

Newspapers on sustainable development – a postmodern business perspective

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Abstract

The paper departs from an urge to understand the operating environment of business firms in the postmodern society. In identifying sustainable development as a key concept, we make use of daily newspapers to explore which values these attach to reporting on sustainable development. After identifying these norms of society, we argue that firms have taken on a role in people's lives that former pertained to the religious, collective culture. Business organizations provide a sense of belonging in times when people look for new areas of selfidentification. This role has been accepted opportunistically and strategically in the business world. We thus identify a weak SD paradigm, which seems to increasingly appear in our everyday life, whether one is, beside a newspaper reader, primarily a customer or a business manager.

Keywords

Sustainable development, values, postmodernity, identity, ethics

1.1 Background

The United Nations has in a General Assembly resolution in September 2000 launched a global sustainability program called the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Finland is, together with the other member countries of the UN, a signatory of this declaration. Having just passed the midterm point in the assertion, it is of interest to study how sustainable development (SD) has been manifested in society. What values are connected with the concept of SD in everyday life? How do newspapers, as central actors of moulding and forming public opinion, bring SD forward? What pressures and implications do these bring upon the major economic actors of our times – the business networks, firms and corporate life? And last, but not least – how can we understand this interconnection of values, SD, media, business and society in a postmodern society? This study is a further development of a recent research report that explored Finnish newspaper articles inclusive of the concept sustainable development (Hellöre, forthcoming). Serving as a pilot study, that report explored the possibility of integrating psychological models as a means to understand value. Not successfully verified models have at this stage been left out, but the frameworks that proved useful are here included and further explored, providing a broader understanding of the postmodern society in which firms are embedded. The embeddedness of firms has been researched by a number of scientists, most notably Granovetter (1985, 1992, also by the IMP-school¹ with researchers such as Forsgren & Johanson, 1992; Håkansson & Johanson, 1992; Törnroos, 1997; Andersson, 2001 etc.) Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1996) see values as based in foundational basic needs. However, as a person's values develop, the process of learning becomes essential. This is called socialization and implies how an individual incorporates the values and norms of society through ways of imitation, identification of roles and other means of socialization. As mass

media provides day-to-day influence over issues of importance, it also plays a central part in the socialization of the norms that make up our rules of life. Therefore, researching media supports the identification and understanding of values in society. Thus, the research questions to be addressed here are:

1. What types of values (inclusive of ethics) are transmitted in Finnish newspaper articles on sustainable development?
2. How can these values be understood?
3. What does this imply for Finnish firms embedded in a postmodern society?

The approach includes a theoretical and analytical triangulation, which integrates perspectives of psychological models, business focus and a philosophical and ethical examination of the postmodern society. By using a range of perspectives, the innovativeness of new understanding is raised (cf. Hatch, 2002; Kristensson Uggla, 2002; Asplund, 1970; Normann, 2001). The main aim is thus to understand the current everyday environment of the Finnish firm. The central idea is to make sense of the complexity of the empirical data in the light of the research questions. Sensemaking as a research aim has been discussed at length by e.g. Weick (1995) and with similar lines of thought, however using other concepts, by authors such as Kristensson Uggla (2002), Normann (2001) and Asplund (1970). The study further aims to be part of the paradigmatic debate on sustainable development. By philosophically discussing the results of an empirical study on newspaper articles, the contribution lays both in concrete and abstract terms: Theoretically, the study innovatively uses psychological frameworks to understand and analyze values of SD. Empirically, the study relies on currently published articles in Finnish newspapers. Managerially, the paper can offer insights beyond everyday business problems, addressing the underlying streams of thought that influence media and thus put pressure on

¹ The IMP-group is a research group founded almost four decades ago around the common theme of the European International Marketing and Purchasing project. The school has become international in scope and is sometimes referred to as the Uppsala school or the IMP-model.

firms. In addition, a few normative managerial implications are drawn. The study has certain limitations. Geographically, the data is collected in Finland. As a result, the exploration of SD is delimited to the national languages. Furthermore, it should be noted that various synonyms or other forms of SD have not been considered, in order to have a clear frame of focus and make the study do-able. The paper is divided into two main parts, excluding the background above. The first part (1.2) is both empirical and theoretical, where we simultaneously account for and philosophically discuss the empirical exploration of values in media articles. The data collection, methods of analysis and results are presented, and sustainable development is discussed as part of the ethics of a postmodern society. The second part (1.3) is managerial, and to some extent normative, where we draw concrete implications of the empirical results and analysis in a business context. The paper ends in a few concluding remarks.

