12-1-2013

Gender and Corporate Sustainability: On Values, Vision, and Voice

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Recommended Citation

CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Individual and Organizational Responses to Changing and Challenging Conditions

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In this issue, we introduce three empirical articles, all of which concern our changing organizational environment. We take up the issues of corporate sustainability, organizational downsizing, and the ongoing struggle for organizational legitimacy. All three highlight the dynamic environment we face every day, and the efforts that individuals and organizations put forth to cope with this constant change. In the following, I introduce and briefly summarize each of these thought-provoking pieces.

Corporate sustainability has become both an ethical and a strategic imperative for organizations around the world. Organizations are challenged by myriad forces related to the natural environment, human rights, population growth, corruption, poverty, and much more (Fairfield, Harmon, & Behson, 2011). To survive, organizations must develop sound, effective policies and practices that address today's urgent issues while considering the needs of future generations. In their article "Gender and Corporate Sustainability: On Values, Vision, and Voice," Joan L. Slepian and Gwen E. Jones explore the differences between men and women in their sustainability values and vision. Previous research in this area suggests that there is a significant difference in the beliefs of men and women with regard to environmentalism and sustainability. It is important to know how these differences might impact the decisions that organizations make in the future around sustainability issues.

Overall, Slepian and Jones found that women are indeed more personally concerned about sustainability-related issues than men. Further, they found that women judged their organization to be less involved in sustainability related practices than men did. Their discussion highlights the somewhat more nuanced differences between men and women's views of their companies' concern for specific sustainability issues, suggesting that differences may relate to more deeply engendered

processes within the organization. The authors propose a number of insightful suggestions for further research to explore actual involvement and behavior of women in their companies' sustainability initiatives.

The "Great Recession" that began in 2007 resulted in an enormous loss of employment in the United States, with a 5.1% rise in the unemployment rate. With such a broad-based loss of employment, it is likely that organizations will experience repercussions for years to come. Roselie McDevitt, Catherine Giapponi, and Deborah M. Houston explored one aspect of this fallout in their article, "Organizational Downsizing During an Economic Crisis: Survivors' and Victims' Perspectives." The article explores the reactions of both layoff victims and layoff survivors to the processes and practices used by organizational management during the downsizing action. The authors based their hypotheses on the psychological contract literature, asserting that an employee's perception of a breach of the psychological contract can affect that employee's attitudes toward continued employment with the organization and attitudes toward future employers.

McDevitt and colleagues found differences between survivors and victims of layoffs in their perceptions of downsizing actions, confirming the proposition that victims are apt to take a more negative view of managements' actions than survivors. On the other hand, the findings suggest that survivors and victims did not differ in their perception of open lines of communication and agreement with the management strategy. The authors propose a number of avenues of additional research and discuss the implications of their findings for organizations in the aftermath of a difficult economic period.

Institutional theory asserts that organizations adapt to their environment by acting in ways that make them appear more legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional isomorphism occurs when organizations in the same field take on similar characteristics as a result of their reaction to the environmental conditions. New institutional theorists have taken a more action-oriented view of the process, suggesting that

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organizations are not powerless in the face of change, but rather act as institutional entrepreneurs in forming organizational responses to environmental conditions and consequently, changing the organizational field.

In his article "From Endogenization to Justification: Strategic Responses to Legitimacy Challenges in Contentious Organizational Fields," Paul-Brian McInerney examines the case of a social enterprise and its response to criticism from the external environment. McInerney's ethnography explores the way in which organizations endogenize, or take on institutional practices from the field and adapt them to their own constraints.

Overall, he finds that endogenizing allows organizations to promote new ways of doing things in their field and results in institutional entrepreneurship.

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