# ANALYSIS OF THE IDEA OF SUSTAINABILITY IN RELATION TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS. FROM THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PRESENT TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE FUTURE

**Lecturer PhD. Marius-Costel EŞI**

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania*

*mariusesi@yahoo.com*

**Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to analyze to what extent we can discuss social and economic sustainability in the context of the contemporary society. We are considering, on the one hand, the analysis of the social-educational dimension in relation to the way of implementing sustainability at the level of the business organizations. On the other hand, we aim towards a proper explanation of what extent the axiomatic core (values, customs, principles, etc.) of a business organization can contribute to its development/growth from an economic standpoint. Therefore, our analysis seeks first of all to deal with the ways in which an epistemic and practical correspondence between the idea of sustainability and the economic, social and educational dimensions of business organizations is possible. Secondly, we want to show that an exhaustive analysis of the idea of sustainability in relation to these dimensions implies a reassessment by the decision-makers (stakeholders) of what the organizational management, organizational culture, organizational behavior and the education for the future mean.*

**Key words:** *business organizations; economic sustainability; educational sustainability; organizational values; social sustainability*

**JEL Classification:** *O35*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the idea of sustainability as it is related to the economic, social and educational dimension of business organizations requires an exhaustive understanding of how the axiomatic nucleus is reflected at the level of business organizations. Thus, specific features are highlighted that generate or can generate a series of social capitalization, through which most of the strategic projects assumed/validated by organizational decision-makers (top-managers, stakeholders) can be validated. Moreover, such an image reveals, in our opinion, an organizational typology at the level of which a number of social responsibilities and obligations are obvious.

We consider in this context that the existing decision-making process within business organizations needs to be correlated/adapted with the type of organizational culture, especially when considering the relationship between corporate sustainability and organizational culture (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010: 357-366) is analyzed. This is, in other words, the issue of value visibility: how efficient/competitive business organizations are compared to the strategic management assumed by decision makers and "how to implement the corporate sustainability in organizational practice" (Daily & Huang, 2001: 1539-1552). That is why we believe that it is necessary to consider the many needs and values characteristic of different types of social/national cultures that can be found in the culture of the business organization in which it operates.

The focusing of such an idea on the analysis of value issues in relation to the idea of ethical sustainability (O 'Hara, 1998: 43-62) within the business organization, expresses the call for necessities and needs reflected both at the social level and at the personal level. Such needs, corroborated/developed with the exigencies of decision makers, can be related to the social/economic utility dimension. Moreover, the identification of parameters that reveal, on the one hand, „the relation between the axiological dimension and the value utility existing at the level of the business organization and the link between corporate social responsibility and financial performance, on the other" (Pava & Krausz, 1996: 321-357), can enable decision-makers to assume a competitive decision-making process based on the idea of performance (Clarkson, 1995: 92-117).

## II. THE ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY ASSUMED BY THE DECISION-MAKERS AND THE IDEA OF SUSTAINABILITY

The analysis of the economic responsibility of the decision-makers in relation to the idea of sustainability leads us to focus our analysis on the dimension of legitimation of managerial activities in relation to the resources used (Hart, 1995). In other words, the assumption by decision-makers of a system of values within their own

organizations implies both the existence and the acceptance of cultural patterns of an organizational nature (Hofstede, 1981:15-41). In this way, an important role in the assuming by the decision-makers of the idea of sustainability is played by the concept of "economic responsibility".

Certainly, in such an approach we do not want to make a diachronic analysis of the idea of economic responsibility. We are rather interested in seeing how much such an idea can be pragmatically validated in relation to the existing capital (Pearce & Atkinson, 1993: 103-108). Furthermore, our interest is focused on how to identify the axiological coordinates that guide decision makers. This is the reason why the explanation of the concept of "sustainability" is linked to the existing capital (Solow, 1993; Pearce, 1988; Stern, 1997) or the social responsibility we believe is proving to be effective given that management strategies need to be clarified (Radcliffe, 8) and subsequently correlated with the very idea of social/economic utility.

