
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND BUSINESS
Markus Kallifatides and Lin Lerpold (eds.)

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This book is dedicated to Marie Ehrling for her long commitment to enabling studies of management practice conducted by researchers at the Stockholm School of Economics. Her commitment to research has also greatly contributed to our mission of science-based education and, thus, our students' education. Marie has also acted as an important executive within the sustainability field. She is deeply knowledgeable of the dynamic nature between business and society, encompassing both challenges and opportunities, some of which this book addresses.

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Every year since 1992, the SSE Institute for Research (SIR) has produced an Annual Book.[1] As a sign of the times, this volume marks the third time the book has been written in English rather than in Swedish, for several reasons. Firstly, the Stockholm School of Economics is the workplace of many academics who do not speak, read or write in Swedish, and the invitation to participate in the Annual Book was extended to all academics at the School. Secondly, this year's theme of sustainability is inherently global (as well as local), and we intend for as many people as possible to be reached by our efforts at approaching, and formulating, these questions. We therefore extend our sincere gratitude to Michelle Vessel for her suggestions on how to write in the English language. We also thank Petra Lundin for her graphic design of the book.

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Stockholm, December 2016

Markus Kallifatides and Lin Lerpold

1 Up until 2009, the Annual Book was produced by Ekonomiska forskningsinstitutet (EFI), the predecessor to SIR.

CHAPTER 4

Sustainability – a popular management idea

MATS JUTTERSTRÖM

Introduction

A general trend within science is that the studied subjects are seen as exclusively in need of their own special theories, concepts and models. The European Union, Balanced Scorecard, states, visions, international organizations, etc., are basically perceived as something unique, clearly delimited from other social phenomena (e.g., Ahrne 1998). Sustainability – the subject of this book – is a significant example of the tendency above. The concept of sustainability[1], and its somewhat synonymous labels CSR (corporate social responsibility), SR (social responsibility), CR (corporate responsibility), and others, have recently become established as a necessity for more or less all organizations. Much has been written about these emergent concepts. We now have a sustainability literature largely, and remarkably often without reflection, mediating an image of uniqueness and delimitation.

The main argument of this chapter is, however, that much can be gained by seeing sustainability as an example of something more general. By seeing sustainability as *an example of something* we can increase our understanding of what the concept implies for business firms and other organizations. This is not only of theoretical value, but also of a practical value. It can contribute to an enhanced understanding among individuals in the processes of operationalizing sustainability – that is, those who are moving from discussing a rather vague overarching idea to the transformation of daily business operations

1 I will here define sustainability as an organization's responsibility for three areas: the environment, working conditions and human rights. While there are also other definitions and much conceptual confusion (Matten and Moon 2008), this definition is used by many practitioners and is reflected in widely diffused sustainability standards such as the UN Global Compact.

and products. In other words, who are going from talking to taking responsibility.

This chapter proposes that sustainability is an example of a management idea: a model for governing organizations. Accordingly, the argument here is that the prerequisites and mechanisms for other management ideas also largely apply to sustainability. Further, sustainability represents a particular kind of management idea, the category of management ideas that gain extensive popularity and diffusion worldwide. I shall refer to this category as *popular management ideas* (cf. Abrahamson 1996; Røvik 2002; Sturdy 2004). Other examples of management ideas that have reached significant diffusion and currency among organizations in recent decades are: *just-in-time* (e.g., Hutchins 1999), *business process re-engineering* (e.g., Hammer and Champy 1993), *lean production* (e.g., Pascal 2002), *outsourcing* (e.g., Oates 1998), *time-based management* (e.g., Stalk and Hout 1990), *matrix structure* (e.g., Burns and Wholey 1993), *total quality management* (e.g., Oakland 1993), *activity-based costing* (e.g., Cooper and Kaplan 1991), *Six Sigma* (e.g., Tennant 2001), *lean startup* (e.g., Blank 2013) and *balanced scorecard* (e.g., Kaplan and Norton 1999).

As illustrated in this chapter, there are many generic similarities between sustainability and other popular management ideas. As in the case of the other examples, sustainability: is produced to apply to a multitude of organizations; is expressed in forms of a particular kind of rule, the standard; is largely disseminated by consultants who want to profit from the concept; meets certain kinds of challenges on the managerial level in organizations, when implemented, and when used in daily operations. These different aspects constitute significant parts of the operationalization of the concept – production, diffusion, managerial decision-making, implementation and usage. On a general level, these aspects have long been studied by organizational scholars, and the chapter makes use of this literature to illustrate the similarities between management ideas.

