



Sustainability as corporate mission and strategy

Tore Mysen

Department of Marketing, Oslo School of Management, Oslo, Norway

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe how a corporation with sustainability as its mission implements sustainability strategy and programmes to promote social responsible management. Special attention is paid to how internal and external value systems interact and influence the conception and implementation of sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach – As an educational charity and social enterprise, the Eden Project is examined, using a qualitative case study approach. Extant literature complements the discussion of how internal and external driving forces interact and influence sustainable management and practice. Method triangulation is adopted to increase the internal validity, comprising in-depth interviews with key management informants, one major supplier, representatives of the staff, observation on site and a member check for the correctness of descriptions and the systematisation of the data.

Findings – The sustainability strategy of the Eden Project is divided in three interconnected strategies; operational practice, educational programmes and outreach initiatives that target young people, disengaged and unemployed people, and deprived communities around the world. The study points to possible interrelationships between different internal and external value systems, and how internal and external driving forces may influence the way corporations conceive and implement sustainability.

Research limitations/implications – The business sustainability model at the Eden Project provides opportunities for the development of sustainability management, and suggestions for future research are presented.

Practical implications – The study illustrates how the carbon footprint on Earth can be reduced, and how social responsibility can be advanced.

Originality/value – This study is the first to examine a corporation that deploys resources to increase financial performance in order to support the main objectives concerning promoting sustainability management. Thus, the examination may provide new ideas to practitioners and researchers related to the advancement of social responsibility.

Keywords Sustainability, Social responsibility, CSR, The Eden Project, Corporate strategy, Sustainability management, Social enterprise

Paper type Case study

Introduction

The concept of sustainability has for some time attracted increased attention by practitioners and academics (Hult, 2011). As described by Unruh and Ettenson (2010, pp. 94-5), a “recent IBM survey found that two-thirds of executives see sustainability as a revenue driver, and half of them expect green initiatives to confer competitive advantage”. Unruh and Ettenson (2010) made ten in-depth interviews with key executives in various large consumer and industrial companies, and maintain that they identify a “dramatic shift in corporate mind-set and practices”, and a growing awareness that environmental responsibility can spur growth and differentiation. Kerr (2007) and Mahler (2007) bear witness to the increasing attention by successful multinational companies to incorporate environmental sustainability into their products and/or services to strengthen or differentiate the corporate brand.



By increasing speed, academic research examines the changes showing that companies not only focus on obtaining economic goals, but also seek to deliver environmental and social benefits (Elkington, 1998). However, different approaches are used to examine sustainability, and competing constructs are debated and criticized. For example; in their review of previous research concerning different aspects related to sustainability, Chabowski *et al.* (2011) point to studies that examine corporate social responsibility (CSR), cause-related marketing, corporate citizenship, enviropreneurial marketing, and corporate environmentalism. The Brundtland definition of the sustainability concept is criticized on the basis that it is too vague to be of any use as a practical guide to planning (Guest, 2010), and much research concerning sustainability is argued to embrace too few aspects that should relate to business sustainability (Wagner and Svensson, 2010; Svensson and Wagner, 2011). Along the same lines, the competing CSR concept is debated and argued to be blurred or fuzzy (Lantos, 2001), hard to define (Ralston, 2010), and that CSR research has a tendency to focus on very limited aspects and dimensions (Maignan *et al.*, 1999).

Still, there does not seem to be a consensus of which dimensions to include in a concept of sustainability, which motivates further exploratory studies. Up to the present, company executives and academic researchers seem to be mainly focused on how established companies and organizations succeed in adapting, or may adapt to and exploit, the growing attention concerning sustainability as a means of fulfilling corporate goals (Chabowski *et al.*, 2011). In contrast, the objective of this study is to describe a corporate effort to promote sustainability and implement sustainability as strategy, in which economic goals are a means of supporting the corporate sustainability mission and strategy. Furthermore, this study aims to discuss how corporations' value systems may interact with the way they conceive and implement sustainability practices. Such an approach may enrich companies' ideas of how to change and inspire further research.

The rest of this study is organized as follows. The methodology is presented, followed by a description of the history, status, mission and strategies at The Eden Project. In the final sections, relationships between driving forces of sustainability, conceptions and implementation of sustainability are discussed, based on the study of The Eden Project and previous literature on the subject. Finally, limitations are presented, and propositions for future research are outlined.

