

Corporate and entrepreneurial contributions to sustainability transitions

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Businesses increasingly consider sustainability issues in their strategies to develop their organizations to be fit for future (Doluc, Wagner, & Block, 2018; Hörisch, Wulfsberg, & Schaltegger, 2019, online). These strategies often focus on minimizing negative externalities, but doing so potentially fails to address increasing systemic (market) risks associated with wider sustainability transitions (Loorbach, van Bakel, Whiteman, & Rotmans, 2010). Societal transitions are defined as nonlinear, disruptive systemic shifts that result from unsustainable, path-dependent optimization, ignoring emerging alternatives and existential pressures. For businesses operating in a context of emerging societal transitions, this poses a complex challenge: to transform their own business models in tune with shifting societal and market conditions. If successful, however, businesses that develop proactive transition strategies can help shape future markets that operate within planetary boundaries and this way evolve towards truly sustainable business models. This implies rethinking future markets and consumer preferences and helping to build new consumption patterns and to change lifestyle patterns towards higher levels of sustainability.

Earlier research dealing with sustainability contributions beyond the organizational boundary have focused either on large companies or on entrepreneurial ventures. The first strand of literature emphasizes opportunities and challenges for businesses to contribute to sustainability transformations of their organization and markets and suggests that contributions to large-scale sustainability transitions will likely differ by company size (Gallo & Christensen, 2011; Hörisch, 2018; Loorbach & Wijsman, 2013). Frequently, large corporations are highlighted to be the levers for sustainability transitions due to their substantial direct impacts on environmental and social developments and their broad outreach along supply chains (Brown, Vetterlein, & Roemer-Mahler, 2010; Christ & Burritt, 2018; New, 2015). The second strand of research emphasizes entrepreneurial potentials of radical, disruptive sustainability-oriented innovations and proposes that start-ups, pioneers, spin-offs, and other entrepreneurial ventures are key for driving sustainable development at the large scale (Hockerts &

Wüstenhagen, 2010; Johnson & Schaltegger, 2019, online; Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016). For small and medium-sized enterprises, frequently, their collective impact on sustainability transitions is emphasized, as about 70% of all global environmental damage is created by small and medium-sized enterprises (Hillary, 2004; Revell, Stokes, & Chen, 2010).

Still, the interlinkages between both strands of literature have so far gained only scant attention. Coevolution of sustainability transformations of small and large companies leading to sustainability transitions at the meso- or macro-scale have been highlighted while underlying processes have not yet been in the core of research attention (Loorbach & Wijsman, 2013). What strategies, experiences, and effects characterize successful and failed sustainability relevant mergers, acquisitions, or alliances? What paths aiming to contribute to sustainable development can be distinguished and what learnings can be drawn from them to inform management, societal stakeholders, and governments? What barriers and challenges are faced in exchange and collaboration, ranging from language and professionalization to resources and networks? Additionally, the complex nature of sustainability transitions complicates the assessment of business contributions to sustainability transitions. Still, rigorous assessment will be crucial for creating corporate strategies as well as for designing respective policies and incentives to increase corporate contributions to sustainability transitions.

Consequently, submissions to this special issue analyze how companies of different size can and do contribute to sustainability transitions. Issues addressed in submissions could include, but are not limited to the following:

- Analyzing and managing business contributions to meso-level sustainability transformations of networks (industry associations, standardization institutions, etc.) and macro-level sustainability transitions (eradication of poverty in a country, reforestation of deserts with a business approach, etc.).

- Analyzing different corporate strategies for sustainability transformations of the organization leading to sustainability transitions at the meso- and macro-level.
- Analyzing processes and pathways as well as management and organizational approaches for companies of different size on how contributions to sustainability transitions can be realized.
- Empirically assessing the contribution of corporations and entrepreneurial ventures of different size to sustainability transitions.
- Identifying and analysing examples of businesses and best practice cases that go beyond frequent expectations, e.g., large corporations, which aim at radical sustainability innovations, or start-ups, which aim at transforming the mass market.
- Analyzing failures of pioneers or large companies trying to change the mass market towards sustainability.
- Examining the role of innovations and experimentation for corporate sustainability transformations.
- Analyzing and developing management approaches for sustainability transitions along the supply chain.
- Analyzing mergers and acquisitions between sustainability pioneers and conventional incumbents with regard to how the sustainability mission and impact has developed.
- Investigating alliances and collaborations with societal stakeholders (NPOs, private public partnerships, etc.)
- Debating and analyzing ethical issues of sustainability transitions (e.g., potential value conflicts).

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.

0.1 | Time schedule

Contributors with ideas for papers can contact the editors before submission by email. The following schedule will be applied:

Submission of papers: 24 August, 2020

Review deadline: 31 October, 2020

Initial decisions made and authors informed: 15 November, 2020

Deadline for last paper revisions for consideration in the special issue: 30 June, 2021

Final decisions made: 15 August, 2021

Publication of special edition of journal: end of 2021/beginning of 2022

1 | CONTRIBUTIONS

Full papers are invited to be considered for publication in the journal special issue. Paper submissions should not exceed 7,000 words for

theoretical papers and empirical studies and should follow the editorial guidelines for "Business Strategy and the Environment," which can be obtained from the website <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/10990836/homepage/forauthors.html>. Submitted papers should make clear their relevance to business, management practice, and academic significance. We also welcome joint papers by academics and practitioners.

2 | GUEST EDITORS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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Please send your submissions via email to schaltegger@uni-leuphana.de (instead of using the online submission system; do not use the online system for this special issue).

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