ADOPTING A SUSTAINABLE CULTURE - PERSPECTIVES FROM THE BUSINESS SECTOR IN MAURITIUS

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ABSTRACT

There is some consensus that if firms are to adopt a sustainable culture and achieve economic growth, they need to look at sustainability beyond its 'green' roots which are also supported by the economic, social and cultural performance of business. The purpose of this paper is to assess the extent to which firms in Mauritius are adopting a sustainable culture. A representative sample of 182 local companies took part in the survey which was carried out using face to face interview and online method. Statistical analysis was carried out and the Cronbach's alpha score for the overall questionnaire was 0.96, indicating a high degree of reliability. Regression analysis showed that 'social dimensions' had the strongest effect on sustainability (â= 0.756), followed by 'cultural dimensions' (â= 0.421), then the 'environmental dimensions' (â= 0.369), whereas for the 'economic dimensions' â value was 0.012 indicating that these had little effect on the dependent variable. Implications from these findings are discussed and directions for further research.

Keywords: Sustainable Culture, Business Sector, Mauritius, Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

There is no consensus on a definition of sustainability. Liebert (1992, p.1) is critical of sustainability as being ill-defined term and often used in connection with agricultural development. Despite the availability of several sustainability measurement frameworks and initiatives, only few have an integrative focus measuring environmental, economic and social dimensions (Singh *et al*. 2009, p.190; Veleva and Ellenbecker 2001, p.519-49; Labuschagne *et al*. 2005, p.380-385), and very few considered the cultural dimension. When discussing sustainable development, it is essential to include the broad notion embodied in literature as it informs the underlying belief systems, worldviews, epistemologies and cosmologies that shape international relations and human interaction with the environment (Nurse 2006, p.36).

Scope of Sustainability

The main goal of implementation of sustainability principles is safeguarding of an optimal amount of general capital (or sum of different kinds of capital) for the future generations (Ciegis *et al*. 2009, p.33). According to a study from The Economist Intelligence Unit around 75 percent of large international organizations were under pressure to report on social and environmental performances alongside financial measures (Delai and Takahashi 2011, p.438). Rake and Grayson (2009, p.396) argue that there is a mutual agreement that the marketplace and private enterprise can, and must, work together with the government and others to find solutions to the biggest global problems of our generation. If sustainability is to become a reality it is necessary that this concept be taken into account in the decision making at all levels of society (Agenda 21, 1992). Corporate sustainability is not be restricted to large organisations only, but also be known in smaller corporation (Griffiths and Petrick 2001, p.1579).

Economic Dimensions of Sustainability

In the western world, as well as developing countries, people aspire to have high-consumption lifestyle. In order to ensure fair distribution of wealth and efficient allocation of our resources, we need to ensure a sustainable economy. Literature categorizes many businesses as being amoral institutions, Wilcke (2004, p.202) put forward that capitalism guided by free and perfect market conditions will eventually produce ethical dilemmas. Gasper (2007, p.9-10) argues that in reality, markets do not always behave perfectly and there are potential negative externalities to society and the environment. Following the recent global financial crisis of 2008 and the NASDAQ DotCom Bubble 1996, stakeholders put companies under additional pressure to internalize more of the social and environmental externalities they create (Steger *et al*. 2007, p.163). For the past few years, due to government instability and mass unemployment for example in Greece, we have witnessed a situation where those to whom it is not given to achieve 'wellbeing' envy the 'chosen few'. This ever increasing gap between the rich and poor within a society would seem to be one of the most serious problems globally, and this is touching the economic dimension of sustainable development. Steger *et al.,* (2007, p.73) further point out that companies must ensure that, while fulfilling those stakeholders demands, their own economic survival in this competitive and volatile business environment, is secure. Following the research of Delai and Takahashi (2011, p.438-450), different themes and sub-themes for economic sustainability have been identified to evaluate both short and long terms economic issues. Brief descriptions of those themes are discussed below.

Profit and Value

It is assessed by the traditional financial measures. Financial measures gauge performance (for example Sales and Turnover), profitability or costs (Total tax paid to all authorities), and are expressed as dollars, amounts, ratios or other forms (Delaney and Whittington 2011, p.264). This theme ensure through financial results long and short term sustainability of all kind of organizations (Delai and Takahashi 2011, p.461).

Investment

It has been divided into capital employed, whereby it evaluates if the company has correctly and successfully utilize shareholders' and investors' capital, and research & development, where the company focuses on product innovation and new product development to sustain in the long run.

