

Sustainability: Towards an Anti-corruption Strategy to Protect Human Rights in Multicultural Societies

Angela Dettori
Ernestina Giudici

Abstract: *The shift in the concept of human security from the traditional notion of national and military security to issues including development and respect for human rights is becoming increasingly clear. The scale of the change is broad, and human security is increasingly becoming a global concept of individual freedom in the fight against inequality. A characteristic of this new approach is its connection with the concept of sustainable human security, which considers the environmental elements related to the resolution of current and future human insecurities. In light of new and evolving production and work structures, the success of businesses is likely to be increasingly dependent on human and social resources. The competitiveness and viability of firms depends on their ability to ensure that employees are motivated, skilled and committed. This is best achieved in progressive workplace environments characterized by a spirit of mutual trust and respect, non-discrimination, and good labor-management relations. Starting from the central dimension of the principle of equality between men and women, and the increasingly widespread phenomenon of multiculturalism, this paper offers some reflections on the various initiatives that sustainable enterprises can undertake to combat human insecurity. This work also contributes to the understanding of how sustainability reduces corruption by working to prevent human rights violations within the working environment.*

Keywords: *sustainable enterprise; human security; corruption; multiculturalism*

Introduction

The need for an ethic of coexistence which favors control and exchange between cultures has become indispensable. Beyond the complexity of socio-economic and political problems, issues related to corruption and respect for human rights are arising in increasingly multicultural societies.

Corruption, which can be observed throughout the human history, undermines humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation, human development, and human security.¹ Human security is a comprehensive concept of interdependent and fundamental freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. The added notion of sustainability aims to identify long-term solutions for the institutional, economic, social, and environmental aspects of human security. More specifically, “sustainable human security” aims to find systemic solutions for human trafficking, climate-related disasters, famines, poverty, multiculturalism,² and extreme

inequality. Sustainable human security underscores the persistence, interdependence, and universality of a set of freedoms that are undoubtedly fundamental to human life.

The implication of the previous observations is the formulation of some questions: how does the orientation toward sustainability protect the rights of workers in businesses? How do human security and sustainability work together in this new approach? What types of policies should enterprises adopt to reduce ethnic and cultural inequality? In a rapidly globalizing world, enterprises face a dynamic business environment that requires them to be adaptive and competitive.

The main purpose of this work is to understand how sustainability can represent a firm's anti-corruption strategy. In addition, our focus will be on understanding how sustainable enterprises seek to reduce corruption by diminishing the risk of human rights violations within the working environment.

After this introduction, attention is devoted to examining the concepts of corruption and sustainable development in the managerial context. Next, the possible relations between multiculturalism and sustainable human security are analyzed. The subsequent section contains contributions that help to further comprehend how to maximize the potential benefits of human rights in sustainable enterprises, such as anti-corruption strategies in multicultural societies. A company must balance its economic, financial, and social performance to be sustainable.³ Lastly, some final comments are presented.

What is corruption?

One of the main problems to be addressed in the analysis of corruption is the difficulty in finding a widely agreed upon definition. Indeed, there is no single, universally accepted definition of corruption. This is not only attributable to diverse legal traditions but also to different political, historical, and social sensitivities.⁴

In general, corruption can be defined as the use of money or gifts to obtain certain types of benefits and advantages or utilities,⁵ or synthetically, corruption can be defined as a private gain at public expense.⁶

Each of the numerous existing definitions focuses on one of the several facets of corruption: the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary⁷ describes corruption as dishonest or illegal behavior, Gould⁸ explicitly defines corruption as an immoral and unethical phenomenon, and the World Bank⁹ identifies corruption as the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development.

