

Doctoral Program "Ethics and Responsible Leadership in Business"

PROF. DR. LAURA MARIE EDINGER-SCHONS

RESEARCH AND DISSERTATION TOPICS

The main research focus of Prof. Dr. Laura Marie Edinger-Schons is studying the responsibilities of companies and consumers in society, as well as the respective reactions of stakeholders to CSR activities. Her work is characterized by an empirical orientation. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, she analyzes data from companies, customers, and employees. The underlying research question is how companies can manage responsibly in the face of changing stakeholder expectations and globalized market structures. For this purpose, Prof. Dr. Laura Marie Edinger-Schons studies the various interests of internal and external stakeholders. She is also interested in the question of whether consumers can be held responsible for the negative consequences of their consumption decisions and how companies can motivate consumers to show more sustainable consumer behavior.

Possible Dissertation Topics

Stakeholder Democracy

Businesses increasingly have political power. Through philanthropic donations, they provide important public goods and thereby assume a quasi-political role. However, the distribution of these budgets is usually not democratically legitimized. There is a "legitimacy gap" or "social issues gap". There is a growing discussion about the internal structures of companies that are often anything but democratically organized. In some contributions, "stakeholder democracy", i.e., the participation of stakeholders in decision-making in the company, is proposed as a solution to the problem. Many companies are already taking first steps in this direction. Keywords such as "Employee Empowerment", "Employee Engagement", "Agility" are used to describe these aspirations. Research has so far largely lacked empirical studies that address these phenomena from a stakeholder perspective. When and how do you want to involve stakeholders in decision-making processes? What positive or negative consequences can such integration have for the stakeholders, the company, and society?

- de Jong, G., & Van Witteloostuijn, A. (2004). Successful corporate democracy: Sustainable cooperation of capital and labor in the Dutch Breman Group. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18(3), 54-66.
- Turnbull, S. (1994). Stakeholder democracy: redesigning the governance of firms and bureaucracies. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 23(3), 321-360.

- Matten, D., & Crane, A. (2005). What is stakeholder democracy? Perspectives and issues. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 14(1), 6-13.

Corporate Political Activity and CEO Activism

Lobbyism and political influence of companies are no new phenomena. However, it has recently been observed that CEOs are taking a more political position. In the US, this phenomenon has been sparked by the current political polarization and the Trump administration. Apple, Starbucks or Nike are just a few examples of companies that are committed to political ends. In German-speaking countries, similar incidents are already being observed, such as Joe Kaeser, who, along with some other German managers after the incidents in Chemnitz feels responsible to engage in action against the AfD and the radicalization in Germany. Initial research shows that these activities are seen by the company's stakeholders as both very positive and sometimes critical. This still very recent field of research still offers numerous opportunities for empirical studies on psychological processes that explain the reactions of stakeholders, as well as potential contingency factors that explain heterogeneity in the responses. What factors explain positive or negative reactions to CEO Activism? Which theories can be used to explain these reactions (e.g., attribution theory). Which individual predispositions of stakeholders (for example, Right-Wing Authoritarianism) play a role?

- Hillman, A. J., Keim, G. D., & Schuler, D. (2004). Corporate political activity: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 837-857.
- Lux, S., Crook, T. R., & Woehr, D. J. (2011). Mixing business with politics: A meta-analysis of the antecedents and outcomes of corporate political activity. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 223-247.
- Chatterji, A. K., & Toffel, M. W. (2016). Do CEO activists make a difference? Evidence from a field experiment.
- Chatterji, A., & Toffel, M. (2015). Starbucks' "race together" campaign and the upside of CEO activism. *Harvard Business Review*, March, 24.
- Chatterji, A. K., & Toffel, M. W. (2018). THE NEW CEO ACTIVISTS A PLAYBOOK FOR POLARIZED POLITICAL TIMES. *Harvard Business Review*, 96(1), 78-89.

Corporate Digital Responsibility

In the increasingly digitized world, companies have a new responsibility, not least because they have access to the extensive data they collect through their business operations. On the one hand, they have the responsibility, in the context of data protection, to handle this data carefully (for example, not to disclose it to third parties). In addition, they often have the potential to initiate or support positive environmental or social developments. Many companies are currently trying to guard against negative privacy scandals. Due to this far-reaching uncertainty, less attention is being paid to the positive potential that digitization brings with it. There are many important questions for empirical research:

which new social responsibilities arise from digitization (beyond the legal responsibility to protect data)? How do the companies deal with this? What strategies can companies use to leverage their newly acquired data power for positive purposes? What new business models or intersectoral partnerships can emerge that can support this positive development?

- West, S. M. (2017). Data capitalism: Redefining the logics of surveillance and privacy. *Business & Society*, 0007650317718185.
- Zuboff, S. (2015). Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization. *Journal of Information Technology*, 30(1), 75-89.