However, even though there are considerable similarities that may contribute to our understanding of sustainability, it is relevant to ask whether it is only a question of similarities. Does sustainability represent something special, something that distinguishes it from other managerial concepts of how organizations should change and operate their businesses? To put sustainability in the same category as, for example, *just-in-time* and *balanced scorecard* may perhaps even provoke some readers. Anticipating this objection, a second purpose of the chapter is to investigate potential differences between sustainability and other popular management ideas on a more nuanced level. In the chapter, I thereby try to avoid binary standpoints, instead adding a more nuanced perspective to the basic similarity argument by discussing its limits. Regarding data on the operationalization of sustainability in the analysis, it is largely based on qualitative case studies (Jutterström and Norberg 2011, 2013) conducted by several researchers – Matilda Ardenfors, Tommy Borglund, Niklas Egels-Zandén, Magnus Frostenson, Staffan Furusten, Mats Jutterström, Markus Kallifatides, Peter Norberg, Sabine Walter and Andreas Werr – many of them active at the Stockholm School of Economics.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I illustrate that management ideas – sustainability and others – are rule-based, expressed as standards, and subject to fashion. Then, the emergence and diffusion of management ideas is discussed, as well as what tends to happen to them when diffused. After that, I turn to the question of how popular management ideas affect organizations, as well as to common problems of implementation. The chapter ends by summarizing the similarities and briefly describing some significant differences concerning sustainability – for example regarding the level of conflict at managerial levels when dealing with sustainability, and the role of external organization (rules, monitoring, sanctions, etc.) outside individual organizations.

Popular management ideas

MANAGEMENT IDEAS INVOLVE RULES

Sustainability, like other popular management ideas, is largely constructed in the form of rules for what to do, how to do it, etc. Rules constitute a generic element for trying to organize something. When many follow the same rules, this creates similarity and homogeneity, even among people or organizations far away from each other. Rules are often, but far from always, accompanied with other generic elements of organization: monitoring, sanctions, hierarchy and membership (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011). To what extent rules should be accompanied by other elements of organization – for example, monitoring and sanctions – is much debated in the case of sustainability.

Management ideas are usually expressed as a particular type of rule: the standard – that is, written rules where compliance is formally voluntary. Hence, management ideas are not binding, like laws and other directives.

Neither are they unwritten, like norms, but are usually documented (cf. Brunsson and Jacobsson 1998). Standards and directives are decided upon, in contrast to norms, making processes of decision-making important to understand the characteristics of, for example, sustainability standards (see Tamm Hallström 2004). In the case of sustainability, society clearly comprises many directives and norms concerning the environment, working conditions and human rights. But among practitioners, compliance to them are seldom referred to as sustainability. Sustainability concerns adaptation to written rules with higher ambitions than laws – non-criminal organizations are not automatically sustainable.

Here, it is important to note that the voluntary aspect of standards applies to organizations, but not to their members and employees. Once an organization has decided to introduce sustainability, or some other management idea, compliance with the rules is no longer voluntary for the members of the organization. Within the organization, the standard has become a directive. This also includes states, if we see them as organizations (Ahrne *ibid*). For example, the Swedish state has decided that some of its members, the state-owned companies, must follow certain sustainability standards (Borglund 2010).

Rules for how companies should operate their businesses vary in strength. What distinguishes a strong, or institutionalized, rule is that we take it for granted (Jepperson 1991). It is seen as a successful or obvious way of doing things. A sign that a rule, for example, a management idea, is strong is that it is difficult to criticize – even when there may be reasonable grounds for questioning how well it suits a particular organization. As with other popular management ideas exemplified above – for some time, at least – sustainability has attained a relatively high degree of institutionalization. It is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for large corporations, to choose not to pursue sustainability. Companies that deviate from this concept are often required to explain themselves, which is not always easy.

Rules can also differ based on whether they obtain widespread or more limited diffusion. Management ideas such as sustainability, outsourcing, just-in-time and balanced scorecard resemble one another in that they have attained rapid diffusion in the business world. The relatively high degree of institutionalization and diffusion are two basic features that unite many management ideas, sustainability and others.

MANAGEMENT IDEAS AS FASHION

Organizations are under a great deal of pressure to conform to what are generally regarded as the 'right' contemporary ideas. However, many management ideas quickly lose popularity and are replaced by new ones. A key explanation for such changes is that many ideas have the characteristics of fashions (Abrahamson 1996; Røvik 1996). Following a rapid rise to popularity, they generally begin to be perceived as passé. Which management ideas are seen as being right for organizations thus changes over time.