Methodology

The Eden Project in Cornwall, England, was chosen as the case study (www.edenproject.com) because financial goals are secondary to the objective of promoting sustainability management. The Eden Project is well known both within the UK and outside, has global ambitions, and has been able to demonstrate that business based on sustainability as its strategy can survive and impact positively on stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, and actions, related to sustainability. Information was obtained from internal, archival sources, from information published on the internet, from observations on site in October 2011, as well as in-depth interviews with key executives and staff representatives at Eden, and an in-depth interview with a key executive at one of the organization's major suppliers (www.sharpsbrewery.co.uk). An overview of the informants at Eden comprises: the foundation programme manager, the organisational development director, the commercial projects and relationship

manager, the commercial procurement manager – retail, the foundation projects manager, the retail operative, the programme production coordinator. And at Sharp's Brewery: the business development and marketing manager.

The interviews lasted from approximately 45 min up to one-and-a-half hours, and were later complemented with communications by e-mail. The questioning focused on a descriptive approach, aiming to clarify Eden's mission and strategy, its history and development, organization, stakeholders/network, as well as how Eden understands sustainability, and the various programmes aiming to promote sustainable management. Descriptions and analyses were sent to informants for discussion and corrections.

History and status

The Eden Project Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Eden Trust, located at Bodelva, Cornwall, and characterizes itself as an educational charity, a tourist destination, and a social enterprise. Co-founder Tim Smit originated the idea, and assisted by the expert horticulturalists Philip McMillan Browse and Peter Thoday the site at Bodelva was constructed and opened 2001. Since opening, approximately 14 million people have visited The Eden Project. Accommodation capacity is estimated to some 1.5 million visitors a year. The vast majority of the income necessary to meet the operational costs on site and fund wider outreach, charitable missions, has been generated by Eden Project Limited from its visitors. About 37 per cent of its income stems from sponsorships, external funding, and a recently started retailing programme in cooperation with for example Sharp's Brewery, and the chains John Lewis and Marks & Spencer. As one of the informants expressed: "Increased sales and profit helps us support our mission. The essence of a social enterprise basically".

By 2012, The Eden Project has established itself as a major international destination; it is recognized as a major brand in the environmental or "green" sector, it has a reputation as a national leader in the area of public education on environmental issues, and is recognised as a regional economic engine and leading social enterprise. In the next sections, mission and strategy as concepts are defined; mission, strategy and selected activities are described, accompanied by some more details of the activities linked to the interconnected strategies.

Mission, strategy, and activities at The Eden Project: an overview

Interconnectedness and synergy

The Eden Project's corporate mission, strategy, and activities, are outlined in Figure 1. A brief discussion of core concepts and detailed description of illustrative activities follows. However, activities are continuously being developed. Thus, the illustration of activities is not exhaustive.

Mission and strategy

Although a debate of definitions is beyond the scope of this study, core concepts in this study are delineated in the following and related to The Eden Project. The concept of mission reflects what the organization aims to accomplish (Kotler and Keller, 2006). The Eden Trust was established to develop The Eden Project as one of the UK's top landmark projects created to promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources, leading to a sustainable future. "Over time the mission may change, to take advantage of new opportunities

