

“SWITCH THE LIGHTS OFF”

Employee argumentation on acceptance or rejection of corporate environmentalism in a financial corporation

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Submissions goal

Traditionally corporate environmental management research has focused on the need for change in polluting industries and their environmental impacts. However, recently it has been discussed whether less polluting industries, e.g. financial firms (Coupland 2006) have environmental responsibilities and whether it should be integrated also in their organizational cultures. Prior research has created important contributions on our understanding of prerequisites of integration of environmental sustainability into organizations. However, one can find surprisingly little evidence on the arguments based on which the organizational members choose to adhere to environmental sustainability while others do not. This study focuses on the rhetorical strategies used by employees in a financial to accept or reject environmental sustainability among employing organization's responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework

The literature review is based on the research of internal environmental sustainability changes in organizations and external influence on those changes. Prior research has approached the question of accepting/rejecting environmental sustainability especially from the perspectives of managerial action and external stakeholder influence. It has indicated that especially four attributes lead to organizational acceptance of environmental sustainability among organizational responsibilities: integrative organizational cultures and collective learning process,

managerial pro-environmental actions and attitudes, positive emotions and fear of negative emotions and external demands. Whereas fragmented cultures and conflicting views, lack of managerial support, lack of external pressures and lack of formal environmental requirements concerning employees' jobs lead to rejection of environmental sustainability.

Method

Research material is based on interviewees with 30 employees in a Finnish financial firm. The interviewees held different positions and responsibilities in the organization. All the interviews focused on the meaning of sustainability in the interviewees' daily work and they covered the four themes: job description of the interviewee, views on sustainability in the corporation, internal sustainability communication and external sustainability communication. All the topics were openly discussed from the viewpoint of the employees' daily job.

I applied rhetoric as a loose theoretical framework for my data analysis. I focused on the arguments used to accept/reject environmental sustainability among corporate responsibilities. Rhetorical argumentation is seen in this study an essential quality of all language use and a persuasive feature in social interaction, when people aim to accomplish a common understanding. I identified seven rhetorical strategies through a five stage coding process.

Main outcomes and results

In this study I identified seven rhetorical strategies used by employees to accept or reject environmental sustainability. Four of them lead to rejecting environmental sustainability among employing organization's responsibilities. Those are exclusion from business branch responsibilities, distancing by job description, conflicting values with financial values and externalizing environmental influence. These categories were used to externalize environmental sustainability to different societal actors, excluding the corporation. Three of the categories lead to accepting environmental sustainability among employing organization's responsibilities. Those are association with own job, self-evidence and juxtaposition of past and present.

In conclusion, the results indicate that the process of accepting environmental sustainability is more complex and conflicting among employees than prior studies on integrative cultures and shared learning processes have shown. It is also influenced by specific features of different business branches, the opinion employee has concerning employing organization's environmental impacts, relationship

between environmental responsibilities and employee's own job and the value congruence or incongruence.

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