Relationship with Investors

According to Laskin (2010, p.1) investor relations are responsible for raising shareholder capital to enable corporations to implement their vision and leading to long term sustainable growth. L'Etang and Pieczka (2006, p.82) argue that investors relations require transparency to increases the level of trust and accountability in an organization, therefore enhance collaborative work between stakeholders and organisations.

Corporate Governance

Corporate governance is important to the corporate environment, general society or political environment for example in improving public faith (Aras and Crowther 2007, p.433) or employee and trade union representatives present on organizations' board. Company laws have been passed to ensure that they have proper mechanisms in place in order to ensure good corporate governance.

The reason for this upsurge in interest in corporate governance, are primarily the economic liberalization and deregulation of industry and business (Joyner and Payne 2002, p.300).

Crisis Management

It refers to how the organisation is structured to prevent any crisis and, has a high connection with reputation and licenses to operate protection (Delai and Takahashi 2011, p.464). Despite organisations plans to prevent and manage crisis, it is important to consider their quality and assess their effectiveness and efficiency in order to ensure smooth running of an organisation during any condition impacting on economic sustainability.

Economic Structure

Economic structure of an organisation will indicate how sustainable is the company on the long term, and factors to be assessed are basically financial status, economic performance and trades. Lameira *et al.* (2011, p.74) argue that the Gross Domestic Product growth and income per capita, directly related to nation's wealth growth, were included to control for the level of development in a county. Gross capital formation was included as a support for development of projects including the implementation of projects for sustainable economic growth.

Environmental Dimensions of Sustainability

The environmental dimension encompasses the ecosystem wellbeing, which is a ''condition in which the ecosystem maintains diversity and quality, its capacity to support all life, and its potential to adapt to change to provide future options'' (Prescott-Allen, 2001, p.7). Ecological sustainability concentrates on general vitality and health of ecosystems (Ciegis *et al*. 2009, p.31). The society as a whole take the natural existing resources for granted, forgetting that they are limited in nature. A large proportion of our ecosystem is endangered due to the heavy demand of natural resources from organisations. The ecological trust encompasses the view that businesses must pursue balanced growth whilst being conscious of the finite stock of natural resources (Nga and Soo 2010, p.102). Companies must understand that their contribution in order to maintain the ecosystem's wellbeing will happen through reducing their resources consumption, waste generation and pollution, as well as their impacts on ecosystems, land, water and air (GRI, 2002). Firms need to assume their role for the promotion of environmental strategies through prevention pollution, product stewardship and innovation of clean technology creating further opportunities for sustainable competitive advantage (Hart 1997, p.72-75). This will obviously have an impact on the company's operation since decreasing environmental impacts means optimization of raw materials, energy, water, prevention of fines, maintenance of reputation, etc. Companies should avoid producing commodities that will harm workers, environment and society, and also to the proper creation and maintenance of areas habituated by human beings (Wade, 1999).

Social Dimensions of Sustainability

The social dimension deals with the human wellbeing, how to attend human needs and to increase the opportunities of development equally for all people (Commission on Sustainable Development, 2002). It encompasses the practice of an ethics of care in stewardship towards humanity (McCuddy and Pirie 2007, p.967). The concept also reflects the interface between development and dominating social norms and strives to maintain the stability of social systems. The social dimension involves allocation of resources that reflects the commitment of the firm towards enabling humankind to pursue social, intellectual, cultural and spiritual development (Birch 2008, p.30-31). Negative social phenomena should be addressed when discussing on sustainable development strategies in order to identify the underlying causes and, find solutions for these complex situations. Governments and its stakeholders have the ethical obligations to fight against human inequality, social injustice, crime, corruption and poverty. They should encourage and support initiatives like improved education, universal human rights, social justice, reducing poverty, political empowerment of women, more equity between rich and poor, gender equity, intergenerational equity and other movements for social equity. By adopting those social contracts businesses acknowledge their interdependence with the human communities they serve (Nga and Soo 2010, p.101).

Society

Societies can be seen as different subsets of communities with webs of relationships among individuals who share values, norms, and culture. Wood (1991, p.693) summarizes corporate citizenship as the organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships. It is important that organisations identify openings to sustain the societal environment including its cultures, groups, and places. Maignan and Ferrel (2001, p.461) have identified several examples of proactive corporate citizenship initiatives which are economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. According to (Delai and Takahashi 2011, p.459) when considering the society subtheme, we should consider the social actions, communication with society, codes of conduct, corruption and bribery.