We also note that with the transition from conceptual-theoretical explanations to practical explanations (Munasinghe, 1994:13-16), we can talk about the fact that decision-makers, as moral agents (Caroll, 1991), must assume the responsibility in management. Such managerial responsibility also reflects the need to assume the idea of morality. Moreover, such an assumption, that of moral assumption, leads to an exhaustive analysis of „three basic fields of knowledge: rational, emotional, and spiritual in continuous interaction" (Bratianu, 2016).

In this sense, we can agree with the idea that the very organizational morality is the basis of the organizational culture, the sum of existing principles and values (Howard, 1998; Poulton, 2005). In other words, regardless of the strategy assumed by the decision-makers in relation to the axiological landmarks assumed by a business organization, the dimension of managerial values can be correlated with the economic, social and educational dimension. What we want to show is that when we talk about developing/growing of an organization, the decision makers should consider ideas such as „profitability, efficiency, profitability, productivity, yield, concepts that can be correlated, on the one hand, with the organizational field itself, and on the other hand, the moral /organizational behavior of all the employees" (Welford, 1995).

In this way, the transposition of the organizational behavior into the field of social responsibility presupposes a transposition in the conceptual-theoretical dimension, as well as practical for obtaining a common good (Burciu & Kicsi, 2016: 33-40). Such an approach, materializing through the implementation of specific policies to empower our own employees (Baron, 2001: 7-45) and to achieve organizational sustainability (Bennett &James, 1999; Callens & Tyteca, 1999: 41-53), proves its economic legitimacy as the relationship between strategic behavior and managerial strategies (Burgelman, 1983: 61-70) becomes operational. In these circumstances, we consider the idea according to which the assumed social/economic (managerial) responsibility of the decision makers can be correlated with the idea of sustainability justifiable.

However, it is harder to establish from the point of view of the socio-economic praxis, where responsibility starts and ends (whatever this is, economic, social or educational). That is why we admit that it is harder to quantify such an idea in relation to the dimension of sustainability. However, the effects that "implementing" the responsibility on business organizations and, implicitly, on their employees can generate can be quantified qualitatively and quantitatively. Therefore, the assumption and "implementation" of responsibility within business organizations translates into the idea that the decision makers' responsibility can be perceived as a relevant vector in terms of the management positioning they have assumed.

Extrapolated to the social sustainability dimension, such an idea highlights a number of social implications to illustrate the(non) the validity of a business organization by legitimizing business strategies (Figge, Hahn, Schaltegger & Wagner, 2002: 269-284), but also especially in the case of managers (Drucker, 1954, 2006). The „validity of a business model" (Chesbrough, 2010: 354-363; Zott &Amit, 2010: 216-226; Posteucă, 2013: 69-77), and implicitly of „sustainable business models" (Bocken, Short, Rana & Evans, 2014: 42-56), to sustain a sustainable innovation (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013: 9-19), reflects the very effect of social and economic assessment on the business organization (Schaltegger, Burritt, & Petersen, 2017). In other words, the social implications can acquire axiological, economic and social legitimacy insofar as the organizational culture is assumed and as strategies implemented and successful are taken into account.

Such a model is found in the case of social sustainability, a sustainability correlated with issues related to the analysis of economic (Percy, 2000:195-202; Norton & Toman, 1997: 553-568), ecological (Ostrom, 2009: 419-422) and environmental systems (Watson, Boudreau & Chen, 2010: 23-38). The pragmatic connotation of implementing an analysis that allows for a clear analysis of social sustainability reveals the need to implement organizational strategies that highlight the idea of social value itself (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975: 122-136). On the other hand, correlating social sustainability with the concept of „social value" expresses the level of a business organization - that is corporate sustainability" (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002: 130-141) - its yield/efficiency from the entrepreneurial perspectives.