Fashion has two contradictory functions. It helps observers differentiate between organizations; that is, it allows us to distinguish between organizations that quickly embrace new organizational fashions and those that do not. At the same time, fashion makes organizations more alike, as more and more of them begin to follow the same popular management idea (Forssell 1999). Thus the necessity for organizations to reflect current trends and not seem outdated leads to many organizations portraying themselves in similar ways.

Business firms and other organizations also encounter demands of having their own identity, of being unique and of finding a niche in relation to other organizations. Identity becomes a fundamental characteristic of what it means to be a 'real' organization (Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Jutterström 2004). Some companies handle this dilemma between the demands for conformity versus differentiation by affixing their own labels to popular management ideas (Røvik 1998; Furusten 1999). The content of what they do may be similar to that of most organizations, but on the surface it is depicted as different. Companies can thereby portray themselves as both modern and unique. One example of this is ABB's T50 programme, founded on the idea of time-based management (TBM), which became popular in the early 1990s. Another example is IKEA's sustainability standard IWAY, introduced in 2000.

Companies and other organizations are constantly looking for new management ideas to show that they keep up with the trends or to try new approaches to perceived problems that old ideas have failed to solve (Barley and Kunda 1992; Brunsson and Olsen 1993). But it is not just the demand for new ideas that drives changes in management fashion. Consultants, gurus, authors of management books and so on – that is, the 'supply side' of management ideas – also make a great deal of money from the continual introduction of seemingly new management ideas that companies need help to learn, implement and so on. The reuse of old management ideas is common, but to be attractive, the ideas must not appear old-fashioned or obsolete. Recycling old ideas therefore often involves dressing them in new language (Røvik 1998; Hood and Jackson 1991): the label is new but the content is largely proven. As with other management idea labels, sustainability or CSR thus represent a contemporary 'package' of a much more long-lived content: business ethics. If the particular labels lose popularity, it is likely that other popular variants and abbreviations would arise to handle similar issues.

Not all management ideas follow fashion logic, however. Some ideas obtain a higher and far more lasting degree of institutionalization. Over time they become established, stable management tools. One example of this is the 'budget', a management idea that, despite its questionable efficiency, has long been an integral management model for organizations (Wallander 1994). A relevant question is why some ideas follow fashion logic and others become institutionalized (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Explanations for this are not necessarily functional; that is, management ideas that survive in the long term would be those that prove to be efficient. Barbara Czarniawska and Bernward Joerges (*ibid*: 25) raise another possible explanation: the ideas that can be presented as something natural for organizations and their activities are in fact those that have the potential to survive in the long term. Another explanation is that the amount of organization that emerges from a management idea is a determinant of whether the idea becomes short- or long-lived (e.g., Furusten 2002). Management ideas such as total quality management (TQM) and sustainability may be assigned new government agencies and university professorships to promote them, and different types of international organizations can emerge to support them, which increases the potential for these ideas to prevail.

WHERE DO MANAGEMENT IDEAS COME FROM?

Björkman (1997) describes that the four big management ideas of the 1990s – lean production, total quality management (TQM), time-based management (TBM) and business process re-engineering (BPR) – were all formulated in the US. More precisely, Boston, Massachusetts, is the source of many of these ideas, as central a location for the development of management ideas as Hollywood is for movie-making. The region around Boston is home to many prestigious universities, such as Harvard and MIT. It is also home to many of the world's multinational management consulting headquarters or major hubs, including McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group, Arthur D. Little and Accenture. The global market for management ideas is dominated by a handful of big consulting firms (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). New management ideas are often launched by people with ties to both high-status universities and large consulting firms.

In and around Boston, many modern management ideas are conceptualized and labelled; they are designed to serve as a clear and easy-to-sell product in a market (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Røvik 2000). The content of the ideas, however, may come from many other places. Björkman (1997) points out that much of the inspiration for later, US-developed, management ideas came from Japanese industry of the 1980s. Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) employ the concept of 'creolization' to emphasize that the content of ideas tends to have many and mixed origins, when it comes to both geographical origin and academic disciplines. All in all, the question of where popular management ideas are conceptualized is generally easier to answer than from where they originate.