1.2 A study of values in media articles

The empirical data consists of 57 pieces of news collected during one year (12 months) from two leading newspapers in Finland, *Hufvudstadsbladet* (Hbl) and *Turun Sanomat* (TS). These sources of information have been chosen by offering complementarity to each other in two ways. Firstly, because they serve different language groups. Secondly, because they mainly operate in different geographical regions. By differing in scope, the generalizability of the findings is expected to be greater. Hbl is the main national newspaper for the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, but simultaneously aspires to cover the Helsinki region. TS, again, is the third largest newspaper in the Finnish language, mainly representing the Turku region. However, it seems that TS has gained importance as a means of forming opinion, as it has increasingly become more difficult to publish in *Helsingin Sanomat*, which is the leading newspaper in Finland. The newspapers have been analyzed during the period of May 2007 to April 2008. During this time period, no major groundshaking events took place in the Finnish society. Only pieces of news containing the search words for translations of "sustainable development" have been included in the empirical data. Naturally, for Hbl the search has been made for the equivalent Swedish which is "hållbar utveckling". In TS "kestävä kehitys" respectively guided the selection of material. This is a central limitation to this study. Thus, all newspaper items that deals with sustainable development are not included, only those that explicitly include the exact phrase *hållbar utveckling* or *kestävä kehitys*. This limitation makes the study do-able and feasible by ensuring access to databases on published articles and also avoids making the researchers arbitraries on what sustainable development is; i.e. which parameters a sustainable development need to fulfil. The study is thus descriptive and analytical in nature. Implications of this limitation are that the choice of language reflects the outcomes of the study. The material was accessed by a search function on the homepages of each newspaper. In Hbl 24 items with the search words were found, in TS 33. These are listed in Appendix 1 and 2. Both newspapers reported a peak in July and October. December showed no reported item in neither paper. As for the place of publication, most items were related to expression of opinions in various forms. Editorials, letters to the editorial column and separate columns jointly added up to 19 items. 12 items were reported on the pages of domestic affairs and 4 on foreign affairs. 9 items were in the economics sections of TS and Hbl. Other places of occurrence were linked to sports, extra enclosures such as the Sunday issue, politics, culture and web. Of these the culture section included 3, the remaining 1-2

items. Each piece has been analyzed qualitatively and interpretatively (Bryman, 1989; Strauss, 1987; Robson & Foster, 1989; Norén, 1995; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). By qualitative analysis, we imply that each piece of news is treated as a unique piece of data, read and categorized individually. By interpretative analysis, we mean that we have aimed to make sense of the piece of news in relation to the topic of sustainable development. The sensemaking process (Weick 1995), enables an understanding of qualitative data. The pieces of news have been analyzed by using four different analytical tools. Two are conceptual models, including a framework of SD and a model for understanding the ethical focus of the articles. Another two are psychological models that enable an understanding of the socialization of values. These are one-by-one presented below. In conjunction with each framework or model, the empirical data is analyzed.

1.2.1 The four dimensions of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development was formulated in the 1980's with the ambition to defend the possibility of a constructive co-operation between economic growth and environmental protection. This was, at least partly, a polemic against the "zero-growth", that was recommended by the so called "Club of Rome" in its report *Limits to Growth*, published in 1972. According to the probably most widely used definition, development is sustainable when it meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future (Our common future, 1987). This definition stems from the so-called *Brundtland Report* which was initiated by the United Nations (UN) in 1983. Some instances define SD as consisting of three dimensions; economic, social and environmental (sometimes referred to as ecological) sustainability. Other instances, such as the UN, include a fourth dimension of cultural sustainability. These four dimensions were put forward at the Rio Conference in 1992, stating that neither of the dimensions may be left out for sustainable development to take place. This latter, broader, conceptual understanding of SD is used here. The empirical data shows a rather even distribution of sustainability: cultural (15%), environmental (37%), financial (19%) and social (29%) dimensions. Traditionally, environmental issues have been regarded as the equivalent to sustainability and CSR (despite the term corporate social responsibility!). Therefore it is rather expected that ecologically or environmentally related issues dominate a majority of the articles. On the other hand, the high percentage of cultural sustainability found in the data is noteworthy. This shows that sustainability is no longer restricted to the three traditional pillars (economic, social and environmental), but that in the minds of media and its consumers, cultural sustainability has conquered its own space and is clearly a dimension to take into account. Economic, or financial, sustainability has come into the fore over past years and has by now achieved a noteworthy attention. However, it carries the dominant perspective in only about every fifth article. This is also a notable result of analysis. As the dimensions of culture, economy and society have gained importance, we consequently see that the leading role of ecological issues in the sustainability debate has decreased, although it still is in the lead. In sum, it seems that the four dimensions proposed by the United Nations have broken through in the empirical data from TS and Hbl.

It is important to acknowledge, that the usefulness of SD as a concept has been called in question during the last decades. Some environmentalists have argued that SD has been adopted mainly by those who want to find arguments for not having to change the current European and North-American way of life (Baker, Cousis, Richardson & Young, 1997). Representatives of