Sure enough, sustainability is also targeted by other indicators/parameters (Ragas, Knapen, Heuvel, Eijkenboom, Buise & Laar, 1995: 123-129; Lawrence, 1997: 179-189) which, on the one hand, „highlight personal values" (Vinson, Scott & Lamont, 1977: 44-50), and on the other hand, tend to refer the concept of „social capital" (Toman, 1994:399-413) seen as a social interaction (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998: 464-476). We do not talk about social capital unless we take into account the human capital.

However, the adoption by companies of sustainable strategies (Hart, 1997: 66-76) leads us to accept the need for an integrative model (Stead, Worell & Stead, 1990: 233-242). By such an integrative model, reference is made to the very economic, social and educational dimensions of business organizations. Moreover, a social responsibility approach from a sustainability perspective refers to the idea of measuring business sustainability (Veleva & Ellenbecker, 2000: 101-120).

Measuring the business sustainability implies, in our view, a specific state of affairs in which an exhaustive analysis can be subjected to the relationship between the axiological and economic dimensions, a relationship found particularly in managerial approaches within business organizations. Some axiological-driven analyses are required to support economic values within the market targeting.  In other respects, we claim as necessary in for organizational research to implement more consistent/in-depth studies focused on a real-time amelioration of the decision-makers' and employees' priorities and interests, without antagonizing the individual – organizational system of values. Thus, explanatory proceedings concerning organizational ethics, etiquette and practices may be correlated to the organizational success seen as a sum of particular efforts and achievements. For instance, Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group, claimed "moral and humanistic entrepreneurship", involving, in our opinion, the idea of strategic conditioning.  According to his statement, "business involves creating value in the form of products and services", while "doing good is good for business" (Branson, 2011). This type of strategic conditioning features the very aims and design endorsed by senior management. Establishing and implementing organizational strategies in relation to managerial claims involve an advance and a revision/reevaluation of what is a *sine qua non* business organization. In this way, we believe that we are justified in affirming that the sustainability of the business organization can be generated/involved in such strategic conditioning.

Regardless of how it is perceived, as week or as strong (Neumayer, 1999), the sustainability must reflect, in our opinion, a common basis of value sequences within business organizations that allows us to rethink social initiatives in and through business (Margolis & Walsh, 2003: 268-305). Thus, starting from the assumption that the economic reality reveals aspects of a social nature, we can see to what extent business organizations become sustainable if their strategies also take into account an educational dimension (Warburton, 2003: 44-56; Moore, 2005: 76-91; Porter & Córdoba, 2010: 323-347). Such an educational dimension finds its correspondence precisely in the social and economic applicability of those aspects necessary and useful to the society/economy in general and to the individual in particular.

### III. Social, Economic And Educational Implications Of The Idea Of Sustainability In The Business Organization

The implications of the idea of educational sustainability, corroborated with the size of global affairs (Rusinko, 2010: 507-519) require a series of strategies to be adapted, correlated with the macroeconomic, social and even political context. Thus, the role of managers is to see to what extent the idea of sustainability and the organizational strategy can be correlated. In this sense, the dimension of innovation proves to be one of the most important in the business organization as such. (Drucker, 2008; Rodrigues & Franco, 2019). In other words, we are talking about a conversion – or – remodeling framework, somehow responsible for what the vision of a manager/business organization is.

Assuming the identity and image of the business organization as it is reflected through its representants and decision-makers acquires managerial validity to the extent that, when pursuing organizational sustainability, a number of social, economic and educational implications are also considered (Kantabutra, 2019: 1-39). In other words, we take into account that decision makers (founders/top managers) need to acknowledge a list of conjunctions and integration patterns concerning value distributions in the organizational culture of the company to which they belong. Moreover, the dimension of managerial practices must be "corroborated with the dimension of social responsibility" (Jamali, Safieddine & Rabbath, 2008: 443-459).

The rational exploitation of such an interaction between the organizational culture and value sequences highlights the teleological function of organizational cultures and also the pragmatic function, reflected by the association with the assumption and fulfillment of objectives in relation to organizational responsibility. In this way, the social and economic implications reflect the need for the decision makers to consider the interaction between the mission/objectives formulated, but also the strategies assumed in relation to the axiological core (principles, values, usages) of business organization. Moreover, the learning and action experiences accumulated over time within the business organization bring attention to issues of how to impose the organization on the market, taking into account the competition just for validating its own sustainability.

