

Strategies for transnational management of sustainability: An empirical analysis and implications

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Abstract

An increasing number of companies are now managing and reporting their environmental and social performance and seeking to adopt practices to support sustainable development (SD). However, the management of SD performance remains less understood. Moreover, while SD is necessarily about global impacts of economic activities, the management of SD practices in global companies is even far less understood. This paper focuses specifically on global management of SD in transnational corporations (TNCs) operating across multiple and diverse jurisdictions and social, environmental and economic contexts. 160 SD practices in 6 functional areas were studied in-depth in 24 cases across four TNCs in the pharmaceutical, energy, air travel and ICT sectors. This study revealed details of transnational management of SD in TNCs, i.e. the strategies and processes for on-going management of SD practices in international operations. The fine grained insights into micro-processes within the TNC, and influences of the multi-level context, obtained in this study highlight the intricacies of transnational management of SD in TNCs. This paper presents a framework of approaches for transnational management of SD in TNCs and analyses the implications for business and for SD performance. Several areas for future research are also identified.