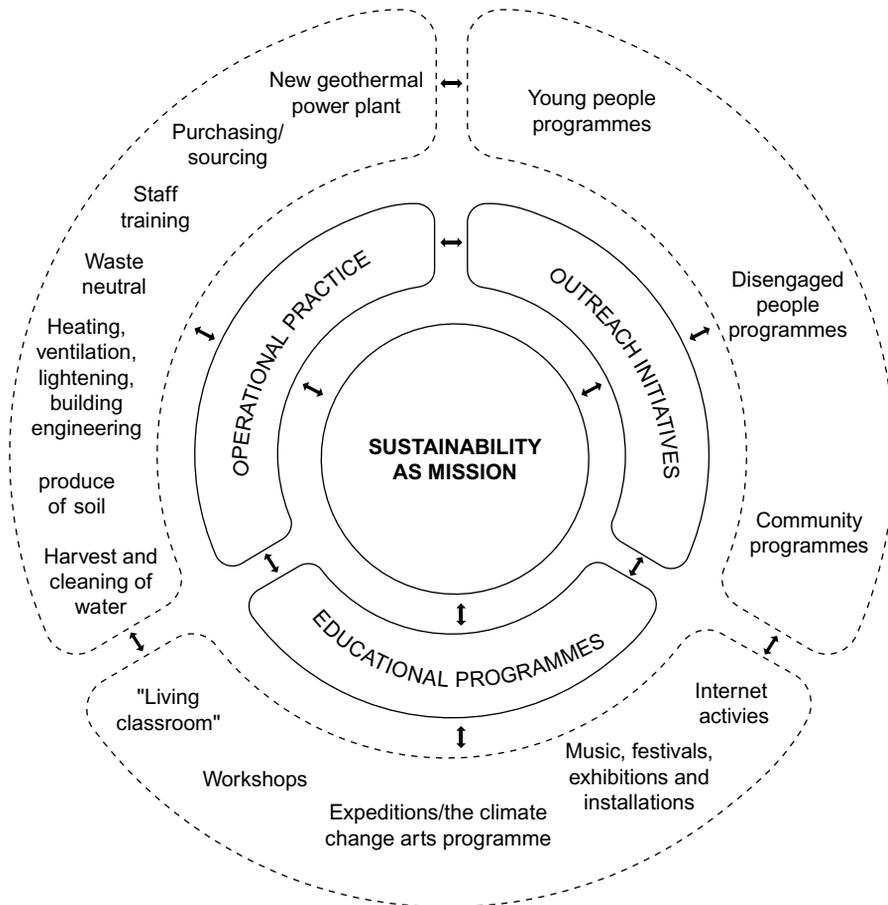


Figure 1.
An overview of corporate
mission, strategy,
and activities at
The Eden Project

or to respond to new market conditions” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, p. 44). In the case of The Eden Project, the mission was clear from the beginning, but one notable change may be that the perspective has developed from a UK focus to also embrace greater parts of the world outside the UK.

The concept of strategy is approached by adapting a definition by Mullins *et al.* (2008, p. 2/12), “a strategy is a fundamental pattern of present and planned objectives, resource deployments, and interactions of an organization with stakeholders and environmental factors”. The notion of stakeholders (Hult, 2011) recognizes the need of an organization to focus not only on “primary” stakeholders such as the owners, customers, suppliers, or company personnel, but to include – or upgrade – “secondary” stakeholders. In contrast to such a categorization of primary and secondary stakeholders, The Eden Project includes “secondary stakeholders” as primary stakeholders, such as local companies, the local community, homeless people, and not least – future generations. Based on their mission, the strategy of The Eden Project is divided into three interlinked areas in which the organization sets goals and deploys resources; operational practice, educational programmes, and outreach initiatives.

The strategies and activities in Figure 1 are interconnected, and they are founded on the mission embedded in the sustainability, competency and capabilities in the organization. As one of the executives expresses it:

[...] we aim to ensure that there are strong connections between each of these elements (i.e.: between operational practice, educational programmes, and outreach initiatives) rather than allowing them to become empires.

As an educational charity, all strategies and activities support “education” in a wide sense, mirroring the corporate mission. For example, operational practice and experience have increased the organization’s horticultural knowledge and skills, which has inspired and facilitated educational programmes on site and reached out with initiatives to help children in other countries to create gardens, grow crops, and develop international learning resources.

Sustainable operational practice

Major elements of the sustainable operational practice relate to the reduction of energy use, carbon dioxide emissions, and cost. Compared to 2008, The Eden Project has reduced energy consumption by 14 per cent, and the target is to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 25 per cent by 2013.

To reduce energy use and carbon dioxide emissions, new technology and staffing are involved. For example, the biomes are designed to cut energy use by adopting new construction technology, by air-insulation, ventilation, and by letting natural light come in through the roof and walls. LED lights have replaced more energy consuming solutions, solar panels are introduced to support electricity consumption, and a biomass boiler is installed to reduce gas needs. In cooperation with EGS Energy, The Eden Project has received permission to build a deep engineered geothermal power plant at Eden, with a capacity of 3-4 MW electricity capable of heating the biomes and supplying Eden and another 3,500 households with electricity. Such a power plant will most likely make Eden independent of fossil fuels.

Cleaning water demands energy on site, as an external water supply uses energy at external suppliers and incurs cost. Innovative processes related to engineering and new technology reduce energy use and external water and soil supplies. Almost half of the project’s water needs are harvested on site. A drainage system created during early construction months due to heavy rains supports irrigation of plants and the flushing of toilets. Low flush toilets and time regulated taps are installed. Rainwater is collected and used for maintaining humidity inside the Rainforest Biome. With assistance from Reading University, and using local mine waste, 83,000 tonnes of different qualities of soil were created at the outset to supply the Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes, as well as the outdoor biome. Water use, heat, and humidity in the biomes, are fully automated monitored and regulated.

To increase the efficiency of new technology, staff are motivated to learn how to operate the technology and contribute to energy saving.