The validation of the value sustainability at the organization level must express, in our view, the very determining nature of the purpose of a business organization. Thus, its identity, corroborated with the strategies assumed by the decision-makers can highlight a number of aspects that relate more to an organizational ethics. In addition, the organizational ethics correlated with the decision-makers' responsibility may in turn generate a series of issues that give rise to interrogations about antinomies such as: good-evil, right-wrong, true-false.

Regarding this idea, a discussion about the conditioning between the ethical/moral aspects and the strategies assumed by the decision-makers by virtue of predetermined goals (which reflects the organizational mission itself) and the *organizational identity* is necessary. From an ethical perspective, goals that some of the business organizations (the mission itself) take on, reflect ideas such as education, responsibility, safety or even knowledge. What we want to emphasize is that terms like those we have previously mentioned as part of antinomy couples do not have an absolute connotation. On the other hand, extensionally, such terms are rather relative.

For example, within a business organization, the notion of "good" is relative and non-quantifiable. We do not know how much "good" can generate positive aspects at organizational level, but also at economic and level.

For instance, we learn from Colt's official website that its mission is focused on delivering to civilian customers on the one hand, and on the other hand to the army, the best and newest firearms in the world for the purpose of law enforcement. In this way, through the stated mission, the Colt Company undertakes a serious commitment to the quality and safety of its citizens ("to delivering the world's finest, innovative firearms to our military, law, enforcement, and civilian customers, through a deep commitment to quality and safety"). Therefore, taking into account some ethical landmarks, the mission of such an organization focuses on issues of applicability rather than the enunciation and consideration of "simple" content in relation to ideas such as education, responsibility, security or even knowledge.

In this example, questions arise about the sustainability of the mission itself of the business organization or about the sustainability of the organization as such. Such sustainability has its starting point in ideas such as safety, law, quality. But we ask doubtful questions about the ethical dimension of such a mission statement. Of course, such a problem remains open to theoretical and practical discussions. It is a fact that we cannot speak in this situation of sustainability unless we discuss the ethical dimension of the organization and the goals assumed at decision-making level (through founders, top managers, etc).

In this regard, we can ask how ethical the content of such a mission is. Moreover, the interrogation in this context is whether ethics is respected in the true sense of the word, knowing that most of the times in a war there are "guilty people", "innocent people" and "collateral victims" respectively. How ethical is the application of the mission of such an organization?" Or, in other words, we can ask how sustainable such ethics are at society level (it is understood that from an economic point of view, concepts such as "efficiency" productivity", "profit "find their validity.). A new type of coordination is mandatory, while translating economic priorities in the postmodern social framework.

We examine therefore, in this context, the perspective of correlating specific objectives assumed by business entities with their value-oriented interpretation required by the social valuation grounds. In this way, the social sustainability can be correlated with the economic/managerial sustainability at the company level. At the same time, we note that in such a situation the very social/moral values of society are brought into question. The interrogation that occurs is whether such an activity is of an ethical or a non-ethical nature. Of course, both the pro and counter arguments come to reinforce the idea that at the level of theorization and applicability a series of analyzes are required that should place the human nature on the first place. In other words, the economic actor must be associated with the good of the human being (although as we have previously seen, the definition of some terms reflects relative meanings).

In this situation, we are dealing with the idea of social responsibility related to the "managerial context" (Davis, 1960: 70-76) or perceived as a contributing factor in increasing the profit of an organization (Friedman, 1970). Thus, the assumption of value sequences initiated/promoted by decision makers indicates that the dimension of organizational culture passes from the common fund of the value sequences to the pragmatic area of the social design. In other words, over time, many decision-makers have learned from their own experience, from their own work and their own employees, their needs and aspirations (Howard, 2013: 76) and of the society. In the example of the Colt Company, we are talking about the need for safety. All these aspects, therefore, have only revealed an image of what is the transposition of value layout from organizational culture into towards the pragmatic (social) dimension of entrepreneurship.

