

# SUSTAINABILITY

# BUSINESS AND SOCIETY 360

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BUSINESS AND SOCIETY 360  
VOLUME 4

# SUSTAINABILITY

EDITED BY

**DAVID M. WASIELESKI AND  
JAMES WEBER**

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# **PREFACE TO VOLUME 4 ON SUSTAINABILITY**

David M. Wasieleski and James Weber

## **INTRODUCING THE *BUSINESS AND SOCIETY 360* BOOK SERIES**

*Where are we? How did we get here? Which way should we go now?*

Sound familiar? Have you ever considered the answers to these questions related to the work you do? Existential moments are common in the maturation of any academic discipline. They are the product of a passionate, caring constituency that is careful about making meaningful contributions that can propel future research and provide illusory discoveries that are conceptually powerful, empirically sound, and practically useful.

It is in this spirit for academic progress that we proudly continue the *Business and Society 360* (*BAS 360*) annual book series. *BAS 360* is an annual book series targeting cutting-edge developments in the broad business and society field. Our series began three years ago with Volume 1 on “Stakeholder Management.” Volume 2 was published a year later on “Corporate Social Responsibility.” Then in 2019, we focused Volume 3 on “Business Ethics.” Each volume features a comprehensive 360-degree discussion and review of the current state of the research and theoretical developments in a specific area of business and society scholarship. The goal of this series is to shape future work in the field around our many disciplines and topics of interest, to enlighten scholars in the area about the most productive roads forward. Essentially, at this crossroad, which way do we proceed?

The 360-degree view is intended to reflect on a theory’s cross-discipline research, empirical explorations, cross-cultural studies, literature critiques, and meta-analysis projects. Given our multi-disciplinary identity, each volume draws from work in areas both inside and outside of business and management.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THIS VOLUME ON SUSTAINABILITY**

Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2015) released AQ4 a detailed report analyzing over 73,000 published works on climate change. While

consensus on the specific conclusions of the studies remains elusive, the volume clearly concludes that climate change is having a profound effect on every ecosystem across the globe. The report also suggests a potential cause is human activity organized in large part through business organizations. There is indeed a “sustainability imperative” facing managers and organizations (Savitz & Weber, 2006). The greatest obstacle to adopting a triple-bottom line approach (People, Planet, Profit) is the lack of an emotional engagement between humans and nature (Shrivastava & Statler, 2010). Clearly, a deeper awareness and understanding of business-nature relationships is essential in order to transform existing business models to deploy progressive strategies toward environmental sustainability (Cyphert & Saiia, 2003). Freeman and Harris (2009) state that business processes and ethical issues need to be seen as other ways for individuals to create meaning. Only then might issues like sustainability be thought of as an intrinsic part of power, authority, authenticity, and imagination, leading to a new set of business practices toward sustainable value (Freeman & Harris, 2009, p. 691).

Oakley, Chen, and Nisi (2008) claim that, despite attempts to increase sustainability initiatives, the level of changed behavior among individuals is disturbingly low. Thus, there seems to be growing acknowledgement that one challenge that is changing sustainable behavior among managers must include changing the mindset about the relevance and importance of sustainability issues. In this volume of *BAS 360*, we acknowledge that there is a lack of complete consensus about what all sustainability entails or how it is specifically defined. Our 360-degree presentation of environmental and social sustainability in this book relies on a broad definition of the term. Consistent with the subsequent chapters, we utilize the commonly accepted Brundtland Commission’s (1987) definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” p. 24), as an organizing frame. This definition implies a long-term orientation, which is somewhat inconsistent with classical economic and managerial assumptions that emphasize instrumental economic rationality and a short-term focus. We consider sustainability as a major current moral issue that needs to be addressed in novel ways.

Our awareness and understanding of sustainability issues has indeed progressed greatly since early movements emanating from the *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962). Modern conceptions of corporate sustainability stress that an organization’s normal business activities should include a consideration of the long-term needs of both social and environmental stakeholders (van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003). It is clear that these stakeholder concerns should be addressed and balanced concurrently, but in reality, they are often treated separately and in conflict (Gao & Bansal, 2013). The common definitions of sustainability provide a business case for environmental stewardship, where corporate sustainable activities are instrumental for the organization’s strategic purposes. What is missing is the underlying normative claims that can inform business behavior toward sustainability. With an overemphasis on companies’ going concerns, often corporate sustainability does not include a broader societal concern for ecological sustainability. Human flourishing for the present and future generations needs to be

the primary driver of sustainability management. We need to overcome barriers to sustainability by integrating knowledge across areas and disciplines (Maher, Maher, McAlpine, Mann, & Seabrook, 2018). This present book volume attempts to integrate different research to move the field forward.