The purchasing/sourcing is organized in a separate unit, collecting product ideas from scientists, management, and staff. Guidelines and selection criteria pertaining to sustainability (reduced impact on environment as well as positive impact on communities) are signalled on the internet to secure self-selection by approaching suppliers. Since its opening, Eden has established a network of about 3000 suppliers,

with around 1,000 of them in regular use, providing items that have a small impact on environment (easy to recycle), benefit the people that produce the goods, or have a positive influence on the consumer's lifestyle. As one of the executives stated, "we have to develop and sell products with the ethos of Eden". A substantial part of the items in the retail shop, or possible to buy on the internet, is based on natural contents or made of recycled waste (for example glass bottles, wool, or tin cans). If fulfilling the criteria to enlist as a supplier, The Eden Project prioritizes local suppliers. About 89 per cent of Eden's catering needs are obtained from local suppliers. For non-catering products and services, the figure is close to 40 per cent.

The target of being "Waste Neutral" was set out from the start of constructing Eden. The "neutrality" refers to balancing the weight of what is sent off for recycling and landfill, with the amount (weight) of recycled products brought in. The Eden Project cooperates with suppliers, aiming at developing longer lasting products, reducing the amount of packaging brought on site, and increasing recyclable product elements.

Educational programmes

As stated in the Annual Report (2005, p. 6), The Eden Project defines its target group as "the widest possible audience", using psychographic descriptors such as:

[...] people that would like to do something, but feel overwhelmed because they are unable or unwilling to engage in the challenges, held back by a lack of understanding about the connections, confused about the complex issues, besieged by the scale of the challenges, or unsure there will be any positive outcomes.

To promote knowledge and awareness, the educational programmes at Eden focus on "celebrating what nature gives us" and "love and awe rather than guilt and fear". Consequently, the educational programmes do not necessarily have an "educational label". As stated in the Trustees' Report (2009, p. 6), The Eden Project wants to "create memorable experiences", without the people involved necessarily feeling that they are being educated.

Primarily, the educational programmes target visitors at Eden, motivating various categories of visitors to engage and learn, and to take home with them an increased awareness of the relationships between plants, people and resources. The Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes at Eden are the "living classrooms", in which visitors can experience the relationships, read about plants and resources, and develop their understanding of the dependency on the natural world. For example, by showing where food, fuel, materials and medicines come from, or by practising planting, growing, cooking, and eating together. Such activities are interconnected with various workshops in which visitors can take part, led by Eden personnel. School, college, and university teachers are offered continuing professional development courses to support them in their efforts to promote sustainability activities within their classes or outside the classroom.

Music festivals, exhibitions, and created installations at Eden play an important role when engaging visitors in environmental and social issues. The concept of "event marketing" may be close as a description of the activities; as a major premise is to attract people. However, the underlying motive is to give the audience impulses and an opportunity to learn and engage in sustainability issues. In several cases, The Eden Project partners with environmentally and/or socially engaged organizations. Notably, since 2007 Eden has collaborated with Cape Farewell – an expedition programme that

since 2003 has included scientists, artists, and communicative experts in visiting different regions of the world, observing the effects of climate change. The expedition participants bring back ideas on how to create stories, images and installations that may be included in the Eden programmes, supporting the initiatives to engage the audience in the subject of climate change.

Access to information and interactive activities on Eden's homepage, and actively using social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, make it possible to reach the widest possible audience globally, and may be created to support educational programmes; for example, by encouraging conversations on Twitter or Facebook concerning the training exercises embedded in The Green Talent programme. Another example of how Eden engages with people online is when The Eden Project recently introduced a non-targeted educational initiative, a challenge to internet readers to "explore your footprints", by illustrating how much carbon footprint buying a new car and driving 100,000 miles in it creates.

Outreach initiatives

The outreach initiatives at Eden cover a broad range of partnering programmes that target young people, disengaged people, and the local, national, and global communities. The young people programmes invite for example school children, their teachers and parents, to take part in outdoor activities at Eden and several other locations in the UK, creating opportunities to get outside more, experience nature, experiment and play with ideas. As expressed in the Annual Report (2009, p. 7), "Thus, unpicking some of the issues and barriers to getting out and then to sharing our ideas widely with young people, parents, teachers, leaders and other organizations". School children in the 14-19 age group are invited to enter coaching programmes at Eden that give career advice and new ways of working that make a positive impact on the planet. In 2008, 20 students from inner-city London took part in an intensive teaching session at Eden, followed by a three week stay at four leading businesses situated across the UK to "understand how business is responding and helping us adapt" (Annual Report 2009, p. 7: Rolls Royce, EDF Energy, Skanska and Boots).