Many organizations can be involved in settings where the forming and re-forming of 'new' management ideas occur. As mentioned above, this is not only done by consultants and universities, but also takes place in government agencies and other organizations, as in the case of TQM (Furusten 2002). John Meyer (1996) refers to these organizations as 'others', with the main purpose of influencing the activities of other organizations rather than their own. In doing so, they distinguish themselves from, not least, manufacturing firms.

WHEN MANAGEMENT IDEAS DIFFUSE

There are many who spread management ideas in society. Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) identify three main categories of carriers: consultants, the business press and business schools. They interact with each other, but also with the practices in the companies that the ideas target (Engwall 1999). Management consultants assume a more active role than the other two. They orchestrate companies more directly, whereas the business press and business schools are occupied more with reporting and analysing developments. Furusten, Werr, Ardenfors and Walter (2011, 2013) describe how a broad range of 'suppliers' of organizational recipes flocked around the increasingly popular labels of sustainability and CSR in Sweden during the first decade of the new millennium – a common situation for management ideas on the rise.

Management ideas are not stable entities as they diffuse. The distance between the transmitter and the receiver, for example, between one country and another, means that ideas tend to be edited along the way (Sahlin-Andersson 1996): only the general and overall gist of them is spread. The ideas become context-less, resulting in changes to their focus, content and meaning. Those who disseminate management ideas play both active and passive roles in these changes (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996).

Management ideas are disseminated to more and more organizations around the world. This had led to increased managerialism; that is, widely varying activities in society have come to be defined as organizations and as such require management concepts (Pollitt 1990; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000, Bromley and Meyer 2015). More and more organizations have become receptive to the management ideas that flourish in their surroundings. This applies not least to organizations in the public sector. One example is the idea of time-based management (TBM). In Sweden, organizations such as the Passport Police and Karolinska Hospital began using this idea in an attempt to reduce processing times; with its embrace of TBM, Västmanland County Council started to promote itself as 'the fast county' (Björkman 1997). Another example is management by objectives (MBO), a concept that most Swedish municipalities were using in the late 1980s (Hansson and Knutsson 1991). Sustainability is, for example, also widely applied by organizations in the public sector, although it has traditionally been associated with the domain of business firms.

WHY DO SOME MANAGEMENT IDEAS BECOME POPULAR?

What then determines whether a management idea will become popular or not? Kjell-Arne Røvik (2000, 2002) presents and discusses different answers to that question, potential explanations for the emergence of 'super-standards', as he calls them.

One theory of why certain ideas become popular is the 'instrumental-rational' theory. This theory posits that the ideas that become the most widely diffused are those that prove best suited as a tool for achieving desired results from a technical-economic standpoint. Rational explanations such as these are widespread in modern society, and are common – not least – in the management literature (that is, in all those books that tell us what we should do and how we should do it, usually easy to find in airport bookstores). But while some ideas may work well in individual businesses, it is difficult to find empirical studies that convincingly show the general strength of rational theory. Rather, there are many examples of the opposite. Ideas and concepts can become widely diffused despite not being specifically useful for improving efficiency in practice, or despite other ideas being more effective (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000). A second theory notes the symbolic value of the management ideas that spread. The ideas that become popular are those whose 'time has come' – that is, those that reflect widely shared contemporary values about what organizations should look like, how they should design their activities and products, and so on. Only ideas that are perceived as modern – that is, for which the time is right – can attain popularity according to this perspective, which sees the ability of organizations to stand against these ideas as limited (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott and Meyer 1994; Meyer and Jepperson 2000). While sustainability can at the general level be described as an idea whose time has come, this theory does not, however, help us to explain differences in the nature and diffusion of the numerous different sustainability standards that organizations may follow (e.g., Jutterström 2011, 2013).

Røvik (2000, 2002) has argued for a third, more nuanced theory of why some rules spread widely and quickly. Instead of explaining the popularity of rules in terms of how rational they are from a technical-economic standpoint, or by how 'well timed' they are, Røvik takes a more in-depth look at the general features characterizing the rules that obtain wide and rapid diffusion. He claims that seven such characteristics determine their popularity. Rules that spread quickly over great distances are: backed by an authoritative centre; presented as a universal recipe for success for all types of business; refined and adapted so that they are perceived as user-friendly and easily sold in a market; portrayed as something modern and new; perceived as good for all entities within the organization; given a sensationalized development history; and depicted as positive for the career and development of individual organization members. Simplicity is key for the ideas to attract many proponents, as in the case of the simple and widely diffused UN Global Compact sustainability standard (Jamali 2010). Simple concepts make for attractive options for the everyday complexities of organizations – characterized by dilemmas and other problems – at least until managers try to implement the concepts and problems usually emerge.

