

Doctoral Program “Ethics and Responsible Leadership in Business”

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RESEARCH AND DISSERTATION TOPICS

The research activities at the Chair for Corporate Sustainability Management focus on the theory and practice of corporate sustainability management, corporate social responsibility and business ethics. Furthermore, we are also interested in stakeholder relations, sustainability-oriented (business model) innovation and purpose-driven venturing through social entrepreneurship, social business or organizational hybrids. We welcome both conceptual and empirical research. Possible research topics and questions include the following but are not limited to them.

Possible Dissertation Topics

Governance of sustainable value chains and political role of the firm

Companies are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their entire value chain. To this end, they collaborate with suppliers but also in multi-stakeholder-initiatives (MSIs). In such rule-setting processes, firms step out of their economic role and take on a political role. This also happens in political CSR, e.g., when companies engage in lobbying.

- What are success factors for sustainable value chain governance or multi-stakeholder initiatives? What role do different forms of stakeholder collaboration play?
- What are the limits of MSIs? What defines them?
- Under what conditions can companies create and appropriate value through sustainability-oriented political CSR?
- What competences and internal structures help companies to take on value chain responsibility? What kind of enabling environment is needed?
- What are the risks and dark sides when companies take on a political role?

Business and Human Rights

Business affect human rights through their own activities as well as through their value chains. At the same time, business is also affected by human rights challenges as the latter impact how stakeholders can create value with the firm.

- How can companies contribute to promoting, respecting, and implementing human rights?
- Where are the boundaries of corporate responsibility for human rights and how do these boundaries change?
- How can companies create a *business case for human rights*? What drivers and barriers are relevant in this regard?

- How does the increasing competition with non-Western firms influence the role of human rights considerations for Western companies?
- What role do stakeholder partnerships play for managing human rights?

Managing trade-offs in sustainability and the search for the business cases

Companies often face trade-offs when managing profitability and sustainability or ethics. While win-win businesses cases try to overcome trade-offs, win-win solutions are difficult to find and not always possible.

- How do companies address perceived trade-offs empirically? What drives their perception? How do they rank or prioritize conflicting goals? How do they position themselves within trade-offs?
- What strategies do companies use to overcome trade-offs? What contingency factors influence their behavior?
- What role do mental models play for perceiving trade-offs and the search for business cases?
- What role can stakeholder dialogue play in managing trade-offs and finding win-win-solutions?

Social entrepreneurship and other forms of impact-oriented venturing

Social entrepreneurs use economic venturing to address societal challenges. In addition to conventional for-profits, hybrid or non-profit organizational forms such as social business emerge with the mission to actively create positive impact.

- How does the management of impact-oriented organizations differ from for-profit businesses?
- How can organizations measure and scale their social impact?
- How do impact-oriented business models differ from conventional ones?
- What role does cross-sector collaboration play for social entrepreneurship and social innovation?

Organizing sustainability and responsible management within the firm

Sustainability and responsible management require adequate forms of internal governance, organizational structures and leadership.

- What are internal governance options for organizing sustainability? What contingency factors influence which governance form works best?
- How do internal sustainability governance and strategy interact?
- What are advantages and disadvantages of new governance approaches such as B-Corp, Verantwortungseigentum etc.?

The “dark side” of morality and morally motivated management

Despite noble intentions, pro-social approaches such as social entrepreneurship, CSR or sustainable products can also have negative non-intended effects. Similarly, moral behavior can have a dark side.

- What are the dark sides of specific phenomena or instruments such as social entrepreneurship or impact measurement? What are options for mitigating the dark side?
- What are potential challenges for dialogue or learning that can arise when stakeholders hold strong moral convictions?
- How can companies deescalate morally laden debates? What are methods, barriers, success factors for finding common ground beyond moral polarization?
- What are implications for stakeholder engagement or communications strategies?

Introductory References

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For more references, see <https://scholar.google.de/citations?user=HXfRg7YAAAAJ&hl=de&oi=ao>