What is clearly apparent when considering the mentioned definitions is the focus on corrupt behaviors in the political, economic, and public administration sectors. It is likely that these are sectors in which corrupt practices are the most deeply rooted and widespread.¹⁰ In contrast, several forms of corruption, such as bribery, collusion, fraud, extortion, abuse of discretion, favoritism, nepotism, and many others, can be found in all sectors of contemporary society, including the private, public, and economic spheres and society as a whole.¹¹ The latter forms of corruption are subtler than they were previously and are now a part of daily activities; therefore, identifying them is not straightforward. Firms must take the perspective of adopting

anti-corruption strategies, embracing sustainable development philosophies, and identifying long-term solutions to the institutional, economic, social, and environmental aspects of human security.¹² In this way, it is possible to develop strong awareness within firms of how corruption can be detrimental to society as a whole based on the internalization of principles that protect anti-corruption conduct.¹³

In increasingly multicultural societies, the link between sustainability and human security is fundamental; human resources are often "consumed and exploited" rather than developed and reproduced.¹⁴ Because the lack of such resources can be a major element in losing organizational competitiveness, innovation, strategic capacity, and profitability, interest in sustainable human security within firms is growing¹⁵.

The main implication is that sustainability may be able to fight corruption by investing in people through measures to protect workers in multicultural societies.¹⁶ Multiculturalism, with its wealth of both professional and relational customs, can represent significant added value for firms.¹⁷

Sustainable Development in a Managerial Context

Corporate sustainability represents an application of the broader concept of sustainable development, which is the theoretical and methodological framework within which to develop the behavior of each firm.¹⁸ According to the perspective that regards sustainability as a factor that should be combined with the existing structures and organizational behaviors of firms, some contributions are offered. Porter and Kramer¹⁹ state that each company must determine, in its own market, whether and how to embrace sustainability, which is seen as just another method to achieve a better competitive position.

The development of sustainable enterprises is related to the strengthening of the institutions and governance systems that nurture enterprises; strong and efficient markets need strong and effective institutions that ensure that human, financial, and natural resources that are combined equitably and efficiently to generate innovation and enhanced productivity.²⁰ This requires new forms of cooperation between governments, businesses, and society to ensure that the present and future quality of life (and employment) can be optimized while safeguarding the sustainability of the planet.

It may be useful to remember that the "sustainable enterprise" concept is related to the general approach of sustainable development, a framework of progress that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This approach postulates a holistic, balanced and integrated perspective on development²¹. The strength of sustainable development is more than just an environmental issue; it requires the integration of the three pillars of development: economic, social, and environmental.²² The social dimension of sustainable development typically includes a commitment to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, just, and based on the promotion and protection of human rights as well as non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunities, security, and the participation of people including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.²³

A central tenet of the social pillar of sustainable development is the generation of secure livelihoods through freely chosen, productive employment. Sustainable development is thus a general framework for dialogue on growth and development but also has more specific threads on enterprise development that protect the human rights of workers.²⁴

Through “sustainable human security,” it is possible to pursue the permanence and universality of a number of freedoms that are fundamental to human life to fight corruption in multicultural societies.²⁵

Multiculturalism and Sustainability

If sustainable development were a totally comprehensive idea, then it would naturally also include a cultural component. Due to our character as “social animals,”²⁶ human beings live in social groups that possess their own intrinsic spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional characteristics, or, in other words, cultures.²⁷

This implies that the sustainable development of human security cannot be discussed without taking the cultural aspects of the human lifestyle into consideration.²⁸ Accordingly, as in the case of the economy, environment, and society, people are required to protect the cultural heritage of the present generation in order to safeguard the cultural heritage of future generations, specifically with regard to cultural diversity as an essential cultural component of sustainable development.²⁹

Why is cultural diversity so critical for sustainable development? Two fundamental reasons are submitted. The first is that the survival of humanity is closely related to the existence of culture. The coexistence of several cultures allows human beings to better adapt to their environments, giving the human race the strength to overcome environmental changes and survive. The emergence of multifaceted cultures able to maintain widespread cultural diversity has increased the possibilities for the human race to internalize skills adapted to environmental changes whenever necessary.³⁰ Furthermore, the existence of other cultures is vital to retaining cultural creativity and vitality. New ideas are born in each culture, but constant encounters between different cultures constitute the source of cultural creativity. To realize cross-cultural exchanges and reforms, cultural diversity must be present as a prerequisite.³¹

The second reason is a guarantee of physical security and the safeguarding of human security for minorities. The lack of mutual understanding between countries has resulted in wars, conflicts, and terrorism.³² To build peace, it is necessary for there to be mutual understanding and tolerance between cultures. If people accept multiculturalism and understand cultures other than their own, this will contribute to the prevention of conflict and the building of peace.³³ In addition, there are people belonging to various cultures within single nations, such as indigenous people, minority races, and immigrants. The acceptance of several cultures entails the acceptance of these people’s ways of life, values and languages.³⁴ For example, a countermeasure to the outbreak of ethnic tensions and regional conflicts after the end of the Cold War involved cross-cultural dialogues undertaken from a security and peace-building perspective.