The Eden Project designs programmes directed at disengaged people, such as homeless people, offenders, prisoners, and unemployed young people. People within such a broad category are invited into Eden to spend a day there and be inspired to learn and change their lives. In cooperation with selected football clubs, companies and organizations, disengaged people are offered introductory courses to learn and practice for example information technology, and with the help of a mentor receive assistance in personal development. Another example is the programme targeted at prisoners seeking to establish real skills, values and self-respect in the outside world (Jones, 2008). From a pilot project at the high-security prison on Dartmoor, teaching prisoners to grow food, establish a relationship with nature and so ease their way back into society, the initiative has developed into a major programme embracing several prisons in the UK and has become a sustainable development in deprived communities.

Several of Eden's community programmes illustrate The Eden Project's role as a social enterprise. Eden's business-oriented programme "Green Foundation" inspires organisations to take action to embed sustainability and motivation amongst the staff to bring about positive change. Furthermore, Eden supports colleges and organizations world-wide in activities such as recovering devastated rain forests (e.g. Thailand),

training and developing livelihoods with unemployed people from townships concerning conservation, horticulture and eco-tourism, bio-diversity; or for instance conservation on the Seychelles, or reducing poverty generally through sustainable tourism (Jones, 2008, pp. 135-6). The Gardens for Life network involves schools and colleges in several countries (e.g. Kenya and India) to create gardens, grow food crops, develop international learning resources, explore food production and supply chains, increase awareness and attitude towards ethical trade, global citizenship, sustainable development and a contribution to youth empowerment. The Gardens for Life programmes now involve over 400 schools, engaging thousands of children across five continents. Another programme, the Big Lunch, encourages community spirit, aiming to get as many as possible in the UK to have lunch with their neighbours, thus creating a meeting place in which people have the opportunity to communicate, share ideas, and strengthen community ties. The programme was initiated in 2009. In total, 2 million had lunch together last year, and this year (2012) the Big Lunch ties in with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee – rolled out across the commonwealth.

Relationships between driving forces, conceptions, and implementation of sustainability

Introduction

Previous research seems to have focused on market behaviour and political initiatives as the primary external drivers behind conception and adoption of sustainability practices; to a large extent it has ignored how internal forces such as corporate culture, mission and goals relate to the market and political environment, and how they influence corporates' conception and implementation of sustainability (Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2010). Drawing upon literature and the study of The Eden Project, the purpose of this section is to discuss how corporates' internal and external driving forces influence the manner in which corporations conceive and implement sustainability (Figure 2).

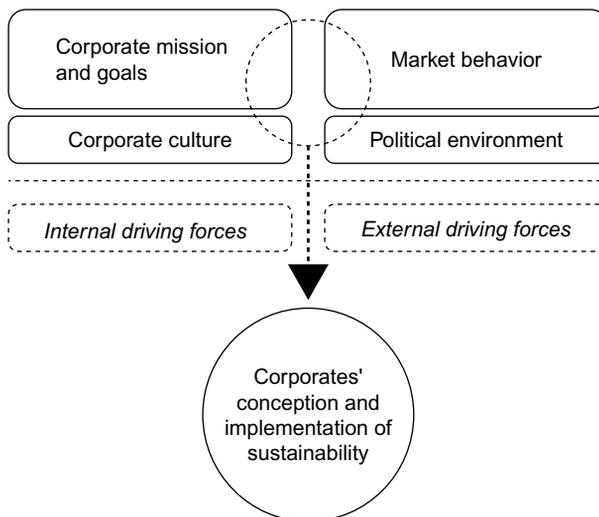


Figure 2.
Conceptual model of
relationships between
driving forces and
sustainability

The interconnectedness between internal and external driving forces

The following discussion is based on the assumption that the way corporations approach sustainability depends on the value systems dominating each corporation, and the mission and goals embedded in the organization, which in turn influence – and are influenced by – how those corporations interpret and react to external forces such as the political environment and market behaviour.

Svensson and Wood (2008) link driving forces, such as the power of the media, lobby groups, government legislation, and institutional responsibilities, to the development of organizational values, norms and beliefs, that in turn affect how management, staff and other stakeholders practice their businesses. Wagner and Svensson (2010) and Svensson *et al.* (2010) elaborate this issue related to sustainability practices, and contend that socially responsible managers manage sustainable business practices because they believe that it is the right thing to do, and that the code of ethics, or ethical culture, plays a major part in enhancing the ethical performance of organizations, and “corporate efforts” to manage and monitor sustainable business practices from an ethical perspective (Svensson *et al.*, 2010, p. 338).