The characteristics of super-standards are not necessarily unfamiliar to those who construct and disseminate management ideas. Management consultants, among others, may be aware that the above characteristics help selling them.

WHY DO ORGANIZATIONS ADOPT NEW MANAGEMENT IDEAS?

So what happens when management ideas such as sustainability reach organizations? Is it merely the characteristics of the ideas that determine whether or not they are adopted, i.e., factors extrinsic of a potential user? Andrew Sturdy (2004), instead, mainly emphasizes the conditions within the recipient organizations as explanations for why they adopt new management ideas. He brings up six explanations as to why popular management ideas – sustainability and others – are adopted.

The first is the instrumental-rational theory discussed above. Sturdy posits the explanation that only ideas proven to work in practice (in a technical-economic sense) are adopted, against five other main explanations: the psychodynamic, the dramaturgical, the political, the cultural and the institutional.

The psychodynamic explanation stresses the need of managers to create an identity and to ease concerns by introducing, at least in appearance, order and control in the organization. Sturdy describes that this line of literature associates decisions about new management ideas with emotionality and impulsivity, with the effect of decision-makers having less insight of how the ideas will affect the organization.

The dramaturgical explanation highlights the rhetoric of those who disseminate management ideas. According to Sturdy, the literature that takes this perspective tends implicitly to treat companies as more or less easily duped victims in the hands of gurus and management consultants.

The political explanation emphasizes power-related reasons as a basis for whether or not organizations adopt new management ideas. Individuals embrace and argue in favour of ideas for career reasons, status and the like – not because the ideas in themselves may improve performance. People who control resources, decisions, the agenda, expert knowledge, informal networks and so on act as gatekeepers who decide whether to reject or permit ideas such as sustainability.

The cultural explanation focuses on the organization's culture – that is, on the set of values and beliefs that permeates the organization. This explanation implies that management ideas that fit with a particular organization's culture also have a better chance of being adopted by the organization in question. Thus corporate cultures can serve as a bridge or a barrier for the diffusion of individual management ideas, such as sustainability.

The institutional explanation says that organizations in similar settings will embrace similar management ideas. The demands of the surrounding environment and organizations' need for credibility become important in determining whether organizations adopt new management ideas or not.

Røvik's (2000, 2002) and Sturdy's (2004) contributions have many similarities. For example, both raise a number of alternatives to the instrumental-rational explanation, explanations that criticize the established view that the most effective solutions are automatically those that win out. And the psychodynamic explanation raised by Sturdy reflects a number of super-standard characteristics. Ideas that are packaged as something new, clearly structured, user-friendly and good for the entire organization are also ideas that are seemingly able to help management profile their organizations outwardly and provide a sense of order and control.

HOW DO MANAGEMENT IDEAS AFFECT ORGANIZATIONS?

How, then, do management ideas affect the business activities of organizations? A picture often painted of organizational reform, such as by adopting a popular management idea, is that when management has decided on a certain change, the organization's activities also undergo reform according to the decision. Decisions and actions conform.

However, the relationship between decision and action is much more complex in practice. One way of dealing with the question of how management ideas affect organizations is to distinguish between presentation and practice. 'Presentation' here denotes how the organization is described to the surrounding environment. Through its contacts with stakeholders and others, for example through its annual report, website, participation in trade fairs, recruiting and the mass media, the organization conveys an image of itself and how it functions. By 'practice', I refer to the day-to-day processes within the organization.

When organizations present their activities to the outside world, they need to demonstrate that they meet with external demands in order to be legitimate and attract the overall resources needed. Demonstrating conformity to contemporary institutionalized managerial ideas constitutes a significant part of what establishes legitimacy for business firms and other organizations.

Institutional organization theory contends that organizations are much more alike than different, and that this needs to be explained (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The question is – in what way are they alike? The fact that organizations resemble one another, at least on the surface, is in part an effect of certain management ideas having attained wide diffusion – many organizations state that they follow the same principles of how they are organized. The processes surrounding decisions about management ideas also contain similarities. Even if there are often explanations for decisions on adopting 'new' management ideas other than (bounded) rational explanations, rational arguments are usually needed to motivate the introduction of a management idea (Forssell 1999), such as sustainability. Those who want the organization to adopt a new management idea generally need to put forward arguments about increased efficiency and profitability, even if insight into how a general idea will affect the future organization is limited (Crozier and Friedberg 1977; March 1988). This sets management ideas apart from products such as clothes or music, where aesthetic arguments are more important than rational ones.

