

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Shirley-Ann Augustin Behravesh

Will defend her prospectus

**Sustainable Business Practices, Organisational Culture and
Their Influence on Corporate Sustainability Performance**

Abstract

The prevailing paradigm of neoclassical economics focuses on maximization of shareholder value. This value maximization often encourages companies to favor resource harvesting over preservation for future generations, externalize wastes and pollution, and ignore the societal and environmental impacts of their operations. Production cycles are energy intensive, and are based on utilizing resources as if they were unlimited. Businesses typically pursue sustainability goals only when doing so is in their interest, e.g., to save costs, comply with legislation, respond to pressure from stakeholders, or enhance the company's image.

During the past two decades, it has become widely recognized that business organizations *can and should* reduce their negative environmental and social impacts to address sustainability challenges. Corporations have become institutions of global influence, and society expects them to be responsible for more than the mere production of goods and services. Stakeholders look to them to solve the environmental and social problems and to contribute to larger social and environmental goals, as well. Sustainability *has* become a business concern, but still primarily because of the competitive advantages it produces in forms such as waste minimization, green product design, reduced fines for violating environmental regulations, and improved community and stakeholder relations. Many researchers see corporate sustainability endeavors as superficial technical fixes. They see the neoclassical economic assumptions that have long formed the basis of corporate operations as insufficient to address sustainability problems, and argue that corporations can only contribute to global sustainability by implementing initiatives that gradually change attitudes and business operations to align with sustainability principles.

My research examines the sustainable business practices that have been adopted by businesses. Sustainable business (SB) practices are actionable organizational pursuits that are based on sustainability principles. These practices can be adopted individually or in bundles; and research has shown bundles to be the more effective option. SB practices that have been bundled, work simultaneously and synergistically to create a high quality, effective sustainability strategy. The first phase of my research asks, "What bundles of SB practices do businesses adopt?" and "Which of these bundles are strongly associated with successful sustainability performance?" The second phase links the discovered SB practice bundles to organizational culture. Organizational culture plays a major role in business-strategy selection and

performance, and some have argued that it is the ultimate source of organizational change towards sustainability. I therefore ask the question, "Are the SB practice bundles that an organization implements related to its culture?"

I will use surveys and document review to answer these questions. A panel of business and academic experts will validate questions of sustainability performance. Cluster analysis will be used to identify bundles of SB practices, and by evaluating the sustainability performance of each organization, I will be able to identify the more effective practice bundles. Analysis of variance and t-tests will be used to evaluate the relationship between organizational culture and the SB practice bundles adopted.

By empirically identifying the various clusters of SB practices that are being used by businesses, and linking those to sustainability performance and organizational culture, we can evaluate the bundles in terms of suitability, effectiveness, and comprehensiveness. The evaluations constitute significant practical findings that can be used by organizations to effect change towards sustainability in their operations.

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

1:00 PM

WGHL102

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

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