the poorer parts of the world have stated that the talk about SD is just a pretext introduced by the Western world, in order to make it more difficult for the developing countries to benefit from the technical and scientific development (Baker, 1997). The empirical data shows that the environmental/ecological dimension of SD seems to have lost some of its dominance. This could be interpreted as a successful result of the efforts to harmonize between the ecological, financial, social and cultural dimensions of SD, but it could also be seen as part of a growing tendency to subordinate the ecological issues to questions of social development and economic growth. Richardson (1997) argues that SD has to be redefined along purely ecological lines – otherwise the concept will be only a rhetorical device used by politicians and the market. According to Baker (1997), there are two dominant types of environmental policy: The first is characterized by a so called “weak” notion of SD, and it tries to preserve the quality of nature inside the prevailing economic, political and social systems by only making slight adjustments to these structures. Its defenders believe that it is possible to maintain our current standard of living; mankind has the right to continue to use the resources of the earth, as long as this is done in a long-term perspective. Characteristic of this approach is a focus on technical innovations that make industrial production, heating of buildings and transports more energy-efficient. The resources of Earth are thought to be essentially unlimited, since the strong optimism concerning technology and science implies that new resources will be found before the old are exhausted. This optimistic version of SD is often adopted in political discourse, since it is guided by the conviction that science and technology will provide us with the desirable solutions at the proper time. The second, “strong” version of SD is more radical, trying to change habits of consumption, redefine what is called economic activity, redistribute the use of the resources of the world, and to reform the current financial structures. According to this understanding of SD, environmental protection is a precondition of economic development. While the market is given an important and rather independent role in the weak SD, the use of legal and economic policy instruments plays a crucial role in the strong SD. The partial downplay of the ecological dimension of SD in the newspapers can be interpreted as an expression of the current dominance of the weak, more pragmatic understanding of SD, according to which economic development is a prerequisite of environmental protection. Without a strong and expanding economy, society cannot afford to protect the environment. This attitude indicates, that environmental protection is considered something “extra” in relation to regular economic activity. This rather pessimistic interpretation of the current situation could indicate that business corporations can go on doing business as usual, because they assert that they contribute to SD indirectly by making profit and thereby increasing the economic potentialities of the society. This is in line with how Friedman perceives business to bear its responsibilities in the most optimal way. Friedman writes in a reissued copy of *Capitalism and Freedom*:

“The view has been gaining widespread acceptance that corporate officials and labor leaders have a “social responsibility” that goes beyond serving the interest of their stockholders or their members. This view shows a fundamental misconception of the character and nature of free economy. In such an economy, there is one and only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase it

profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition, without deception or fraud. /.../ Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible.” (Friedman, 1982:133)

The drawback of this attitude is that the corporations will change an environmentally harmful policy only if their own future is challenged, for example when the resources that the company needs for its products are exhausted or at least getting scarce and therefore more expensive. But, on the other hand, the analysis of the newspapers showed a considerable interest in the social and cultural dimensions of SD, which means that it would be unfair to accuse the current media of promoting a narrow financial understanding of SD. The items also showed a significant worry about the future that probably is shared by many of the readers of the newspapers. Therefore, there are a lot of possibilities for firms that are willing to respond to these tendencies in our current society on a level that goes deeper than stereotyped phrases. Mutual advantages can be achieved by offering customers, employees and other stakeholders the opportunity to be part of a corporation that promotes sustainable values and long-term perspectives in social and financial development. This is also the goal of the so-called stakeholder model² (Freeman, 1984), where a win-win situation is sought.

1.2.2 Business ethics and personal identity in a postmodern society

The introduction of the concept of sustainable development in the scientific discourse on environmental issues wasn't just a question of a change in vocabulary. The shift from “environmental protection” to “sustainable development” is an expression of a new attitude towards the relation between science, economy and ethics in the postmodern society. Today, there is a strong feeling of urgency on environmental issues. This is quite understandable, and even unavoidable, given the widespread knowledge about the risks of an ecological breakdown on our planet. At the same time here lies a temptation: the urgent need to find and implement solutions to the current problems tends to give all other matters only an instrumental value in relation to this task. Scientific research is no longer considered as a neutral description of the interplay between man and nature, but as part of an urgent need to accomplish certain goals. Research is therefore valued primarily by its capability to serve political decision-making or technological innovations. In this point of view, man is considered a technician, capable of correcting the former disastrous management of nature by managing nature in a more accurate way. The manipulative attitude towards nature is not condemned as such, only its short-sightedness. There are some postmodern traits in this new “paradigm”. One of these traits is the pragmatism which follows from the postmodern epistemological scepticism: since we can't know anything for sure, the most important question is not if a certain theory or scientific explanation is true, but whether it works (c.f. Weick's concept of sensemaking 1995). As for example Kirkman (2002) has shown there is a strong pragmatic tendency in postmodern environmental ethics, stressing the usefulness of the decisions we make. This kind of pragmatic argumentation is closely related to an anthropocentric utilitarianism: actions should be measured on the basis of their consequences for the individuals or social groups involved. But the current environmental crisis makes it impos-

² The stakeholder approach is in academic literature sometimes referred to as the stakeholder concept, the stakeholder management framework or even the stakeholder theory. Some academics argue that there does not exist any clear understanding on what the theory/approach/concept/framework clearly consists of. Freeman (1994) claims that it rather seems to be a genre of theories.

sible to restrict such utilitarian calculations only to human beings, and especially only to human beings living today.

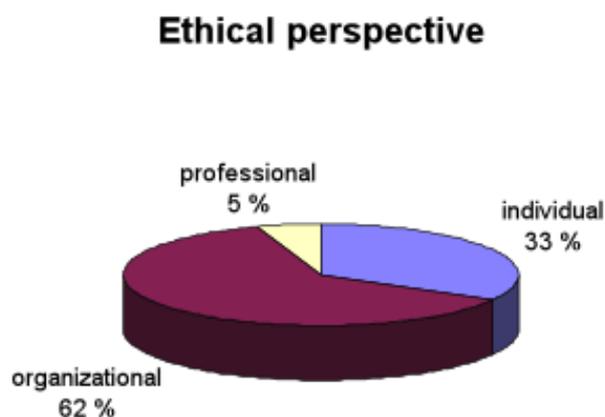


Figure 1 The prevalence of individual, organizational and professional ethics respectively in the entire empirical data.

