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Introduction to Current Empirical Research: examining sustainability

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Current Empirical Research

Introduction to Current Empirical Research: examining sustainability

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In this issue, we feature a new article on the organizational, contextual, and decision-making processes that combine to influence the implementation and success of sustainability efforts. At a time when sustainability – the ability of a company to integrate economic, environmental, and social opportunities into its business strategies – is very much in vogue, we are in need of solid empirical research to determine the variables that might affect those worthy efforts. “Influences on the Organizational Implementation of Sustainability: An Integrative Model” by Kent Fairfield, Joel Harmon, and Scott Behson, provides an integrative model examining how external influences, foundational enablers, decision drivers, internal inhibitors, and the actual sustainability practices themselves affect how performance is perceived by stakeholders.

Fairfield *et al.* show that organizational enablers such as consistent values, top management support, and centrality of sustainability to business strategy form a critical foundation for strengthening the sustainability agenda and spurring implementation. Corporations benefit from emphasizing sustainability, because they believe these efforts can enhance their reputation, help them avoid regulatory entanglements, and spur innovation and growth. However, Fairfield *et al.* also emphasize that a much more powerful determinant of whether sustainability is linked to performance is the presence of *inhibiting factors*, such as a lack of a business case, a true understanding of what sustainability means, and vague ideas for action. As with any important organizational change, negative factors leading to passive resistance can derail even the most worthy of programs, even those aimed at saving the world. This is a worthwhile lesson for managers to hear: that they first need to overcome resistance with a strong business case and awareness building before they can hope to reap the benefits of sustainability efforts.