Respect for cultural diversity contributes to security and peace-building while also contributing to the realization of a multicultural society that respects others. Multiculturalism and cultural rights are closely related concepts; multiculturalism is a government stance protecting and allowing for the recognition of multiple cultures, both at home and abroad, on the basis that diverse cultures are represented by groups such as ethnic groups, immigrant groups, minority interest groups, and religious minorities.³⁵

For cultural diversity to be aligned with sustainable development, governments must adopt multiculturalism policies. Cultural rights are the overall individual rights of a cultural region and comprise the rights to enjoy culture, create culture, and participate in cultural activities. In other words, we are referring to civil liberties and social rights that should be legally justified in national constitutions and treaties.³⁶

Taking the increasing awareness of the recognition of cultural rights into consideration, the next step is to transform the cultural diversity that is now confined to the sovereign boundaries of states into multicultural societies.

Sustainable Human Security

Given the influence that the choices of enterprises have on the psychological well-being of workers, it is interesting to investigate why the human dimension of sustainability often remains in the background. There are undoubtedly many reasons that the physical environment has received more emphasis than people in the debate on sustainability.³⁷ One reason is that the consequences of organizational actions toward the environment are often more visible and easier to monitor. As a result, organizations are increasingly focused on improving their environmental impact and improving their environmentally friendly image in the marketplace.. This one-way orientation reduces the attention provided to the welfare of people.³⁸

Human resource management is a function that has considerable scope and includes sustainability within organizational boundaries, especially with regard to the daily behavior of actors within enterprises.³⁹

Sustainable firms must have a long-term focus and undertake actions that aim to improve social and environmental performance, open areas for action that have not previously been considered in the design and evaluation of human resource management in the enterprise.⁴⁰ Human resource management is a function that can sustainably meet the needs of many stakeholders inside and outside the organization in a legitimate and relevant manner..⁴¹

Assuming that human resource management has an impact on company sustainability, how can it interpret its role from the perspective of building a sustainable enterprise?

According to Wilkinson's⁴² (et al.) sustainable approach to corporate management, this involves two main organizational changes: first, in the organizational context of companies, sustainability entails major changes that can be interpreted as the natural development of companies towards making the matching of the needs of the present with the expectations of future generations possible; second, sustainability requires companies to focus more on strategic management and the development of human resources.

Hart and Milstein⁴³ state that a sustainable enterprise that contributes to sustainable development simultaneously produces beneficial economic, social, and environmental effects.

The integration of human resource management and sustainability has also been explored by Boudreau and Ramstad,⁴⁴ who analyzed two major challenges: the first is related to attracting, retaining and developing talent to survive globalization and foster innovation; the second is related to the implementation of safety and human resource management systems that align economic, social, and environmental actions to develop a systemic, long-term approach.⁴⁵

It is possible that sustainability is playing a very important role in management practices related to the effectiveness of human resources both within enterprises and in growing multicultural societies. The adoption of this perspective could lead to real cultural changes, the establishment of new rules for competition, and perhaps even new markets and conduct related to the sustainable human security concept, reinforcing the persistence, interdependence, and universality of group freedoms that are fundamental to human life.⁴⁶

Sustainability: An Anti-corruption Strategy

Sustainable enterprises recognize people as the basic component of competitive advantages and treat their employees both as assets and as agents for change.⁴⁷ Therefore, sustainable enterprises need to obtain their employees' support because this determines not only the commercial success of their operations but also the engagement of enterprises with sustainable social and environmental issues.⁴⁸

This is made possible by the promotion of enterprise values that are aligned with the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, along with investing in the quality of working life through appropriate workplace organization, practices, employment conditions, and human resource development.⁴⁹ In order to turn economic, social, and environmental challenges into opportunities, enterprises need to tap into the creativity and innovation of employees at all levels by investing in the quality of working life.⁵⁰

How can sustainable enterprises create obstacles for corruption?