Business ethics is a concept which often is used interchangeably to SD and especially to corporate social responsibility (CSR). This has been elaborated in Lindfelt (2004b; 2006b). The use, however, differs both between and within geographical, scholastic and institutional boundaries. Business ethics can interestingly be understood by dividing the concept of ethics into dimensions of individual, organizational and professional character (Philipson, 2004). Take for instance the example of a vegetarian accountant working in a meat producing company. The accountant's personal conviction not to eat meat may be part of her individual ethics. Her following of the regulations of proper accounting reflects the professional ethics of her job. Finally, the company's ethical profile clearly includes an approval of the consumption and production of meat. These three dimensions may be possible to combine – or they may cause deep conflicts if the ethics focuses differ greatly, as in the case of the accountant above. The categorization hence gives a chance to understand the level of ethics involved and the perspective taken upon business ethics or ethics in general. The data shows a clear tendency towards organizational focus in articles that deal with SD in one form or another. See Figure 1. Almost two thirds of the articles (62 %) include an overriding perspective that reports about, or criticizes businesses, firms or other organizational entities. Much less, only about every third (33 %) article takes mainly the perspective of the individual, such as the ordinary citizen, consumer or person. This may imply that the studied media, TS and Hbl, rather sees organizations as agents in SD, than acknowledges the role played by individuals. Is this a tendency representing the view of Finnish society? A very limited proportion (5 %) is focusing on the professional role in ethical matters of sustainability. This may show a tendency in society to downplay – or even be ignorant – of ethical standards held by different professions. Rather, the responsibility and power of the organization, and to some extent the individual, is highlighted. It is quite remarkable that not more work has been done by political initiative to raise the awareness of the potential in professional ethics, considering the amount of official documents on Finland's, Europe's and other large actors' commitment towards a SD. Thus, here may lay a possibility for further stimulation of SD and ethical behaviour, i.e. by stimulating the role of professional ethics. Individual ethics is much more difficult to influence or inspire, and the current culture of Finland is not one of

telling people how to behave. This has been discussed for instance in Lindfelt (2004a).

A question of both theoretical and practical importance concerns how our understanding of ethics is affected if we approve the idea that economical benefits may serve as a justifiable motivation for a company seeking to improve its ethical profile or image. This kind of argumentation would hardly be appreciated if we were considering the behavior of individuals. On the contrary, we are in our daily life highly critical towards persons who, according to our opinion, seem to act in an ethically sound way only when they either expect to be rewarded for their behavior or are afraid of otherwise being punished. In theological language such a person is called a hypocrite, because all that matters for him or her is the surface; that what other people see. Concerning individuals, accordingly, we place greater value on acts that seem to flow from a spontaneous and unselfish care for the wellbeing of others, than on acts that obviously are motivated by an ambition to gain personal benefits. Does this indicate that we should use different criteria when we, from an ethical point of view, assess the behavior of individuals and the policy of business companies? If we consider Adam Smith's idea of self-interest or even "self-love" as the supreme motivation for human behavior, including transactions in the market, the idea of an unselfish actor in the business sector seems highly dubious. On the other hand, as for example Sen (1999) has argued, economists referring to Smith have very often overlooked that he, in fact, simultaneously underscored the importance of virtues such as sympathy, generosity and justice. This indicates that Smith wasn't proposing a narrow egoistic utilitarianism, but rather seeking some kind of balance between the interests of the self and the others. Sen argues that this misinterpretation of Smith has led to a cleavage between economics and ethics, a cleavage that economists only recently have been attempting to mend. On the other hand, it is equally important to keep in mind the simple fact that the point of business is to make money. It would be naïve to expect companies to promote ethical concerns out of sheer benevolence. But the fact that notions like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and SD have entered the field of business and economics indicates that there is a growing need to relate ethics with business/economics. Kaptein (1998) argues that even though the idea of profit is fully accepted, this doesn't automatically indicate that the optimization of profit would also be equally accepted. The company has to show in what way its stakeholders, such as stockholders (dividend), the government (taxes) and employees (profit-sharing), benefit from its profit, and the company also has to convince its customers that it can meet their needs in an ethically sound way. The question of personal identity is a central topic in postmodernity. This identity isn't considered stable or given once and for all. On the contrary, personal identity is something that can be consciously made and reshaped. Through our decisions we create ourselves, our image, but these decisions can always be reconsidered and questioned. By the way we dress, by our lifestyle, by our choice of music, books, magazines and TV-programs we express both our own uniqueness and our relatedness to other people with similar tastes. Since our identity isn't possible to describe by listing a set of lasting characteristics, it has to take the form of a story: the only way to tell who we are is to tell the story of our life. This approach has been adopted by many business companies. Through advertisements, news releases and policy documents, the story, the brand, and thus the identity, of the corporation is shaped and communicated to stakeholders, such as customers and employees. The current interest in "green" values and SD creates possibilities for actors in the market, as we argued

above. In offering sustainable products, the company is able to help those human beings who desire to live in a sustainable way. In a similar way, businesses could strengthen the motivation of their employees by giving them a sense that they are part of a sustainable company; a company that cares for the environment and for the world in which the children of the employees will live. As individuals, people like to take part in a process leading to a more sustainable future, and if this is achieved by being an employee or a regular customer of a certain corporation, then people readily integrate this as a part of their identity, their lifestyle. These considerations could be linked to the encouraging of a professional ethics. In the current ethical debate, there is a renewed interest in virtue ethics, where focus is set not only on individual actions but rather on the whole person (Oakley & Cocking, 2001). As individuals, people like to integrate their professional role with their consumption habits in a coherent lifestyle, where the relation to other people and the environment is characterized by participation and mutual dependency.