The code of ethics, embracing dimensions such as values, norms and beliefs, appears as a core construct in previous research related to corporate culture. Although the concept of corporate, or organizational, culture varies in interpretation and definition, previous research points to the importance of values, ideologies, and beliefs, when hindering or fostering the implementation of managerial or technological innovations, also related to implementation of sustainable practices (Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2010). A similar concept, as compared to code of ethics – or culture – is the concept of “ethos”, which according to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1989, p. 410) is “characteristic spirit, moral, values, ideas or beliefs of a group, community or culture”. In previous research, for example Svensson *et al.* (2009) examine the ethos of the code of ethics in Australia, Canada and Sweden.

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) posit that organizations can be divided into four categories:

- (1) those that are dominated by internal, process-oriented value systems, tend to focus on economic performance, directed at maximizing economic gains, and only adopting sustainability in developing strategic business units that positively affect the bottom line;
- (2) those that are dominated by social, or human-relations oriented values, and support social entrepreneurship in the organization;
- (3) those with open-systems values that recognize the importance of the wider social and economic external environment; and
- (4) those whose rational-goals values motivate sustainability because of reducing cost and increasing operational efficiency.

Previous studies indicate that process-oriented and rational-goals values dominate business practices, hamper the influence of human relations values and/or open-systems values, and in some cases treat societal issues as peripheral matters. As maintained by Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 64), corporations still “continue to view the creation of value narrowly, optimizing short term financial performance in a bubble”, and that responsibility programmes – implemented as a result of external

pressure – “have emerged largely to improve firms’ reputations and are treated as a necessary expense” (Porter and Kramer, 2011, p. 65). On the other hand, the study by Unruh and Ettenson (2010, p. 94) shows evidence of the increasing attention by multinationals to “grow green”. Increasingly, growing green has risen to “the top of the agenda for many businesses”, and is considered as a revenue driver.

However, some research points to the need of combining internal and external value systems, and to develop corporations’ conception of the market and political environment. Elaborating on the concept of “creating shared value”, Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 66) argue that companies have to enhance competitiveness “while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which they operates”. Some companies seem to incorporate such policies and operational practice, which may indicate the influence of human relations and/or open-systems values, in combination with process-oriented and rational goal values. For example, as pointed to by Høgevoid (2011), the Norwegian furniture company HÅG implements a sustainable business model that reduces costs, increases profitability, and reduces the carbon footprint on Earth by innovative operational practices by themselves, their suppliers, and their customers. The Swedish furniture multinational IKEA has adopted an even wider approach to sustainability in India. Years before actually establishing themselves in India, IKEA cooperated with the UN Development Programme and UNICEF to enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women in 500 villages in Uttar Pradesh, claiming that about 50,000 women were encouraged to become entrepreneurs and strengthen their participation in local politics (IKEA, 2012, 1805). As such, the IKEA initiative extends traditional stakeholder theory approaches (Hult, 2011; Våland *et al.*, 2008; Porter and Kramer, 2011), including not only stakeholders that are directly affected by the corporation activities, but embracing societal deprived groups in the community.

In contrast to the dominating process-oriented and rational goal systems in business, in which external driving forces actively or passively influence corporations’ sustainability performances (but where economic goals and efficiency are still the most important), The Eden Project represents a corporation in which economic goals have to be reached to enable the organization to promote responsible management of the “Earth to Earth” issue, leading to a sustainable future for stakeholders beyond those directly affected by the company. The external perspective of The Eden Project extends traditional stakeholder theory, and as such extends the conception of target groups traditionally included in the market concept. To a certain extent, Eden’s “market” approach resembles the priorities of the communities around the company put forward by for example Porter and Kramer (2011). Furthermore, various collaborative partners beyond suppliers are included in a broad range of educational programmes, operational practice and outreach initiatives. However, Porter and Kramer (2011) focus on the competitiveness of companies; in contrast The Eden Project does not. Instead, The Eden Project focuses on a sustainable future for all.

The political environments of many corporations include, for example, guidance from organizations such as the International Standard Organization, the ISO 14000 regulations (environmental management) and/or 26000 regulations (social responsibility), to which companies can voluntarily comply. However, and as shown in the case study of HÅG, Høgevoid (2011), when negotiating contracts; suppliers can be required to have implemented the ISO standards. A growing number of firms have established a code of conduct for its suppliers, as in the case of The Eden Project Ltd and for example IKEA.