But the fact that organizations look alike on the surface, and in some parts of the decision-making, does not automatically mean that their content is the same. The degree to which presentation and practice conform is frequently discussed when it comes to sustainability – for many reasons, talking and taking responsibility do not necessarily correspond. This basic aspect is significant when analysing popular management ideas in general. An individual organization's practice generally deviates from the presentations to the outside world; in many cases, the deviations are substantial. In the following, I address three main reasons for the deviation between presentation and practice: time gaps, resistance and translation.

TIME GAPS, RESISTANCE AND TRANSLATION

One reason for differences between presentation and practice is the time gap between decision and introduction. Presenting and deciding on management ideas takes relatively little time. Implementing them in the day-to-day operations takes significantly longer. When a decision precedes a change (which is not always the case), there is a gap in the time between the decision and the introduction of, for example, a management idea (cf. Brunsson 1989). This time gap entails at least a temporary difference between presentation and practice. An organization can quickly begin to talk about a decided-upon change in order to gain legitimacy, giving the appearance that the organization has changed. But the actual change to the content of activities, and the effects of that change, often comes much later. The time gap also complicates reform attempts, since many things can change between decision and introduction. An organization's processes, products and stakeholders change over time, and thereby the conditions and requirements for the reform may change as well. Management's perception of what is good and bad also changes (March 1978, 1988). New management fashions emerge that seem more attractive than earlier reforms already introduced or underway (when the problems arise). New people with other preferences appear, while others take their leave.

Resistance to change is another fundamental cause of differences between an organization's presentation and practice. Within organizations, there is often resistance to decided-upon changes, for example, to adopt a new management idea. Resistance can be due to several reasons (e.g., Dawson 2003). It can stem from the reform bringing with it changes to social factors in the organization, such as identity, status and the distribution of power. The changes may apply to individual people and entire departments. Resistance may also be due to more practical aspects, such as relocation, reduced financial security, or periods of increased workload. It can furthermore be due to a general fear of the uncertainty brought on by change programmes.

Organizational memory can also be a source of resistance (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). People who have worked for a company for a long period may remember a time when the organization worked with similar management ideas, but used different labels. These people may also remember the problems that often occur when relatively simple management ideas are introduced to a nuanced, narrowly focused business; they may recall that popular management ideas seldom yield all the positive effects promised. But even as organizational memory can be an important factor for resistance in organizations, organizational memory loss can be a prerequisite for introducing new management ideas. Organizations with a large staff turnover, and a large proportion of younger employees, may thus encounter less questioning of changes, for better or for worse. Resistance can also be driven by stakeholders in the environment, for example, individual subcontractors, who think they will lose out with the implementation of a change.

Traditionally, resistance to a decided-upon change has been treated as a problem. Above, I gave examples of resistance based on sub-optimization – the individual's or department's best interest is placed ahead of that of the organization. But resistance is often an expression of concern about the function of business activities, and can build on insights into what is better for the business, or parts thereof – a concern that may be greater in the organization's departments than at the top management level. In large companies, leaders cannot be specialists in every part of the business. Rather, they are generalists who know a little about a great deal. Further, leaders are often recruited from backgrounds in other industries than the one they currently manage.

A third fundamental reason for differences between presentation and practice is that management ideas are often adapted when implemented in business operations. Røvik (2000) is opposed to the idea of congruence between presentation and practice, but also to descriptions of complete decoupling and hypocrisy, where change occurs only on the surface (e.g., Brunsson 1989). Often, the result is instead intermediate forms of adaptation that involve the translation of management ideas to the local context where they are to be used (see also Sahlin-Andersson 1996; Fernler 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 2003). Røvik (2000) emphasizes several such intermediate forms. 'Concretization' entails the interpretation and clarification of management ideas that are general and vague in nature to enable their use in local operations. 'Partial imitation' refers to situations when only parts of management ideas are introduced into the organization, while others are rejected. 'Combination' is a situation in which the different management ideas, or parts thereof, are combined but can still be identified as relatively independent parts. And, finally, 're-melting' refers to a more radical form of translation than combination. Different parts of management ideas are mixed and combined to such an extent that they can be regarded as new forms. The fact that management ideas are adapted, or not used, in day-to-day operations is not always known to managers. At the management level, it may be believed that reforms have been put in place and are working in a certain way, while actual processes and structures look very different.