1.2.3 Psychological models

A group of researchers at University of Bergen has studied the development and spread of organizational culture in Norwegian working environment and its legislation (Hellesoy, Matthiesen, Raknes, Einarsen & Sortland, 1993; see Kaufmann & Kaufmann 1996: 327). They found that values develop over time and, in addition, continuously gain in importance. Hellesoy et al. classify five types of values, all of which derive from a learning process:

- + democratic values: such as justice, freedom of speech, joint decision-making.
- + human(istic) values: such as freedom, personal development, and joyful creativity.
- + health values: such as lack of pain and illness, protection against injuries and harm, physical and mental control of actions.
- + security values: such as protection against dangers posed to people, material and environment.
- + economic values: such as the use of resources, efficacy and competitiveness.

In the empirical data, a majority of the articles are financial-ly (30 %) or democratically (31 %) value-loaded. See Figure 1. This shows a focus on economic effectiveness, resource use and competitiveness in the former case, and focus on values such as freedom of speech, democratic justice and joint decision-making in the latter. In many respects, these two perspectives can be perceived as opposites – as in the traditional and much used dichotomy of whether human(istic) or business values should rule our society. The results show a tendency that these respective forces are strongly put forward in media, creating a stimulating tension and a good ground for debate. On the other hand, it may imply that the two opposite perspectives nevertheless are not so distant at all, but that economical values more and more accompany democratic values – and vice versa. In other words; it pays off to be human. This dichotomy is further emphasized with the third value orientation of the empirical data, which is precisely human, or humanistic, values (21 %). These are, on the one hand, closely related to the democratic values, but as they are more fixed on personal development, joyful creativity and freedom there may, on the other hand, arise conflicts between for example social solidarity and individual self-fulfilment. When adding the humanistic values with the democratic, over half of the pieces of news are covered, which is more than the amount of the financial share. On the bottom-end, we find that security issues such as protection against dangers posed to people, materia and environment received less attention (13%). This

is probably a result of our very secure society and the lack of immediate dangers met by newspaper consumers. Health values (5 %) seemed not a large issue at all in the news on SD. As health issues normally score high in any Finnish news, this result of the study rather shows on a very weak link between SD and health issues. Protection against injuries and harm, lack of physical and mental pain are accordingly not an issue that editors and newspaper media tend to link to SD. This is may be due to the fact that the negative consequences of pollution and the global climate change have had more severe impact on the health of the inhabitants of poorer countries, than on the citizens of welfare countries such as Finland.

Hellesoy et al.'s 5 value dispositions

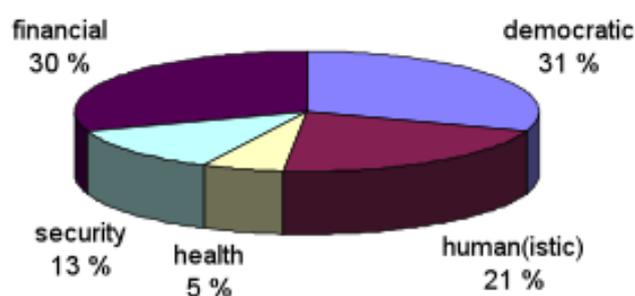


Figure 2 The data analyzed according to Hellesoy et al.'s five value orientations.

Allport's typology of values is another classical psychological contribution. It has been developed in 1960 to a personality test entitled A Study of Values (Allport, 1967: 299). Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1996) give examples of how the typology has been used to identify value hierarchies and profiles in various professions such as among sales directors, priests and industrial researchers. The typology still receives much credit and has also been used for instance in cross-cultural marketing research in a study of consumer ethics (Ford, Nonis & Hudson, 2005). The value profile contains six types of values (Allport, 1967: 297-299):

- + theoretical values: emphasizing the cognitive quest for and discovery of truth through critical and rational thinking.
- + economic values: emphasizing issues that are down-to-earth, useful and of practical matter.
- + esthetical values: emphasizing harmony and form, grace, symmetry and fitness, an opposite to the theoretical values.
- + social values: emphasizing altruism and love of people, unselfishness, kindness, sympathy, close to the religious attitude.
- + political values: emphasizing influence and power.
- + religious values: aiming at a comprehension of cosmos as a whole and the role of human mankind in this greater context.

In the empirical data, the political values (41 %) dominate, implying that sustainability is reported in connection with influence and power. See Figure 2. These are followed by economic values (18%), which in Allport's definition have more to do with practical matters and material, down-to-earth perspectives than strictly financial aspects. Together these two values, the political and economic, represent almost sixty percent of all the articles. This is rather surprising, since the economics and politics sec-

tions of the newspapers were not the main sections to report on SD issues. Quite interestingly, we find that articles mainly dealing with theoretical values (15 %) gained a relatively high share of the articles. This may reflect the significance of SD and the great challenge it poses to human mankind in the current worldview held in media. Theoretical values are defined to deal with the search for truth through rational and critical thinking. Esthetical values (8 %) were the main aspect of SD in a fraction of the empirical data, showing that issues of harmony and form do not occupy a large portion of media coverage in this respect. Finally, only three articles highlighted the religious values as part of SD, and then all in the sense of exploring man's role in the greater context of life. This may show on a tendency of less involvement by the religious movements in the quest for SD, or at least the lack of media interest in this relationship.