Scholarship in sustainability has moved beyond widespread recognition of the triple-bottom line (people, profit, and planet) (Elkington, 1997), due to its narrow application. Arguably, our dominant theories emphasize more the relationship between profit and people, rather than on people and planet. Currently, we live in a new era defined by humans' dominance over the planets ecological and geological systems. The Anthropocene Era (Whiteman, Walker, & Perego, 2013) is a result of the "great acceleration" in human activities that have adversely affected the natural environment since the Second Industrial Revolution. We have reached the point of breaching planetary boundaries that sustain life on Earth (Steffen, Broadgate, Deutsch, Gaffney, & Ludwig, 2015). The impacts of human influence on global climate change has been documented in international research programs (Barnosky, Ehrlich, & Hadly, 2016). Thus, we need to advance our scholarship on sustainability to address these grand challenges. Certainly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for scientists, academics, professionals, and citizens from all walks of life to address the issues humans have created that affect society and the environment. We see this fourth volume of *BAS 360* as an important collection of work that moves forward our understanding of sustainability issues affecting business and society. The following chapters reflect on what we know about sustainability and speculate about future work. We are gratified to have some of the leading scholars in the field who offer their perspectives on sustainability and their suggestions on how these global challenges can be addressed for the benefit of the planet and society.

This volume is broken down into three main sections that take us on a journey from reflections on the development of the sustainability field from theory to practice. Part I features four chapters on Theoretical Advancement and Model Building to set the conceptual foundation for sustainability research. The second section focuses on Practical Applications. Here, the six chapters address specific practical issues related to sustainability. Finally, we end with a chapter that applies the field's knowledge about sustainability to future scholarship. New frontiers in business and society scholarship are highlighted in this last part of the book.

Our lead chapter in Part I features the work of Paul Shrivastava and Laszlo Zsolnai. Their chapter, "Business and Society in the Anthropocene" reviews the main challenges for the business and society field in addressing sustainability in the modern era. Their forward-looking perspective repositions business and society scholarship to enable the field to better address sustainability issues in the future. They invite us to rethink business' purpose and calls on researchers to modify the business-nature relationship. New directions for BAS scholarship are offered based on these insights.

Chapter 2 also takes a large-scale view of current sustainability management theory. In "Advancing a Multi-level Sustainability Management Theory," Mark Starik and Patricia Kanashiro justify and describe examples of a new emerging



integrated sustainability management framework. They argue that an integrated approach to theory building in this area is necessary to address current conceptual challenges that limit our current management theories' utility for addressing sustainability issues.

Our third chapter, "A Strategy to Support Transformation toward Sustainability Globally: The SDG Transformations Forum," written by Steve Waddell and Sandra Waddock, starts with the premise that we have reached our planetary boundaries. Beyond climate change, the planet is faced with numerous grand challenges that require urgent attention. This chapter presents the SDG Transformations Forum as a vehicle for generating large-scale strategic change for our institutions, systems, and communities. The Forum's strategy is described for informing future work on addressing the SDGs.

Part I concludes with a piece by Nancy J. Adler, "Global Wisdom and the Audacity of Hope: A Sustainable Approach to Leadership." She also highlights some of the challenges of the twenty-first century that will affect the future of our species and planet. This chapter is a reprint from Sage's *Advances in Global Leadership* book. Dr Adler argues that current standard logic of our traditional scholarship in sustainability is insufficient and weak for tackling these social and environmental threats. She reflects on the nature of current pragmatic wisdom and suggests hopeful ways to expand and revise our understanding and knowledge to help address our greatest global problems.