Just as is the case with other popular organizational recipes, sustainability is subject to various forms of local adaptation. Kallifatides and Egels-Zandén (2011, 2013) describe the process of an electrification project that Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), a multinational company, carried out in a village in rural Tanzania. While the principles of sustainability adopted by ABB were relatively rigid on the corporate level, they were largely adapted to local norms and conditions in the process of implementation. At the local level, the project entailed both work in line with some of the principles and, to some extent for pragmatic reasons, clear violations of some of the same. From his study of business firms in the financial sector of Sweden, Frostenson (2011, 2013) states that the concepts of sustainability and CSR tend to be translated in the adapting business firms. The translation, however, is not always homogenous but may differ in various parts of an individual organization.

HOW CAN IMPLEMENTATION BE FACILITATED?

In summary, time gaps, resistance and translation are factors that counteract the standardizing effects of management ideas. Organizations' presentations of themselves become more alike than their practices. This applies to management ideas in general, including sustainability.

While translation represents a way of protecting (buffering) the technical core of the organization from its demanding environment – in some respect also facilitating implementation – resistance to and avoidance of a decided-upon change complicate attempts to reform business activities. There are, however, suggestions of how implementation can be facilitated by offsetting such complicating factors. Common advice given in the organizational literature is to try to change the organizational culture so that it supports the reform (Alvesson and Sveningson 2008), although easier said than done. Another common suggestion is to let the employees participate actively in the changes. The literature on organizational development often recommends a three-phase change process (Lewin 1947): (1) an unfreezing phase in which the management tries to strengthen the general perception that the current situation is not good; (2) a change phase in which the reform is carried out and supported by information, dialogue and education; and (3) a refreezing phase in which the change is stabilized and made routine. This model requires that a great many resources are invested to transform ideas into practice and to prevent resistance.

By using this model, or more elaborate ones devised in the same spirit (Kotter 1996, 2007), typical traps when trying to change organizations can, arguably, be avoided. Based on empirical data from some 40 change projects carried out in organizations in Scandinavia, Mårtensson (2003) states seven common change traps to avoid – e.g., the *neutron bomb trap* (excluding people and a human resource perspective from the analysis; the human factor is wiped out); *the poker trap* (where project leaders keep information secret from others); and *the jeopardy trap* (where the exact answer is given before any analysis of the prerequisites and needs of the local practice). Such generic traps, as well as suggestions for how to manage organizational change, are just as relevant to consider when implementing sustainability as they are in the case of other management ideas. The similarities argued in this chapter would be relevant for analysing both problems and solutions.

Differences between sustainability and other management ideas

So far in this chapter, I have used organizational literature to address management ideas in general terms. This review has demonstrated that popular management ideas – sustainability and others – share many important features: e.g., how they come about and diffuse, who participates in their diffusion, why they are adopted by organizations, implementation problems that frequently arise, etc. Such general aspects discussed in organizational literature can help us develop our understanding of sustainability, its causes, problems, effects and so on.

The question of similarities, and how far they extend, also brings us back to the initially raised question of differences. Are there any typical, generic characteristics of sustainability that distinguish it from popular management ideas in general, and if so, how do they affect organizations adopting it? I will end this chapter by suggesting three such differences: (1) sustainability causes more conflict within organizations; (2) sustainability is subject to more external monitoring and sanctioning; and (3) sustainability is largely perceived as a provider of legitimacy, while other ideas are generally seen as providers of efficiency.

MORE INTERNAL CONFLICT

In relation to other popular management ideas, such as Lean, TQM and Six Sigma, there seems to be substantially more conflict around sustainability at the managerial level within organizations. Borglund and Norberg (2011, 2013) describe how individuals and units in the upper management of organizations have varying views on sustainability and CSR, depending on their personal backgrounds, work tasks and the priorities of organizations.

Sustainability tends to affect and involve a large number of functions in organizations, including investment relations, personnel matters, finance, economic governance, information technology, operations, marketing, environment and information. Generally speaking, people responsible for the functions of finance, traditional investor relations and economic governance were more skeptical about the concept of sustainability, while the units of information, environment and personnel matters were generally more positive (Borglund *ibid.*). Further, the adoption of sustainability often implies the installing of a new sustainability unit, affecting other functions, as well as their responsibilities and internal relations. In 2008, one in every three large listed companies in Sweden had employed a sustainability manager (Grafström 2008).