Cultural Dimensions of Sustainability

Hall was among the first researcher to study the culture, ‘emphasizing on the importance of nonverbal signals and modes of awareness over explicit messages’ (Hall 1990, p.xvi), followed mainly by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, and the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE). The main aspects of Culture can be summarized as being Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Collectivism, Time orientation and Gender orientation. Cultural tasks are aiming more at nurturing old and creating new values of culture (Marks-Bielska 2011, p.163). There have been many schools of thoughts in literature as to the impacts of culture on sustainable development. Worldwide research program concentrates on the relation between different cultures of societies and also, emphasizes on organization cultures. Given changing societal expectations it is likely that more firms will adopt a culture of sustainability (Paine 2004, p.224). Many authors have put forward that with globalization, the notion of culture has ‘globalised’ and, evolved to become the fourth pillar of sustainable development that is ‘Culture of Sustainable development’. A culture that is vital and a social development that is sustainable go hand in hand (Packalén 2010, p.118).

Corporate Culture

Schein (2010, p.32) defines organizational culture as “… a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” Companies focusing on sustainability bring with it changes to the corporate culture as well as society (Kocmanová et al. 2011, p.545). Steger *et al.* (2007, p.173) argue that firms rely on their corporate culture and well founded business logic to maintain corporate sustainability management as simply the ‘‘right thing to do’’. Eccles *et al.* (2011, p.25) argue that developing a corporate culture of sustainability may be a source of competitive advantage for a company in the long-run. Eccles *et al.* 2011, p.6 argue that the important elements of a corporate culture of sustainability are the likely to:

- be transparent in its external reporting about its performance;
- assign responsibility to the board of directors for sustainability and to form a separate board committee for sustainability;
- measure information related to key stakeholders — such as employees, customers and suppliers — and increase the credibility of these measures by using auditing procedures.

Cultural Identities

The term cultural identity has been addressed by several authors like Denton (1997, p.171) who defines cultural identity as powerful glue that binds people together. Spicer (2001, p.227-30) explains that preserving the cultural identity of minorities is important to counteract enhanced drug abuse and alcoholism among members of these minorities.

In the same vein, the cultural identity of an organisation mainly involves forms of ceremony, etiquette and correct code of conduct, which most of the time is their competitive advantage.

In most organisations, the leaders are the creator of the cultural identity and every employee is expected to respect those protocols. For example how to establish initial contact with customers, , personal appearance / grooming of employees, conversational taboos like working women in some countries, etc.

METHODOLOGY

The key research question resolved around how sustainability-related factors impact on sustainability within the local companies. The objective of this paper was to explore the extent to which the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions impact on sustainability.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between the economic pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the social pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

H3: There is a significant relationship between the environmental pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

H4: There is a significant relationship between the cultural pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

Data was collected by during two weeks. Most of these were collected using face-to-face interviews, and through the web and followed by telephone interviews in order to achieve our target.

Bivariate analysis

Bivariate analyses were produced to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The results are as shown below:

Correlation between economic pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability

H_0: There is no significant relationship between the economic pillar of sustainability and Sustainability.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between the economic pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Table 1: Correlation between economic pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability

		Sustainability	Remark
Economic Pillar	Pearson Correlation	.300**	H_1 is supported.
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	182	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 reveals a positive correlation between economic pillar of sustainability and sustainability. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is quite significant ($r = 0.300$), supporting H_1. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis H_0 ($P < 0.05$) and conclude that there is some statistical linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. We can infer that there is a positive correlation between economic pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Correlation between environmental pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability

$H2_0$: There is no significant relationship between the environmental pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

$H2_1$: There is a significant relationship between the environmental pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Table 2: Correlations between environmental pillar of sustainability and sustainability

		Sustainability	Remark
Environmental Pillar	Pearson Correlation	.748**	$H2_1$ is supported.
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	182	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 reveals a strong positive correlation between the environmental pillar of sustainability and sustainability. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is very significant ($r = 0.748$), supporting $H2_1$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis $H2_0$ ($P < 0.05$) and conclude that there is a statistical linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. We can infer that there is a positive/strong correlation between the environmental pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Correlation between social pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability

$H3_0$: There is no significant relationship between the social pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

$H3_1$: There is a significant relationship between the social pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Table 3: Correlations between social pillar of sustainability and sustainability

		Sustainability	Remark
Social Pillar	Pearson Correlation	.623**	$H3_1$ issupported.
	Sig.(2Atailed)	.000	
	N	182	

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Table 3 reveals a strong positive correlation between the social pillar of sustainability and sustainability. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is very significant ($r = 0.623$), supporting $H3_1$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis $H3_0$ ($P < 0.05$) and conclude that there is a statistical linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. We can infer that there is a positive/strong correlation between the social pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Correlation between cultural pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability

$H4_0$: There is no significant relationship between the cultural pillar of Sustainability and Sustainability.

