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Sustainability in a corporate context

Innovation driver employees

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Current news on global warming and CO₂ reduction make it clear to us again and again that the measures already taken are not sufficient and that we must act more sustainably. Various institutions, such as companies or states, have a duty to do so, but also we as individuals have to act. We are responsible for our sustainable behavior – both on a private and professional level. Companies can even gain a competitive advantage with a focus on sustainability, as innovative business models are created and costs are saved by using less resources.

Role of employees

As individuals, we play a special role in our position as employees with regard to sustainable behaviour. Our decisions in this role are often far-reaching, as we either drive or plan measures for sustainable behavior or implement them directly. On a vertical level, both each individual and (top) management must implement and exemplify the required sustainable behavior. Taking into account the time people spend at their workplace, this can have a decisive influence on an improved CO₂ balance. At the horizontal level, organizational units must ultimately implement management guidelines with regard to sustainable behavior. At the same time, however, all other stakeholders have the opportunity to influence environmentally friendly behaviour and contribute their ideas. For these reasons, it is important for us as individuals to understand how we can shape a more sustainable future as part of society.

Influencing factors on sustainable behaviour

We know from research that there are a variety of factors that influence sustainable behavior.



The findings are mainly based on two different explanatory paths. On the one hand, factors aimed at attitudes and beliefs of individuals were examined. In this respect, it is important to determine whether individuals are intrinsically motivated to behave sustainably and communicate this to their fellow human beings and actively influence them to act sustainably. Furthermore, emotional intelligence, habits in action, perceived self-efficiency and learning processes of individuals are important predictors for determining sustainable behavior. On the other hand, research has already investigated that a behavior in one context has an impact on another behavior in another context. These are called „behavior overflow effects“. The decisive factor here is that sustainable behaviour in the private sector also has an effect on behaviour in the corporate context and vice versa.

Possibilities for a sustainable corporate orientation

In companies, employees are integrated into the organizational framework that allows or restricts possibilities. In terms of sustainability, companies have to organize their processes in such a way that resources are used efficiently through sustainable process design. On the other hand, companies can also be aligned more sustainably based on the findings regarding the influencing factors. At the same time, this also makes it possible to achieve a more far-reaching effect into private households. Current research has shown that specifications in the processes and a lived culture for sustainability in the company also lead to individuals acting sustainably outside their role in the company. Companies have various measures at their disposal that promote such thinking. Additional information about one's own consumer behaviour can play a central role here.

Often people have insufficient knowledge

about the concrete extent of individual behaviours on the climate and the environment. Additional information can therefore help to make employees aware of the importance of their own behaviour and thus awaken their ecological awareness. For example, health information and meatless alternatives in company canteens mean that people generally consume less meat.

Similar findings have been achieved in the area of waste prevention, with companies actively supporting their workforce to act more sustainably. With information on how to avoid food waste, companies ensured that the behaviour of canteen staff became more sustainable. To the extent that individuals had a positive attitude towards sustainable action on their own, this information even had a positive effect on the avoidance of food waste in private life.

Companies can specifically support this behaviour, for example by using technical possibilities: in addition to recruitment, smart waste bins



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help to better record behaviour by providing regular feedback to the canteen staff on the food thrown in. This information can then be used to replace less popular foods with high-demand ones. In addition to saving resources in existing processes, innovative business models and processes can also be initiated with corresponding objectives on sustainability indicators. This is where the bigger, but also more difficult lever lies, with which effects for both customers and employees can be achieved.

In a bundling of activities that promote sustainable behavior, companies are ultimately called upon to provide their employees with an understanding of the consequences of their decisions. Bundled under the technical term „Corporate Social Responsibility“, i.e. the understanding of the impact of a company's actions on the environment and society, (top) management in particular is called upon to set a positive example when rethinking.

Conclusion

Regardless of the fact that current measures for CO₂ reduction are not sufficient, current research shows many ways to counter this phenomenon. It is important that companies actively live planned changes with regard to sustainable action and plan and implement appropriate measures cooperatively with their employees. These actions by companies, which are combined into „Corporate Social Responsibility“, ultimately oblige institutions and individuals alike to make their actions more sustainable. Thus, all institutions and individuals of a society are responsible for promoting sustainable awareness and calling for more sustainable measures in order to successfully master future environmental challenges.



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