Allports 6 value types

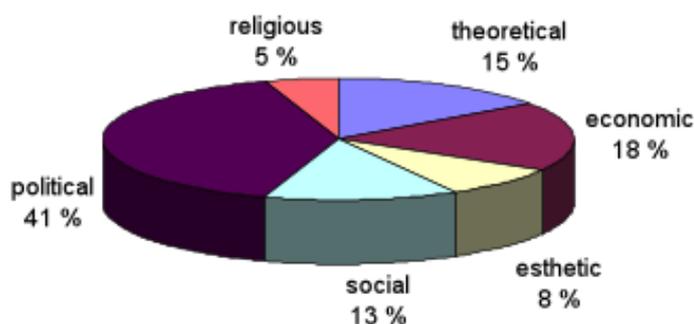


Figure 3 The data analyzed according to Allport's typology of values.

According to sociologists, postmodernity is characterized by pluralism, individualism, demands for immediate fulfilment of desires, and scepticism towards traditional authorities and all kind of absolutism. But at the same time, paradoxically, many representatives of sociology of religion (for example Hervieu-Léger, 2000) have noticed that the personal lifeworlds of post-modern men and women aren't only characterized by individual choice, but also by a longing for relatedness; for a sense of being part of a larger totality: a history, a community or a family. The Scandinavian countries of today face a unique situation, where a great majority of the population belongs to the Lutheran churches, but at the same time many of these church members in empirical surveys declare, that they don't believe in the fundamental teachings of their church. This peculiar fact has by some sociologists of religion (Bäckström et al., 2004) been described by the notion "believing in belonging", which indicates that the individuals in question understand their relation to religion primarily as a question of belonging to a larger entity, not as a question of personal faith: belonging is more important than believing. As a result of the secularization in the Western societies and the globalization, the importance of both the churches and the national states has decreased. The great narratives of churches and of nations do not, to same extent as earlier, provide the individual with a feeling of rootedness in a larger historical, cultural and social context. This means that business companies, consciously or unconsciously, may step in to fill this gap. The company provides its employees not only with a salary, but also with a job that, hopefully, gives the employees a sense of

meaning, direction and participation. By being an active part of the organization, the individual, together with others, strive towards "a common good", because they all benefit if the company makes progress. An expression of this tendency is the idea that a company can be described as a living organism with a "soul". Companies these days also have values, just like people. As a consequence, the company is able to place demands on its employees: they need to show that they are worthy members of the organism, otherwise they can be "cut off from the branch".

1.3 Implications for a Finnish business context

What implications can be drawn from the empirical data to the operational context of business firms? First, it is of fundamental importance to understand how the firm is embedded in a societal context. Polanyi launched the term "the embeddedness of firms" already in 1944. The term is used today by researchers to understand how firms are embedded into the wider environment or society (see e.g. Ramírez-Pasillas, 2004; Noorderhaven, Koen & Beugelsdijk 2002; Lindfelt 2006a). Mainela (2002) include the political, market and societal spheres in explaining the surroundings in which a firm is implanted – or embedded. She sees that the IMP-tradition includes two foundational presuppositions in understanding the firm:

a) Organizations (such as firms) consist of patterns, where various units stand in relationships to each other according to structures of interaction and mutual dependence.

b) Every business transaction is embedded in a network of relationships with distributors, sub-suppliers, governments and a set of other partners. This implies that an understanding of the business, e.g. of actors in the network, influence each relationship within the network. To understand the business, one has to understand the actors. Mainela argues further that all types of economic embeddedness are founded upon the social embeddedness, because individuals are the ones who initiate all business-related actions (Mainela, 2002:141; c.f. Törnroos, 1997).

This is a foundational argument for understanding why the values held by individual businesspeople affect the firms - and especially how this in turn is based on the norms of society and the socialization of these norms into the set of values of the individual businessman or -woman (see above, Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1996). Therefore, when understanding the embeddedness of firms, the relevance of exploring the postmodern society in which it is embedded becomes crucial. This is where this paper aims to contribute.

In consequence of the above and of the empirical analysis, we propose that the following ten tendencies in society affect business and its legitimacy of operations. In italics are conclusions read in the empirical data and in the subsequent paragraphs we suggest an interpretation of how each proposition affects business operations and firm management. We aim to at this final stage normatively draw conclusions that would benefit business and shortly ponder what each proposition could imply for Finnish firms.