$H4_1$: There is a significant relationship between the cultural pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Table 4: Correlations between cultural pillar of sustainability and sustainability

		Sustainability	Remark
Social Pillar	Pearson Correlation	.623**	$H4_1$ issupported.
	Sig.(2Atailed)	.000	
	N	182	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 reveals a strong positive correlation between the cultural pillar of sustainability and sustainability. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is very significant ($r = 0.623$), supporting $H4_1$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis $H4_0$ ($P < 0.05$) and conclude that there is a statistical linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. We can infer that there is a strong positive correlation between the cultural pillar of sustainability and sustainability.

Regression Analysis

This method of analysis is used to produce an equation that will predict the dependent variable (sustainability) using one or more independent variables (sustainability-related factors).

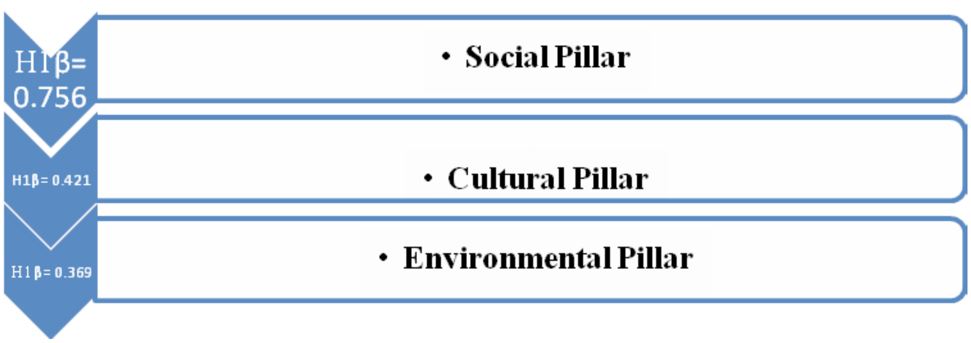
Table 5: Contribution of sustainability-related factors to sustainability

Coefficients						Remarks
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	16.105	2.357		6.833	.000	
Economic Pillar	.008	.045	.012	.177	.860	$H1_1$ is not supported
Environment Pillar	.173	.029	.369	5.903	.000	$H2_1$, $H3_1$, $H4_1$ are supported
Social Pillar	.345	.022	.756	15.501	.000	
Cultural Pillar	.274	.048	.421	5.693	.000	
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability						

The â coefficient is an indication of how much the dependent variable (sustainability) is expected to increase when one of the independent variables increases by one standard deviation, holding all the other independent variables constant. The set of standardized coefficients Beta (â) from Table 5 suggest that Social Pillar has the strongest effect on Sustainability (â= 0.756), followed by Cultural Pillar (â= 0.421) and Environmental Pillar (â= 0.369), whereas for the Economic pillar â = 0.012 which a negligible effect on the dependent variable, Sustainability. For example any increase in one standard deviation of environmental pillar, there will be an increase of 0.369 in the standard deviation of Sustainability provided that the other sustainability-related factors remain constant.

Proposed Framework

Following the findings of business executive survey on sustainability, the following framework is proposed:



SUSTAINABILITY PILLARS

Figure 1: *Proposed framework for assessing the impact of sustainability-related factors on sustainability.*

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the social, cultural and environmental pillars are the determinants of sustainability in the context of Mauritius. The Economic pillar â = 0.012

had a negligible effect on the dependent variable, sustainability. Further studies need to be carried out with larger samples to test whether these results can be generalised. Growing numbers of companies particularly in emerging markets are starting to place sustainability at the core of their long-term corporate strategies. Developed countries, and large enterprises, are promoting the wider take-up of sustainability policies. At the same time, governments, regulators and investors are also stepping up their interest in sustainability issues with a clear understanding of the risks that are inherent in poor sustainability practices. The experiences of business managers from companies leading in the field of sustainability provide a number of insightful lessons for other managers embarking on a move towards sustainable practices. Action must start today as time may be limited. Whilst many managers understand the long-term significance of sustainability, some have other major concerns in the short term. There are signs however, that the 'long term' is not far and that the relationship between sustainability and corporate growth is becoming become clear and for business leaders who have not yet addressed this issue, time may be running out.

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