Given the fact that both the humanistic, moral and pragmatic hypostases of entrepreneurs represent rather an aggregate of norms, experiences and activities that express and reveal at the same time the identity of the organization, we can admit that the identification of cultural and personality patterns identified in business are or must be linked to an ethical requirement concerning the organizational mission. Thus, in such a scientific approach, a series of systemic analyzes are possible regarding the presence of cultural patterns and individual traits or specific ways of implementing management strategies. Moreover, such an image can show how the inherent links between the entire organization's system of principles and values and the business' public identity can be explained through the mission- strategy dynamics.

This image implies, when analyzing the idea of sustainability, taking into account some defining features related to the *human component* (socio-economic actors), the *material component* (technologies required of the socio-economic actors) and the *pragmatic component* (complying with the customer's needs and requirements). The assumption that we are considering in this respect is that according to which business organizations must respect the conditions stated before: strategic efficiency, economic stability, environmental and social

sustainability. In other words, these predicaments may reflect the very idea of sustainability, as perceived in relation to the size of organizational performance.

Moreover, the organizational performance explained from the perspective of "the relationship between the firm's strategy and the business model" (Madu, 2013: 1-9), or "the relationship between decision and company strategy" (Coeurderoy & Durand, 2001:57-88) as such, or from the perspective of the knowledge management (Zack, McKeen & Singh, 2009: 392-409), or the organizational learning (Liao & Wu, 2009: 64-76), the organizational performance can be quantified in our view from the perspective of the three components mentioned above - human, material and pragmatic). On the other hand, when talking about learning organization (Polanyi, 1966), we need to consider the knowledge management dimension (Nonaka, 1994: 14-37).

Thus, in a direct relationship with the learning organization (Senge, 1990), the knowledge management asserts two forms of knowledge, namely, the explicit knowledge, which emphasize the organizational structure, working rules and procedures, investments, innovations and implicit knowledge that highlights cultural values, decision ethics and "know-how" (Hedlund, 1994: 73-90). In this way, we can admit that the transformation of any kind of knowledge depends on the ways in which knowledge is used. Such an understanding is responsible for the educational dimension.

## IV. SOME ISSUES ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE FUTURE

The poverty, the destruction of the environment and of the society in which we live, and in the future even of the universe we live in are images of our non-existence. That is why we need to be aware of the role and strength of our new technologies, we need to identify the real and/or potential solutions to the short/ long-term problems we face. Any approach of this kind means a choice between to be or not to be. The first option becomes plausible to the extent intelligent beings know how to communicate and choose what is best for them. That is why we can state that the educational dimension has a fundamental role in the social and economic sustainability.

To be sustainable from an economic, social, educational point of view means first of all to be sustainable as a human being. Or, to be sustainable as a human being means knowing what to do with the power and science that you have. Unfortunately, some of us do not know what to do or do not show that their real intentions are of the best. How many of us have the power to decide, to take the commitment to themselves, to the rest of us that do we do our best to protect ourselves and protect the planet in general?

In this regard, we cannot not talk about the fact that all the educational principles, all the great economic, theological, all philosophies about what a society, a nation, a civilization, all must be as soon as possible reassessed, rethought, adapted, so that everyone can be fine. Achieving something useful in peaceful and awareness conditions is more than vital for an entire civilization. Sustainability means opening people to people and communication.

We would not wonder that in a near future we can talk about the sustainability of our civilization in relation to the sustainability of other civilizations, with other very intelligent life forms in the universe. We would not wonder that in a near future we should try to develop and apply a series of contact strategies and protocols to validate the idea of the universe's sustainability and everything that implies life at its level. In this way, what we call today a decision-maker today (top-manager, supervisors, administrators, leadership) would acquire totally and completely different connotations. It would not be surprising that in a more or less distant future we could initiate, on the basis of specific communications involving needs and resources from different places and spaces of the universe, other types of educational, economic, social or political systems.