Sustainability managers thus have to work in this internal political landscape of various sustainability advocates and sceptics, and changed relations between internal units – altogether described as a highly challenging task. In order to get anything done, this increases the demands on sustainability managers to master political leadership (establishing formal and informal power sources, etc.) and symbolic leadership (making use of culture, symbols and language). This situation can be compared to the use of popular management ideas such as Lean, TQM and BPR, generally perceived as exclusively a matter of improving efficiency, an established and relatively apolitical aspect of organizations.

MORE EXTERNAL RULE-SETTING, MONITORING AND SANCTIONING

The operationalization of sustainability comes in a multitude of different sets of standards, each and every one addressing many organizations. In an earlier study (Jutterström 2006, 2013), I mapped out 100 different initiatives. From the mid-1990s and onwards, the number increased dramatically – a veritable explosion of sustainability standards. Behind these initiatives are organizations that primarily set the standards for other organizations to follow. The two largest categories in this set of data were non-governmental organizations (NGOs, 41 per cent) and business associations (31 per cent), with governmental organizations, trade unions and hybrids as smaller categories. Such organizations do more than set standards. Besides setting rules, their main activities typically also involve monitoring, giving advice, publishing information, organizing conferences and networks, and applying pressure (see also Windell 2006). Business associations may be as demanding as others. For example, for companies seeking to join the transnational toy producer association and its national member organizations, adoption of their sustainability standard is mandatory (Jutterström 2011, 2013).

Compliance and non-compliance to sustainability standards generate great interest in society at large. Sustainability standards, which often come in elaborate and nuanced forms, also make it easier to analyze and judge the behavior of individual organizations. There are many organizations that monitor, analyze and critique other organizations in terms of sustainability – many more than set sustainability standards. Some of them also engage in activism, for example at shareholders' annual meetings (Sjöström 2007). For large organizations, a breach of sustainability rules – whether standards, norms, directives, or a combination of the three – tend to become topline news in the mass media, often causing serious problems for the organization involved. Critics' attention to, and understanding of, the fact that large organizations are complex social systems that are very difficult to coordinate and control, is often low.

In comparison to the other popular management ideas mentioned in this chapter – lean, TQM, BPR and so on – the picture is essentially different. A breach of Lean or BPR principles will hardly make it to the front pages of the mass media, and there is no multiplicity of organizations – nonprofits or others – that devotedly surveil compliance to Lean or Six Sigma, publishing 'blacklists' of violators. The fundamental difference between such other examples of popular management ideas and sustainability is that the latter is an idea about 'business in society' (Jutterström and Norberg 2013), a topic that has been the subject of vivid discussions for as long as business firms have existed.

SUSTAINABILITY – A PERCEPTION OF LEGITIMACY RATHER THAN EFFICIENCY

A fundamental difference between sustainability and other popular management ideas in general is that sustainability is mainly associated with legitimacy improvements, as opposed to other ideas which are mainly associated with efficiency improvements. The conception of legitimacy improvements is clearly reflected in the standard arguments for adapting sustainability (Jutterström and Norberg 2011, 2013): it attracts potential employees; motivates and keeps existing personnel; increases brand value and goodwill (also, it has been argued, strategic value); boosts reputation; and reduces overall risk for the organization.

Traditionally, efficiency arguments have been much less common, and rather perceived as a negative effect: increased legitimacy by adoption or expansion of sustainability would come at a cost of decreased efficiency (higher costs). The understanding of sustainability as an important efficiency improver, saving and keeping scarce resources (Jutterström and Norberg, *ibid.*), is more likely an effect of experience-based learning (Kolb 1984) in organizations that have implemented it. In comparison to sustainability, popular management ideas are generally perceived the other way around – they are generally seen as efficiency improvers (whether true or not), while the effects on legitimacy tend to be overlooked or underestimated.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the relevance of zooming out and generalizing to increase our understanding of sustainability. With the use of the organizational lens, generic similarities between sustainability and other popular management ideas have been described. Significant stages of operationalization have been highlighted, outside as well as within the individual business firm. The stages described are all relevant to understanding the many popular management ideas of our time and how they affect organizations. They have also illustrated the many typical dilemmas, complexities and other challenges that tend to occur when going from a rather vague idea to the transformation of daily business operations.

Although in the same category, some important differences between sustainability and other popular management ideas were also discussed. As many aspects of popular management ideas are in flux, further analysis of how the popular management idea of sustainability develops, and in some respects diverges from other ideas, seems relevant.

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