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Varied Perspectives on Social Sustainability

FROM THE EDITORS

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This special issue of *Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* contains articles from two different conferences: the European Business Ethics Network (EBEN) annual conference, which took place June 14–16, 2017 at the University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics, Jyväskylä (Finland), and the CR3+ conference that took place April 28–29, 2017 at the Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki (Finland). The theme of the EBEN conference was ‘Searching for Sustainability in Future Working Life’ and the theme of the CR3+ conference was ‘Making Corporate Responsibility Useful’. The EBEN conference was organized in cooperation with the WeAll Research Consortium’s ‘Social and Economic Sustainability of Future Working Life: Policies, Equalities and Intersectionalities in Finland’ (funded by the Equality in Society programme, Strategic Funding of the Academy of Finland, no. 292883), the University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics, the University of Tampere School of Management and the Finnish chapter of EBEN. The CR3+ conference was co-organized by the Hanken School of Economics (Helsinki, Finland), Audencia Business School (Nantes, France), ISAE/FGV (Curitiba, Brazil) and La Trobe University Business School (Melbourne, Australia). The theme ‘Making Corporate Responsibility Useful’ embraced a variety of contemporary discussions on corporate responsibility and sustainability, including local and global perspectives.

Sustainability and responsibility are often understood as overlapping and co-evolving concepts despite their differences and distinctions (e.g. Montiel, 2008). Whereas the term corporate responsibility was originally developed to address the responsibilities of individuals in business, particularly managers (Bowen, 1953), sustainability as a concept emerged in the 1970s because of a new mandate for economic growth without environmental damage, which was adopted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Conservation Strategy in 1980. The report of the Brundtland Commission in 1987, whose main question was ‘How can the aspirations of humankind for a better life be reconciled with the limitations set by nature?’, is considered particularly influential. Understandably,

over the course of time, the concept has been reinterpreted and remoulded by different fields of science and researcher traditions. Partly due to its origin, the discussion around sustainability has often focused on environmental aspects. However, for both concepts, economic performance has been a key driver for legitimizing sustainable and responsible practices in business, while the other influences of society and working life have been downplayed (see Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Banerjee, 2000).

In this special issue, we think outside the business box and elevate discussion towards the integration of multiple aspects of sustainability and responsibility. The last decade has seen a significant and lively debate on changes in society, including social, technological, cultural, economic and environmental changes, among others. These issues are linked and, consequently, can enhance social sustainability from varied elements in management practices, planning and leadership.

In the first article, Sümeyye Kuşakcı addresses the analysis of historical texts in managerial sustainability. In particular, the author introduces the Islamic worldview on justice and its key role in sustainability in management which has been overlooked by academic research. The authors in the second article, Jarkko Jalonen and Tuomo Takala problematize ethical decision making in the debt collection process by studying the debtors’ ethical perceptions of the debt collection process. Based on their empirical data, they suggest that a debtor often perceives debt collection as expensive, greedy and uncompromising. In the study, the dissatisfaction of the debtor is explained as being due to the nature of the debt collection industry, in which one solicits a service and another is obligated to pay.

The third article is by Jaana-Piia Mäkinen and Kirsi Heikkilä-Tammi, and it introduces an empirical study on how mindfulness training can promote sustainability in the workplace. Mindfulness training, it has been suggested, can at the very least indirectly support employees’ well-being through the employees’ mindfulness, positive emotions and hopefulness. Hanna Salminen, Mika Vanhala, Mikaela von Bonsdorff and Monika von Bonsdorff examine perceived high involvement work practices

and retirement intentions, which strengthens the discussion of sustainable human resource management. In this fourth article, the authors demonstrate the direct association between perceived high involvement work practices and an employee's job withdrawal intention, supporting the idea that these practices are significant in relation to older employees' intent to continue working up to and beyond their retirement age.

These micro-level investigations are complemented by the fifth article. Taneli Vaskelainen and Nina Tura bring forth the complexity of the 'sharing economy' concept and its definitions. To elaborate the concept and its use, they create a framework for problems in the sharing economy that links a specific problem discourse to a specific actor and a specific stakeholder group. The authors also map risks related to the sharing economy that appear as underrepresented in previous research.

To conclude, there is a need to pursue both environmental and social sustainability in organizational issues as well as in organizations themselves and in sectors and markets. As the articles in this special issue demonstrate, we must move beyond 'one size fits all' solutions. Ultimately, holistic, critical and transgressive thinking and acting are urgently needed not only in organizations but in the discussions on the impacts business and society have on each other. We therefore hope that the studies introduced in this special issue will pave the way for thinking and actions in this direction.

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