved in transdisciplinary approaches of corporate sustainability.
- Transdisciplinary projects in companies in transitory, emerging, and developing countries.

Papers more strongly focused on the transdisciplinary methodology itself:

- The links between methods known as action research, participative inquiry, insider–outsider research, design thinking, etc., on the one hand, and transdisciplinary methodology, on the other.
- History and evolution of transdisciplinary methods for corporate sustainability.
- Comparison and analysis of different transdisciplinarity approaches in corporate contexts.
- Conceptual and/or analytical frameworks for successful transdisciplinarity projects for companies.
- Requirements for successful transdisciplinarity projects and approaches for meeting these requirements.
- Systems, tools, and organizational structures for implementing and managing transdisciplinary processes and projects in companies.
- Analysis of indicators to measure the success of transdisciplinary processes in companies.
- Surveys and empirical investigations of the success, change, and cultural differences in transdisciplinarity practices.
- Intercultural differences in corporate transdisciplinarity practices.

**Coverage/Audience**

At present, management is confronted with multiple challenges, requirements, and developments in corporate sustainability. The way in which complex sustainability problems can be managed involving a multitude of actors
from different disciplines and different practical background experiences is still not entirely clear. What kind of approaches can support such transdisciplinary projects and processes for management? This call for papers invites studies that provide insights which will provide corporate managers and academics with new and much-needed transdisciplinary approaches to corporate sustainable development. Academics should be interested in this special issue because it will contain theoretical approaches, corporate practices that are empirically tested, and contributions to theory development.

The journal’s special issue is intended to provide a qualified overview of the most recent developments and the state of the art in transdisciplinarity in corporate sustainability.

Schedule

Contributors with ideas for papers are encouraged to communicate with the editors before submission by e-mail. The following schedule will be applied:

Submission of papers: 15 April 2012
Review deadline: 31 May 2012
Initial decisions made and authors informed: 15 June 2012
Deadline for revisions for journal: 30 August 2012
Final decisions made: 30 September 2012
Publication of special edition of journal: early 2013

Contributions

Full papers are invited to be considered for publication in the journal special issue. Paper submissions should be between 4000 and 6000 words for theoretical papers and empirical studies and should follow the editorial guidelines for Business Strategy and the Environment, which can be obtained from the website ‘Notes for Contributors’ (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-0836/homepage/ForAuthors.html). Submitted papers should make clear their relevance to business, management practice, and academic significance. We also welcome joint papers by academics and practitioners.

Guest Editors and Contact Information

Professor Dr Stefan Schaltegger
Professor Dr Markus Beckmann
Dr Erik G. Hansen
Centre for Sustainability Management (CSM)
Leuphana University of Lüneburg
Scharnhorststrasse 1
D-21335 Lüneburg
Germany
E-mail: schaltegger@uni.leuphana.de