



“Stronger together”: an ethical and integrative response to the global threat of (un)sustainability and disasters.

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Broad research area

5. Other (Business Ethics and Sustainability)

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to critically examine the challenges that unsustainability and disasters pose to organisations and to present an ethical and integrative solution which will increase understanding of the connection between sustainability, disaster recovery (DR) and ethics, and will enable organisations to be both sustainable in the long-term and resilient in the short-term.

Theoretical background

It is warned that life as we know it is unsustainable (Isaksson, Garvare & