

An examination of owner managers' perceptions

Sustainability as a contribution to long-term success

Is sustainability a contribution to long-term success? How does it work? Using the case of German graphic design industry businesses, this article explores the influence of sustainability as a contribution to long-term success.

By Metje Rocklage

It is well documented that sustainability management is especially relevant for big firms. This research seeks to explore this for the German graphic design industry (GDI). GDIs should be at the forefront of sustainability management because they have a wide reach and connections to other industries and are with its creativity services in graphic and communication design important for the growth of the whole German economy (Rösler 2012).

The key research question is: Is the use of sustainability in German GDI a contribution to long-term success? This leads to the title of the thesis "An examination of owner managers' perception of sustainability as a contribution to long-term success in the German graphic design industry." (Rocklage 2016).

Methods

The research methodology is based on a number of 14 out of a total of 31 expert interviews conducted with German graphic design industry owner managers' implementing sustainability in their daily business. Preparing these semi-structured guideline interviews two pre talks were adapted. Together with reflective presentation of the author in front of an audience of graphic design and sustainability experts, the author developed a constructivist prejudice as a foundation for an Applied Thematic Analysis. The comprehensive expert interviews leads to a profound understanding of sustainability as a contribution to long-term success.

Results

The core results of this research are that sustainability for graphic design industry owner managers' means a strong inner motivated world improvement with another way of thinking and acting of how to ecologically (with priority), social and (not for all) economically produces good and sustainable results, which means durable and valuable products. The use of sustainability within German graphic design owner managers' is based on internal motivation and personal core values. Ecologic activities occur more often than economic and social activities. Implementing sustainability to future business requires a creative, alternative, complex, and long-term thought process with consideration to consequences. Sustainability is often seen as a contribution to long-term success (with happiness and satisfaction). Sustainability positive influences the inner motivation, the networking and cooperation, is an added value, provides a unique selling proposition, and is seen as an image-forming factor.

The surprising finding of this research is the high personal inner motivation of the topic sustainability within German graphic design industry. The owner managers' personal core values are of primary importance; with it the use of sustainability is seen as a contribution to long-term success with happiness and satisfaction. For long-term success, it seems to be optimal for the entrepreneur to act in a sustainable manner

based on inner motivation and intrinsic interest.

That leads to the assumption, that the integration of sustainability in businesses of German graphic design owner managers' is established on the basis of inner motivation and personal core values. German graphic designers that implement sustainability are headed in the right direction to be fit for the future, by thinking creative, complex and for the long-term. Further additional research is needed about inner motivation and sustainability as a contribution to small and medium-sized success.

Recommendations emerged from the interviews relevant to value-based information; descriptions surfaced that characterized lived strategies within sustainably-acting graphic design. The implementation of sustainability must be based on viable information in order to integrate it into business. Sustainability is seen as a requirement to be fit for the future. Creative, complex, and long-term thinking is necessary when considering sustainable alternatives; one must consider the consequences of one's actions. The use of sustainability needs to be assessed as a consequence along with the implementation and adjustment in the supply chain. This significant research results can help, not only existing graphic design companies practical to include sustainability in their business plans.

References

- Rocklage, M. (2016): An examination of owner managers' perceptions of sustainability as a contribution to long-term success in the German graphic design industry. Bielefeld, FHM Verlag.
- Rösler, P. (2012): Innovationsleistung der Kultur- und Kreativbranche unverzichtbar für die deutsche Wirtschaft. Paper presented at the *Jahreskonferenz Kultur- und Kreativwirtschaft*, Berlin.

AUTHOR + CONTACT

Dr. Metje Rocklage is researcher at the FHM-Center for Sustainable Governance. Fachhochschule des Mittelstands (FHM), Ravensberger Straße 10 G, 33602 Bielefeld. Tel.: +49 521 96655-239. E-Mail: rocklage@fh-mittelstand.de