Nicola Misani's work begins Part II of this volume with his chapter, "Sustainability and Implicit Contracts." In this Practical Applications section, Dr Misani explores the non-legally binding agreements that are common in business relationships. He reviews the literature on implicit contracts that illustrate how organizations create value through relationship-specific investment. He argues that sustainability can be utilized as an underlying motivator for engaging in implicit contracts in business. Sustainability facilitates these tacit agreements between parties by increasing trust. Future work in this area is proposed to promote strategic sustainability in organizations.

AQ5 Chapter 6, co-authored by S. Ramya Muruganatham, Fong Keng-Highberger, and Rupashree Baral, provides theoretical and practical contributions for reducing corporate sustainability tensions. Their piece, "Enabling an Intrinsic Perspective towards Approaching Tensions in CS Decisions through Moral Imagination: A Conceptual Framework," offers a conceptual framework that encompasses moral imagination for changing managers' mindsets toward sustainability. Insights from their model can be used to inform intrinsic managerial motivation for addressing climate change issues.

Natalia G. Vidal and Harry Van Buren III present a typology of the forms of business collective action (BCA) in their chapter, "Business Collective Action for Corporate Sustainability." Operating from the premise that BCA is a useful tool for handling sustainability issues, they provide an overview of the importance of BCA and relate this approach specifically to sustainable issues. Their issues management perspective offers firms and researchers a fresh perspective on corporate sustainability that can inform practice and future scholarly work.



In Chapter 8, Thomas Walker and Sherif Goubran examine a particular business sector that has a huge influence on sustainable development. In “Sustainable Real Estate: Transitioning beyond Cost Savings,” the authors present case studies from the real estate sector to illustrate how building practices can be deeply connected to sustainable development policies. They provide a survey of sustainable real estate research and show how policy and technological innovations can inform this sector on how to address social and environmental challenges.

Our next chapter, by Robert Sroufe and Laura Jernegan, offers a detailed description of the process of integrated management so as to inform managerial decision makers about the dynamic systems in which their businesses exist. In “Making the Intangible Tangible: Integrated Management and the Social Cost of Carbon,” the authors explore how different companies utilize this integrated management model in all facets of their business. Focusing on including environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance in the strategic process, this chapter offers different metrics for measuring ESGs.

The last chapter in this section, “The Case for a Plastic Tax: A Review of Its Benefits and Disadvantages within a Circular Economy,” closely examines the advantages and disadvantages of imposing a levy on plastic. Thomas Walker, Dieter Gramlich, and Adele Dumont-Bergeron explore the utility of a plastic tax as an economic instrument for limiting plastic use in organizations. They make recommendations about when and how a plastic tax should be implemented and discuss the possible implications of such a policy tool.

Volume 4 concludes with a final section on Applications to Scholarship in Sustainability. Chapter 11, written by Sandra Waddock and Jegoo Lee, reviews scholarship within the business and society field. In “The Sustainability and Popularity Paradoxes of SIM Scholarship,” the authors reflect on the field’s distinctive competencies that distinguish our work. They contend that business in society scholarship remains disconnected from other disciplines within the Academy of Management. In a very forward-looking sense, they argue for future research in the field to focus more on the role businesses play in society in order to tackle sustainability issues.

Taken together, this volume provides a broad overview of current sustainability research from both theoretical and practical standpoints. While the book does not cover every nuance of sustainability research, past or present, the chapters do contain a survey of work that shows how the field has evolved and where it needs to go next.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *BAS 360* book series is supported by the International Association for Business and Society (IABS). IABS is the premier international professional association of more than 300 educators from over 20 countries researching and teaching on the relationships between business, government and society, sustainability, and business ethics. In addition, there is support from the Palumbo-Donahue

School of Business at Duquesne University, which has been recognized by Corporate Knights in its 2018 Better World MBA Ranking. Among the 40 schools listed, the University's MBA Sustainable Business Practices program is ranked No. 5 nationally and No. 13 internationally. Duquesne is also one of the first 100 signatories of the United Nation's Global Compact Principles for Responsible Management education. Finally, the co-editors of *BAS 360* acknowledge and thank Mr Gene Beard for his financial support provided through the Eugene P. Beard Faculty Resource Fund in Ethics at Duquesne University. We also express our gratitude to the Albert P. Viragh donors to Duquesne's Institute for Ethics in Business for their financial and moral support for this endeavor.

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