

Reference/Citation

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Stakeholders, Attitudes, and Sustainability: The Need for Attitude Convergence

By

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Abstract

There cannot be full sustainability under conflicting attitudes. This paper points out that if achieving full sustainability is the goal, then we must focus our current attention on generating a state of general attitude convergence: a world where the attitudes of governments, private organizations, academics, and the general public are pro-sustainability at the same time.

Introduction

From the sustainability point of view, it could be said that there are four main stakeholders: governments, companies, academics, and the general public. Their actions can be seen as attitude indicators. If they care about society and they show it, for example joining programs designed to reduce poverty in any of its forms, it is said that they have a good/responsible social attitude or a positive social attitude. If they care about the environment and they act, for example to protect it/improve it, it is said that they are environmentally friendly. If they care about the economic feasibility of a program and they act, for example, when it is economically sustainable, it is said that they are financially responsible or have a positive financial attitude. Hence, the social, economic, and environmental attitudes of different stakeholders play a role in determining whether or no we can reach a state of full sustainability.

Evolving government attitudes

Not long ago, governments were concerned only about social, economic, and environmental conditions at home, whether at the local or national level, as it was believed that they were immune to international dynamics. Today, governments are showing concerns about global issues too such as global warming, biodiversity loss and so on because it is known now that they may directly or indirectly affect conditions at home. This situation is forcing government to find ways to show positive attitudes toward local and global concerns at the same time.

Evolving company attitudes

Just a few decades ago, private organizations and corporations were dismissing environmental issues and social issues as no issues. Then, pressures from environmental groups made them to include environmental concerns within their production functions/ activities and the eco-economic development model was borne. Today, pro-eco-economic organizations and institutions such as the World Bank and WTO are being pressure to add social concerns within their development strategies and models in the name of sustainable development. Action appears to be moving towards the identification and implementation of more socially responsible eco-economic activities.

Evolving academic attitudes

Until very recently, academic attitudes toward environmental issues and social issues were close-minded or narrow-minded. Aspects that could not be quantified were left out modeling exercises or theories and issues for which no objective evidence was either at hand or could easily be gathered were left unattended until negative evidence justifying actions could be produced or accumulated. The modus operand of conservative academics was basically based on the notion of evidence before action, otherwise no action. Now, complex environmental issues and social issues have led scientist to consider prevention as a reasonable justification for scientific action leading to a more open minded or liberal scientific community: a community willing now to adjust previous models/decision-making processes to include environmental and social concerns as required by the more flexible sustainable development movement.

Evolving general public attitudes

Educating the segments of the general public who consume in excess per capita (the rich) and those who produce using inefficient methods (the poor) was seen as the central goal of responsible education programs. However, recently the production patterns of the rich and the consumption patterns of the poor have been seen also as environmentally and socially relevant. All these concerns appear to be reflected in so-called sustainability education programs, an education process focused on combining awareness about the impact of both production and consumption decisions on socio-economic systems.

The need for attitude convergence

If all four types of stakeholders display positive attitudes toward the goal of sustainability, then reaching a full sustainability state could be a feasible outcome. In other words, full sustainability scenarios require full convergence of stakeholders' pro-sustainability attitudes. For example, without a positive government or company or academic or general public attitude or any combination of them toward economic, social, and environmental concerns, full sustainability is not possible. Hence, the full convergence of positive stakeholder's attitudes is needed to achieve sustainable conditions.

The fundamental nature of pro-sustainability programs

Therefore, pro-sustainability programs must be geared at encouraging positive social, economic, and environmental attitudes at the level of government, the private sector, the academic sector, and the public in general at the same time. In other words, education/promotional programs must be directed to induce a pro-sustainability attitude across stakeholders at the same time if the desired outcome is full sustainability. This will, on one hand, ensure that eco-economic programs that are socially friendly are implemented and it will provide, on the other hand, an easy framework for monitoring sustainability processes.

Conclusions

As pointed out above, a full sustainability state could be possible. However, it could be reachable only when we have full positive attitude convergence. In other words, full sustainability is possible only if the attitudes of all stakeholders are pro-sustainability at the same time. Therefore, sustainability education must be about generating pro-sustainability attitudes across stakeholders.

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