Is it not a simple question, but the answer can be synthesized into few words that present different implications: is fundamental investment in human beings within firms. Living in a multicultural society means protecting minorities, especially in the working environment. Therefore, sustainable enterprises must invest in human subjects and in social responsibility in order to create a successful working environment where employees are motivated and able to operate with different cultures.⁵¹

In a rapidly globalizing world, enterprises face a dynamic business environment that requires them to be adaptive and competitive to survive and grow. In light of new and evolving work structures, enterprise success is likely to increase based on human and social resources.⁵² The competitiveness, viability, and survivability of enterprises increasingly dependent on their ability to ensure that employees are motivated, skilled, and committed. This is best achieved in progressive workplace environments characterized by a spirit of mutual trust and respect, non-discrimination, and good labor-management relations.⁵³

Indeed, at no time in history has the quality of the workforce assumed such widespread importance; globalization has intensified international competition centered on the use of modern technologies that are primarily knowledge-based and intensive in the use of conceptual skills. Additionally, governments play an essential role in ensuring that educational systems provide students with the basic skills necessary to ensure that training enhances employability and human resources.⁵⁴

Sustainable enterprises promote equity and non-discrimination at the workplace. The management of a diverse workforce is increasingly recognized as a key factor in improving efficiency, productivity, and overall business success. Similarly, there is increasing evidence indicating not only the benefits of a diverse workforce but also the increased economic impact of discrimination in the workplace, both for enterprises themselves and for societies in general.⁵⁵

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on analyses of the managerial behavior of firms and the most significant scholarly contributions from the last decade, it is apparent that both agree on considering human beings as essential resources. This shared notion arose because globalization made investing in people more important than ever. Moreover, the evidence suggests that employees are more motivated in workplace environments characterized by a spirit of mutual trust and respect, non-discrimination, and good labor-management relations.⁵⁶

What added value do we offer to the development of managerial studies with this work?

If, as previously noted, the contribution of human beings is universally accepted, it is also possible to present similar considerations with regard to sustainability and multiculturalism. More precisely, sustainability and multiculturalism are attracting the attention of firm managers and scholars, who wish to better understand how they can contribute to the success of firms. We want to emphasize that both sustainability and multiculturalism, as well as the centrality of human beings and their security, are separately analyzed.

Our contribution highlights the effective strength of interactions between sustainability, human security, and multiculturalism. Considering that these elements work interdependently, we highlighted the existence of a synergetic effect that provides a different and special value to the activities of firms. In addition, this emerging value is the essential premise for which attention is being focused on human security within firm operations as a natural protection against corruption.

In short, our work suggests that firms make decisions related to how interactions among sustainability, human security, and multiculturalism support the central role played by human beings within firms and protects employees from corruption inside and outside firms.

About the Authors

Angela Dettori earned her Master's Degree at the University of Cagliari (Italy) in 2011, where she currently is a Ph.D in Business Administration. Her main research topics are tourism businesses and sustainability. She has written a chapter in an edited book and she has attended as a presenter at the ItAis conference (Rome 2012) and at DBM Conference in Cardiff (December 2012). She attended at the 2013 EGOS Conference (Montreal).

Ernestina Giudici is Full Professor of Management and Communication at the University of Cagliari (Italy) where she is also member of the Board of Directors. She is Member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences and of the Editorial Review Board of the Transnational Marketing Journal. She has published several books, chapters in team books and many articles. Her research interests include innovation, the relationship between organizations and their environment, identity, motivation, creativity, ethic, corruption, multiculturalism, sustainable development, etc. As a presenter, she has attended to several conferences (e.g. EGOS, Academy of Management, EURAM, QMOD, IABE, ItAIS etc.).

Notes

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