The business organization will acquire another form, another structure and maybe another name. The organizational culture will also be different; the same will occur to the trade. The principles and values should probably remain the same because intelligent life also means tolerance, compassion, trust and humanism. We are talking here about a "humanity of the universe" that can be embraced as a key concept in terms of life sustainability and very intelligent life forms. The interconnectivity, the connections to all very intelligent forms of life can also acquire a different meaning. The evolution, conservation and intelligence will materialize through successive adaptations and mutations, through processes that now some of us do not imagine or want to accept.

Perhaps such statements at this time (both at the theoretical level, in the community where we live in the academic and scientific terms) may be risky as long as most of the problems we are currently facing are not solved. One thing, however, is of certainty at this time, namely, all aspects that have as a central element the sustainability of life derives from the idea of sustainability and its different forms: economic, social, educational, ecological, even political, and so on. We must therefore accept that the idea of sustainability opens a door to a different kind of reality. The great doubts have become certainty only after they have been sacrificed on the altar of ignorance.

Let us not limit our vision or thinking. Let us leave the imagination free to fly beyond what the present can imagine to be possible. Let us do everything we can to ensure that the idea of sustainability of the future acquires existential legitimacy in times and spaces as many and as diversified as possible in other possible worlds.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The gradual transformation of the society becomes visible as a result of social experiences. Under these conditions, social values exceed social structures, which are totally different in the contemporary society. So are organizations which are also involved in major transformation over time. People change, too, cognition transcends somehow the classic historical frame.

In other words, their internal functional structures thereof are constantly remodeling, generating temporary units that in turn transform themselves. On the other hand, it is also a perpetual migration of socio-economic actors from one organizational structure to another. All this is done with a price, namely: new short-term organizational components emerge that once are used are removed forever (e.g. the emergence of new jobs/jobs that are transformed from one period to the next). Therefore, this paradigm highlights the idea that the modular organizational structure is given by organizational components with a short lifespan, which allow the permanent reorganization and stability of the market.

By summarizing the main ideas that we have raised in this paper, we can conclude that:

(1)  On a competitive basis, the organizational philosophy can support the socio-economic structure of the organization and, implicitly, its sustainability.

(2)  Evaluating sustainability according to the economic, social and educational dimensions of business organizations implies in the present society, or at least should imply, from our standpoint, a theoretical and practical re-evaluation of what a business organization stands for, of what implies their organizational culture in relation to the responsibility of the main decision makers (founders, top managers).

(3)  Taking responsibility depending on the taking of action strategies at decision-making level can have major effects upon the sustainability of the business organization.

Taking into account the main issues that we have encountered in this paper, our proposals on the subject are focused on the following directions:

(1)  Directed towards functionality and social/economic/educational utility, the idea of organizational sustainability should be analyzed in the future and in relation to the change of attitude regarding the organizational behavior of the employees. We consider in this regard, on the one hand, the intentional profile of the business organization (based upon its properties such as shape, structure, type of management, size, etc.) and, on the other hand, the dimension of human accountability and social conscience.

(2)  Interpreting conceptual sustainability at an organization level can be validated theoretically and practically to the extent that the rational autonomy of the decision makers' responsibility is correlated with their organizational philosophy (mission and vision of the organization). In this way, a comparative analysis of what constitutes the idea of sustainability of the present in relation to the idea of sustainability of the future can be made.

(3)  The quantification of social values finds pragmatic correspondences in assuming the elaboration and implementation of policies and strategies of economic and educational nature. Therefore, a third proposal is that at the time of an epistemic analysis of the idea of sustainability be considered, on the one hand, in addition to classical ("Maslow's hierarchy of needs**")** needs and necessities and needs arising from the manifestation of other needs, and on the other hand, everything that the values of the present society implies concerning the values submitted by business organizations in the contemporary society. Sure enough, in such an approach, the decision makers' vision of the business organization of the future (with specific approaches and strategies, which, of course, have a potential nature) must not be missed.

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