1. Sustainability is reported most often in opinion-related matters and in domestic affairs. This result also shows that the topic evokes feelings and opinions in the readers and in the editors. It may be that both groups want a change and want to be part of this changing process. The editorials contain large opinionbuilding power, which should not be underestimated by businesses. Instead, these can form an opportunity for business to innovatively take new ideas into operations, management or marketing. At the same time results indicate that SD poses a great challenge to human mankind, as many pieces of news

mainly deal with theoretical values and the cognitive quest for truth. There is a real worry in society about SD-matters. The issue has finally – after a quarter of a decade since Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) – come further than the superficial beautiful words. Thus, companies need to take this aspect seriously into account in its identity formation and corporate philosophy. Only window-dressing and empty PR will do more harm than good. Serious thinking of the philosophical meaning of SD to the firm is needed, before claiming to address these issues.

2. Pieces of news on sustainability issues tend to be published in peak periods throughout the year. When a certain issue is reported in media and becomes part of everyday life, its importance rises. Thus, when there is good publicity on SD-matters of a company, the issue probably gets attention that is rather large in proportion to the issue itself – and vice versa. By the following-up of certain topics, such as SD, an issue grows in importance. Thereby, a company can gain good publicity if taking advantage of the months of good SD coverage and a raised awareness in the minds of the citizens, who also form various stakeholder groups of the company.

3. Cultural dimensions of sustainability are almost as frequently reported as the financial. Firms need to incorporate the cultural aspect into its corporate philosophy on SD. As it seems, the cultural dimension is apparent in society, but is still lacking in most firms (c.f. Lindfelt 2004a).

4. The environmental/ecological dimension of sustainability seems to have lost its great traditional dominance in the understanding of SD. It is no longer enough to rely on a sustainable ecological approach in creating the SD-identity of a company. This dimension is still important, but no longer guarantees that the firm gains an image of taking sustainability into account. For this to take place, it seems that more dimensions than just ecological sustainability must be accounted for.

5. The empirical data emphasizes the role of organizations, rather than the role of individuals or professions, as actors in SD. According to beliefs in society, it is the businesses and other organizations who are main drivers and main carriers of responsibility on sustainability matters. The importance of individual consumer needs, buying habits or consumption trends is downplayed in driving SD forward. Likewise, society does not (yet) recognize the role of certain categories of professions as important for closer examination. Rather, it is the organizations that are investigated and put as role models. This implies that businesses are offered a lead role – they may accept and take it - or they may deny the chance and risk to be questioned on why.

6. Encouraging the role of professional ethics may provide a largely undeveloped possibility of raising SD awareness. Because society is not yet aware of the immense possibility of professional power that a united category of workers can form in driving SD forward, here lies a chance that companies can make use of. If creatively taking this opportunity in their hands, businesses could pass politicians and worker's unions by promoting professional SD awareness and commitment. This could create a real possibility for good image and both societal and economic value creation for the firm.

7. A large part of the articles on SD take the perspective of financial issues; however, the democratic and humanistic perspectives together offer a clearly competing view on SD that is more linked to soft values. Firms need not downplay the need for economic sustainability in the firm, as society accepts the financial dimension of SD. Rather, by emphasizing the economic gains of a SD-approach, the firm's approach is in line with how society thinks. However, sustainability matters are perceived to

be such that these should openly be shared and dealt with. Economic sustainability is not enough, if there is no sense of what good it brings human mankind. In this quest, people want to feel included. Thus, the firm may aim to combine its SD-approach with an ongoing interaction with people inside and outside the firm. Hence, the firm intertwines SD-issues in its identity – and takes on the lead role it has been provided. This should be a valuable approach for reaching into the minds of the public.

8. SD news coverage tends not to include health issues. A relatively blind spot in society is the linkage between SD and health issues. However, many firms, especially in heavy industry, have long worked on occupational health and safety. Here lays a largely unexplored possibility to raise the positive image of the firm – if succeeding in opening up the blind spot of SD and how it relates to health issues.

9. SD is often noted in conjunction with influence and power. Society likes to perceive organizations as powerful, influential, and having the potential to do good and bad in larger extent than ever before (c.f. Brytting, 1998). In this respect, organizations need not worry about being strong agents for SD-development, as it seems this is what society expects them to be.

10. Religious values are downplayed. This is a rather interesting last aspect. Ethics has traditionally been linked to religious values, and religion is probably the largest single origin of the set of values in our society. However, this is not reflected to a great extent in public opinion or as part of media coverage. This implies either that society does not want to link SD in firms with more private religious spheres, meaning that firms should be aware of not doing it either. Or – it could imply a possibility that is unexplored, for stimulating value creation in the firm, by drawing on the positive relations between religious ethical values and a sustainable future.

1.4 Summary and concluding remarks

The main aim of our study has been to understand the current operating environment of the Finnish firm. We have explored the role of postmodernity for doing business, both empirically, theoretically and managerially. This takes place in the midst of the Millennium Declaration, which emphasizes the role of global SD. In researching values expressed by media, we found that cultural sustainability has become a dimension to add to the traditional three-fold understanding of SD. However, there is still a clear link between SD and business organizations. We identify an undeveloped area of SD in professional ethics. SD is most often reported along with power and influence, but least so in conjunction with health and religion. However, SD aspects are seriously taken and often pondered on theoretical level in newspapers. We note that companies play a central role in SD, and often do this out of sheer selfinterest. There is a pragmatic attitude toward ethics in the postmodern society and we argue that this is expressed in the dominance of a weak understanding of SD in society. In the new paradigmatic sense of SD, we furthermore explored the sense of belonging. In sum, we argue that the heightened role of organizations in SD development is directly related to the question of identity in postmodernity. We discuss how a declining role of the collectivism offered by religious institutions, family traditions and cultural heritage, has been overtaken by business organizations. In seeking a sense of belonging, people all the more seem to build their life stories upon participation in an organizational entity. As SD values play significant roles in society, business organizations have taken on the urge to do good, a role traditionally played by actors such

as the church, social institutions, certain professions, family or charitable organizations. The article thus aims to contribute to the discussion on firm identity, business management and SD in creating legitimacy for business operations in our 21st century.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Hufvudstadsbladet contained 24 pieces of news inclusive of "hållbar utveckling".

