Call for Papers

Corporate Change Agents for Sustainability
Transforming Organizations from Inside Out

Guest Editors

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Submission deadline: 30 November 2021

Creating a company that operates in line with planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) and that contributes to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) requires fundamental organizational transformations, including entrepreneurial contributions to transforming markets and society (e.g. Johnson & Schaltegger, 2020). Such transformations, however, do not happen by themselves (Schaltegger et al., 2016). It is often individual managers and employees within a company – so called 'change agents for sustainability' – who play a vital role in advancing corporate sustainability, as they are responsible for starting initiatives, making decisions and implementing measures. Indeed, recent contributions have started to focus on the transformational role of individual corporate sustainability professionals and other zealous employees in shaping strategic decisions around social and environmental issues in organizations from the inside out (Gond & Moser, 2021; Girschik et al., 2020).

Change agents for sustainability can unfold their activities at all levels and places in an organization (Acquier, et al., 2011). Most companies have formalized roles for corporate sustainability professionals (including CSR, EHS, and CR managers) in one form or another (Beckmann et al., 2020). Besides corporate sustainability professionals, CEOs and top managers (Sturdivant, 1979), other corporate agents such as local heroes or champions (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Walley & Stubbs, 1999), middle and functional managers or engaged employees may play a crucial role in the transformation of their organization (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Sharma & Good, 2013).Their activities usually include proposing, pursuing and implementing sustainability projects and activities and ensuring the overall improvement of corporate sustainability performance. Besides, change agents for sustainability often act as key entrepreneurial actors (intrapreneurs) or as activists inside the company who guide and push for organizational sustainability transformation (e.g. Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018), possibly also bottom-up in the organization (Brinkhurst et al., 2011).

Yet being organizationally embedded, corporate change agents face barriers when aiming to change established routines and structures (Battilana et al., 2009), including unsustainable organizational cultures (e.g. Bansal, 2003; Linnenluecke et al., 2009), a lack of resources, information, and legitimacy, conflicting norms, career opportunities, as well as the fundamental disruption of business through the digital transformation (e.g. Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021). To be effective, change agents therefore need to create awareness about the relevance of sustainability with trainings, software, etc. (e.g. Baumgartner & Winter, 2014). They use strategies to engage other actors in the organization, to build official 'sustainability ambassador networks' and informal alliances as well as to convince top management and external stakeholders (e.g. Daudigeos, 2013; Wickert & Risi, 2010). Engaging in organizational sustainability transformations from inside out, furthermore requires change agents to acquire certain competencies (e.g. Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014), engage in complex problem solving (Metcalf & Benn, 2013), creative imaginary work, as well as motivation (e.g. Windolph et al., 2014), passion and persistence (e.g. Hörisch et al., 2019; Wright & Nyberg, 2012).

Extending the growing debate, submissions to this special issue analyse the relevance, roles, competencies, activities, and strategies of corporate change agents for sustainability at different levels and positions in the organization. We further aim to extend previous studies by soliciting studies that explore new and alternative paths to the analysis of how and when internal change agents may facilitate organizational transformations towards sustainability.

Issues addressed in submissions include, but are not limited to:

- Analysing job descriptions and actual job activities of sustainability managers in comparison over time and between different company sizes, industries, countries, etc.

- Analysing and/or empirically assessing contributions of change agents for sustainability to meso-level sustainability transformations of networks (industry associations, standardisation institutions, etc.) and macro-level sustainability transitions (eradication of poverty in a country, reforestation of deserts with a business approach, etc.)

- Analysing different change agent strategies (e.g. issue selling; Howard-Grenville, 2007) to increase their effectiveness inside the organization to achieve organizational transformations, e.g. directed toward other corporate functions such as R&D, HR or sales.

- Investigating how change agents for sustainability establish, manage and maintain networks, alliances and collaborations with societal stakeholders (NPOs, private public partnerships, etc.) and market stakeholders (investors, suppliers, customers, etc.)

- Analysing processes and pathways as well as management and organisational approaches for change agents in different positions, on different levels and in different organizations. Identifying examples of best practices and/or of failures of change agents for sustainability, especially when facing reactionary colleagues or stakeholders.

- Analysing how change agents deal with growth and business performance imperatives, construct business case narratives for sustainability-oriented practices and products (Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018) or introduce new measurement systems and alternative performance indicators.

- Analysing ethical issues of possible and observed strategies of sustainability managers investigating how sustainable managers experience these ethical challenges, especially when facing slowness of corporate transformation.

- Analysing existing, needed and developed competencies of change agents for sustainability (e.g. over time, between countries, compared to curricula of MBA programmes). Analysis

of what capacity building and teaching curricula do and should consider for educating responsible and sustainability managers (Laasch et al., 2020).

- Developing and applying new theoretical lenses (such as theorizing the 'communication constitutes organizations' perspective, e.g. Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013, or critical and feminist perspectives, e.g. Girschik et al., 2020, or leadership, e.g. Metcalf & Benn, 2013) or cultural imaginaries (Levy & Spicer, 2013)

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The call is open to all types of papers, conceptual, theoretical and empirical and to all research methods that support novel, rigorous and innovative academic analyses.

Time schedule

The following schedule is planned:

Submission of papers: 30 November 2021

Initial decisions made and authors informed: 15 January 2022

Deadline for last paper revisions for consideration in the special issue: beginning of 2023

Publication of special edition of journal: summer 2023

Contributions

Full papers are invited to be considered for publication in the journal special issue. Paper submissions should not exceed 8,000 words, for theoretical papers and empirical studies and should follow the author guidelines.

Submitted papers should make clear their relevance to business, ethics, the environment, responsibility, management practice, and academic significance. We also welcome joint papers by academics and practitioners.

Guest editors and contact information

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Submission Instructions

Submission deadline: 30 November 2021

Authors should refer to the author Guidlines for instructions on submitting to BEER.
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Select "Special Issues" and then "Corporate Change Agents for Sustainability":

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