SUSTAINABILITY

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OVERVIEW: Steps to creating business sustainability

Business and economic sustainability is considered essential for survival of the human race and for the maintenance of the earth as a habitable environment. Damage is being caused by businesses and that damage needs to be stopped, prevented, and repaired if life as it is currently understood is to prevail. Businesses are a part of modern global society and collectively we owe our existence and survival to the life giving sources of the earth. Hence business activities and outputs must be seen from an eco-social perspective more than they need to be seen from a simple economic perspective. This notwithstanding, businesses certainly have an economic imperative however this imperative is for people in general and not for the business per se. People need the planet to sustain life so that any planet-damaging business activities are therefore not in the best interests of the very people the business is economically serving. Therefore businesses are only valid if they truly serve their primary purposes first and foremost and their economic interests second. For businesses to transform to a new paradigm and stay viable, the following four point plan is considered essential for their development and possibly their survival. A new business paradigm, or zeitgeist, is certainly essential for the survival of humanity as we know it.

1. Figure out what phase (or stage) the company is currently at. This is Point A

Using Dunphy's six phases
Phase 1: Don't know and don't care
Phase 2: Aware of the issue, but still don't care – for many reasons
Phase 3: Compliance: basically only doing what is legally/formally required
Phase 4: Efficiency: doing some things better as a cost reduction plan
Phase 5: Adopting an action plan to become 'strategically sustainable' in all dimensions
Phase 6: Being ideologically sustainable in every aspect of business

2. Improve the Business: make the business 'Strategically Sustainable'. This is Point B

Ideally all companies should operate at Phase 6 but this is unrealistic for many businesses as their core operations are unsustainable in the long term (oil, coal etc), or the products they're producing (cheap plastic goods, disposable batteries, plastic shopping bags etc) are unsustainable.

3. What is the Business Case for Sustainability?

Sometimes the case for sustainability is fundamentally obvious but then sometimes it is not. In situations like this, one may need to create a business-case for any changes that are required to convert the business, particularly if large sums of money are involved, or if the need for change is not fully identified. Or simply if executives don't comprehend the rationale or the risks associated with 'business as usual'.

4. Develop a plan to get from Point A to Point B for all the key dimensions of the company.

This involves a deep analysis of everything the business does, all aspects of its operations including production processes, product development, supply chain activities including materials and processes, its marketing and distribution activities, and end-of-life product disposal issues. The plan takes into account all technical, financial, and social dimensions of the business as well as corporate governance and the use of non-renewable non-reusable non-recyclable resources. It also takes into account externalities required for the product to be sustainable as well as all non-beneficial outputs such as GHGs, eco-destruction, and cross-contamination issues. The plan is time framed to allow for all changes to be made on a programmed basis with all costs and benefits captured and dealt with on an ongoing basis.

5. Develop a monitoring system to keep the company at Point B

The monitoring system must address all issues in and of the business and must aim at keeping the business functionally operational on a 'do no harm' basis for all its operational, financial, investment, social, societal, and ecological activities. The monitoring system addresses all areas of the business including all upstream, downstream and side-support activities. It assumes responsibility for all chemicals, minerals, elements and parts that are used in manufacturing processes and in all products, and assumes total responsibility for all these issues for the whole-of-life of these issues. The monitoring system has one boundary and that is from raw material extraction through all processes to ultimate decomposition or reuse of all elements used in all products and all processes. Indicators of performance are generally used and standard indicators such as Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) or self-created indicators can be adopted where the purpose of each indictor is to show conformance to or deviations from all measures of good practice. Along with these indicators a correction plan needs to be developed to ensure performance is auto-checked with a pre-planned correction strategy.