Date	Title	Section
15.5	Chirac tog farväl av politiken	Webb
22.5	Låt inte bilarna ta över stan	Ledare
31.5	Klimatfrågan allt viktigare	Ekonomi
14.6	Romantschuk flyttar till Fortum	Ekonomi
16.7	Kunden måste själv begära miljöavgift	Ekonomi
16.7	Etiska fonder når Finland	Ekonomi
24.7	"Afghanistan får inte lämnas åt sitt öde"	Politik
28.7	"Det har varit sju härliga år"	Ekonomi
12.9	Myggnät är Sachs vapen mot fattigdomen	Utrikes
3.10	Ansvar för utvecklingen	Ledare
16.10	Viktiga frågor om Nouxmiljön	Ledare
18.10	Statsministern säger nej till elvärmda hus	Inrikes
18.10	Värynen vurmar för skogen	Politik
4.11	Mot djärva energisnåla mål	Ledare
2.1	Nybygge hotar köpcentrum på Lövä	Helsingfors
6.2	Esbo vill bygga ut för 20000 invånare	Inrikes
10.2	Nollsummespelet inte rättvist	Ledare
22.2	Havet och soporna värmer mässhus	Ekonomi
23.2	Gröna går åt sd:s miljöpolitik	Inrikes
13.3	Biobränslet räddar inte miljön – ens i framtiden	Ekonomi
13.3	Grundskola vinnande concept	Ledare
1.4	Personbilstrafiken får inte öka	Ledare
7.4	Esbo ska byggas hållbart och tätare	Helsingfors
19.4	Personliga utsläppsrätter litet i Finland	Inrikes

Appendix 2 Turun Sanomat contained 33 pieces of news inclusive of "kestävä kehitys".

Date	Title	Section
20.5	Seikkisrockissa luvassa pellemeininkiä	Ajassa
22.5	Meren turkoosi laatoitus herättää Teersalon rantaa uuteen eloon	Kotimaa
27.5	Naisellinen kehityspankki	Pääkirjoitus
1.6.	Lisää krääsää maailmaan vai ihmisten herättämistä?	Kulttuuri
2.6	Luomuyrittäjä on kestävästi pinteessä	Extra
14.6	Kestävä kehitys ei sulje pois talouskasvua	Talous
1.7	Pieni Portugali jää Saksan varjoon	Ulkomaat
3.7	Vuosituhatohjelma etenee verkkaisesti	Ympäristö
3.7	MTK ryhtyy vihreän pääoman etujärjestöksi palkkaamalla ympäristöjohtajan	Kotimaa
4.7	Etelä-Korea vahvoilla kisaisännäksi 2014	Urheilu
5.7	Venäjän jäsenyys OECD:n uusin koetinkivi	Aliokirjoitus
13.8	Osakesijoittajien ei parane hätäillä	Mielipiteet
26.8	Koroisten viljelijäsuku väistyi	Sunnuntai
14.9	Ilmastonmuutoksen torjunnassa odotetaan jo tuloksia	Talous
3.10	Kestävä kehitys toteutuu fantasiamaisemassa	Kulttuuri
8.10	Ahvenanmaalla äänestetään kaksissa vaaleissa	Kotimaa
13.10	Länsimaiden kannattaa tukea afrikkalaista demokratiaa	Mielipiteet
13.10	Halonen kiitti uraaututavaa ilmastotyötä	Ulkomaat
20.10	Ekologista kehitysyhteistyötä	Mielipiteet
23.10	Kirjoittajavieras: Tuulivoimaa ja maalämpöä	Mielipiteet
23.10	Liberaalit juhlivat Ahvenanmaan vaaleissa	Kotimaa
3.11	Nesslingin säätiöltä tukea turkulaistutkijoille ympäristön ja bioenergian kehitysprojekteihin	Kotimaa
6.11	Ihminen sodassa maapalloa vastaan	Ympäristö
11.11	Ei ympäristöpessimismisiä, vaan jokaisen vastuuta	Pääkirjoitus
27.11	Luokattomat lukiot ovat massatuotantotehtaita	Mielipiteet
24.1	Anonyymit ilmastonilaajat	Kolumni
20.2	Kauan eläköt Wanhat tanssit!	Mielipiteet
23.2	Paratiisin takapiha	Extra
8.3	Kestävän kehityksen Turku	Mielipiteet
18.4	Tulevaisuus on muuta kuin tavaroita	Kulttuuri
23.4	Sosiaali- ja terveysala Turun AMK:n suosituin hakukohde	Kotimaa
27.4	Kehitysvammaiset haluavat töihin, mutta eivät ehdoitta	Sunnuntai
30.4	Halonen pahoitteli EU:n kehitysavun vähenemistä	Ulkomaat

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