

Responsibilities of the water-supply and distribution companies

Water-supply and distribution companies (WSC) are companies dealing with one of the most crucial resources of earth. Thus, they have a special duty to meet sustainability and CSR issues. In the sustainability context corporate governance and ethical business leadership require explicit integration of environmental and social challenges in the corporate sustainability management of water utilities. In this context, the central research question is how water companies implement sustainability and CSR requirements in their management.

The challenges of a sustainable development and CSR issues are aimed at the development and implementation of intelligent sustainability-oriented infrastructure, energy and management systems. In order to be able to meet the requirements of a sustainable development and look after their social responsibility WSC should develop strategic options and integrate sustainability instruments continuously. Realizing system changes sustainability-related as well as social value chain processes have to be managed in an integrative way to generate a measurable contribution to the increase of the eco- and social-efficiency in the sense of corporate social responsibility. The main focus of a sustainable change should not only be directed towards the final goods and services of a company, however, above all result in an increase in the value of companies and society (Arnold and Hockerts 2010). Lux et al. (2005) emphasize the evidence of environmental and social management responsibility for supporting transformation processes in the WSC. The influence mechanisms of environmental and social aspects on the economic corporate success may not be underestimated because environmental and social issues have a marketable and a non-marketable character, whose effectiveness can have an effect on the company's success with the help of market, social and political processes (Schaltegger/Wagner 2006).

This study investigates to what extent water supply companies implement sustainability management tools and norms (e.g. ISO 14001, ISO 9001, Balanced Scorecard etc.) as well as confirm ISO 26000. Using literature studies and web analysis relevant data was collected. The data was prepared with the help of categories and by keywords (Bryman and Bell 2009). The corresponding management concepts and instruments as well as the CSR criteria were interpreted on the basis of qualitative and quantitative content analysis and by means of contingency analysis.

By analyzing 100 German WSE and their CSR aspects – including energy strategies and sustainability management – it could be found that the triggers for a sustainable energy use and a sustainable management were just marginally determined. Moreover, there is a lack in CSR communication and making CSR credible to public. The results make obvious that there are differences between municipal and private WSE facing sustainability requirements. The ecological and social responsibility of a WSC depends crucially on how environmental and social challenges are addressed conceptually, institutionally and instrumentally, i.e. social learning processes are initiated and integrated into the long-term economic management. In particular, climate change and sustainability are major challenges for WSC, but are still insufficiently integrated into management processes and external communications. However, a paradigm shift from cost to sustainability and cradle-to-cradle is necessary. This includes integrated and systemic strategic management approaches. These are available, although they have not been adapted yet in the WSC comprehensively. Good approaches provide WSC having own power (regenerative) generation and a strategic approaches concerning sustainability management. This can also be found in the municipal area.

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