“IKEA’s way on purchasing Home Furnishing Products” includes 90 issues “in which the furniture company expects compliance” (Ganesan *et al.*, 2009, p. 87). Complementing guiding regulations, for example, the European Union has implemented a directive aiming at reducing the environmental impact of electric and electronic equipment waste (Tsai and Hung, 2009), and national governments may have legislation that demands the reporting of companies’ impact on their carbon footprint, or internal social welfare (Midttun, 2007).

As in the case of IKEA, The Eden Project shows proactive, open-systems values concerning the political environment, approaching and collaborating with a great number of sponsors, supporting companies and partners. An example of this is “Growing for life”, one of the Eden programmes within the outreach initiatives. The programme started in Dartmoor prison, involving the prisoners in growing plants to inspire personal change. Today the programme has become a community programme aiming to help prison inmates rehabilitate and find jobs upon release. The Eden Project and several collaborative companies are involved in the Prisons ICT Academy (PICTA). Cisco Systems Inc. supports with knowledge and skills, and runs IT-related courses leading up to exams within for example European Computer Driving Licences and Networking and Server Licences. The National Offender Management Service, local government, the Shekinah Mission, and Sutton Seeds support the programme, among others. As in the case of IKEA, The Eden Project considers governmental authorities as partners that contribute to reach common goals related to societal development.

However, the case study of The Eden Project also illustrates that different value systems co-exist and compete in an organization. Besides human-relations-oriented value systems and open systems, rational goal values and process-oriented values appear in the organization. As one of the managers has remarked, The Eden Project Ltd is working with a strategy to develop and establish The Eden Project as a global brand, aiming to increase awareness and interest in sustainability issues, but also to create increased sales and profits. The retailing programme also reveals the complexity in balancing the “Ethos of Eden” with requirements to affect the bottom line positively.

Concluding thoughts

To a large extent, corporations have recognized the importance of adapting to environmental issues; not only considering external driving forces as constraints and costs, but increasingly implementing strategies to achieve competitive advantage (Polonsky *et al.*, 2011; Unruh and Ettenson, 2010). Even in small firms, being environmental may increase financial performance (Clemens, 2006). However, implementation of sustainability management has “concentrated on economic and environmental solutions to sustainability with little consideration of social sustainability” (Wagner and Svensson, p. 178), simultaneously advancing internal financial benefits and social gains in the communities in which corporations operate (Porter and Kramer, 2011, p. 66).

This qualitative study of The Eden Project is not without its limitations. In contrast to most companies, the unit of analysis represents a corporation that from the very start does not primarily assess its performance by financial criteria, but reports to the trustees on social sustainability goals. However, the management at Eden has to deploy resources to achieve increased income and profits to finance the sustainability strategy and programmes, and a study of a corporation that has a reverse logic as compared to traditional businesses may disclose new approaches to sustainability management

and practices that can inspire business executives and future research. Furthermore, a qualitative study may contain bias related to description and interpretation.

On the other hand, the following procedures have been used to increase internal validity (Creswell, 1998): the study has included archival data such as annual reports and videos, personal interviews of key management informants and representatives from the staff, a personal interview with one key supplier and collaborative partner, internet information, observation on site, member check to “solicit informants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202), and the use of previous studies to structure the presentation and discussion.

This study of The Eden Project has attempted to illustrate how sustainable practices may extend previous conceptions of how to advance social conditions in the communities in which corporations operate, and beyond. The mission and goals, supported by external oriented value systems, and complemented with process- and goal-oriented values, focus on the advancement of social responsibility in a broad spectre of communities. Hence, this paper offers executives strategy and programme directions which contribute to develop and implement practices related to social responsibility. The sustainability business model as implemented by The Eden Project, and the focus on internal and external value systems, may also be useful in advancing research related to sustainability practices. For example, by examining how different value systems influence on sustainability management, practices and performance.

References

- Chabowski, B., Mena, J.A. and Gonzales-Padron, T.L. (2011), “The structure of sustainability research in marketing 1958-2008: a basis for future research opportunities”, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 55-70.
- Clemens, B. (2006), “Economic incentives and small firms: does it pay to be green?”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 492-500.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, Sage, London.
- Elkington, J. (1998), *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, New Society Publishers, Stony Creek, CT.
- Ganesan, S., George, M., Jap, S., Palmatier, R.W. and Weitz, B. (2009), “Supply chain management and retailer performance: emerging trends, issues, and implications for research and practice”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 85 No. 1, pp. 84-94.
- Guest, R. (2010), “The economics of sustainability in the context of climate change: an overview”, *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 326-35.
- Høgevold, N. (2011), “A corporate effort towards a sustainable business model: a case study from the Norwegian furniture industry”, *European Business Review*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 392-400.
- Hult, G.T.M. (2011), “Market-focused sustainability: market orientation plus!”, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 1-6.
- IKEA (2012, 1805), “Women’s empowerment program in ‘the carpet belt’ in India”, 29 January, available at: www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/about_ikea/our_responsibility/ikea_social_initiative/women_empowerment_in_india.html
- Jones, H. (2008), “The Eden Project: a synopsis around sustainable enterprise”, *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, No. 30, pp. 133-7.

- Kerr, J.E. (2007), "Environmental sustainability is being embraced by more of the most competitive and successful multinational companies", *Cardozo Law Review. De Novo*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 623-69.
- Kotler, P. and Keller, K.L. (2006), *Marketing Management*, Pearson – Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Lantos, G.P. (2001), "The ethicality of altruistic corporate social responsibility", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 205-30.
- Linnenluecke, M.K. and Griffiths, A. (2010), "Corporate sustainability and organizational culture", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 357-66.
- Mahler, D. (2007), "The sustainable supply chain", *Supply Chain Management Review*, November, pp. 59-60.
- Maignan, I., Ferrell, O.C. and Hult, G.T.M. (1999), "Corporate citizenship: cultural antecedents and business benefits", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 455-69.
- Middttun, A. (2007), "CSR eller bedriftens samfunnsansvar: En megatrend vokser fram" ("CSR or the company's social responsibility: a megatrend emerges"), *Magma*, No. 3, pp. 57-71.
- Mullins, J.W., Walker, O.C. and Boyd, H.W. (2008), *Marketing*, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1989), Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Polonsky, M.J., Miles, M.P. and Grau, S.L. (2011), "Climate change regulation: implications for business executives", *European Business Review*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 368-83.
- Porter, M.E. and Kramer, M.R. (2011), "Creating shared value", *Harvard Business Review*, January/February, pp. 63-77.
- Ralston, E.S. (2010), "Deviance or norm? Exploring corporate social responsibility", *European Business Review*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 397-410.
- Svensson, G. and Wagner, B. (2011), "Transformative business sustainability: multi-layer model and network of e-footprint sources", *European Business Review*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 334-52.
- Svensson, G. and Wood, G. (2008), "A model of business ethics", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 77 No. 3, pp. 303-22.
- Svensson, G., Wood, G. and Callaghan, M. (2010), "A corporate model of sustainable business practices: an ethical perspective", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 336-45.
- Svensson, G., Wood, G., Singh, J. and Callaghan, M. (2009), "A cross-cultural construct of the ethos of the corporate codes of ethics: Australia Canada and Sweden", *Business Ethics: A European Review*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 253-67.
- Tsai, W.-H. and Hung, S.-J. (2009), "Treatment and recycling system optimization with activity-based costing in WEEE reverse logistics management: an environmental supply chain perspective", *International Journal of Production Research*, Vol. 47 No. 19, pp. 5391-420.
- Unruh, G. and Ettenson, R. (2010), "Growing green: three smart paths to developing sustainable products", *Harvard Business Review*, June, pp. 94-100.
- Våland, T., Heide, M. and Grønhaug, K. (2008), "Corporate social responsibility: investigating theory and research in the marketing context", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 42 Nos 9/10, pp. 927-53.
- Wagner, B. and Svensson, G. (2010), "Sustainable supply chain practices: research propositions for the future", *International Journal of Logistics Economics and Globalization*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 176-85.

Further reading

Håkansson, H. and Snehota, I. (2002), "The burden of relationships or who's next?", in Ford, D. (Ed.), *Understanding Business Markets*, Thompson Learning, London, pp. 88-94.

About the author

Tore Mysen is Associate Professor, Marketing, at Oslo School of Management, Norway. He holds a Dr Oecon (PhD) at Norwegian School of Management BI. His research agenda consists of various subjects within inter-firm relationships, such as: governance of foreign collaborative partners, co-ordination and cooperation, relationship management, relationship quality and relationship climate. He has published in various international journals. Furthermore, he is a member of editorial boards and is committed as track chair at conferences. Tore Mysen can be contacted at: tore.mysen@mh.no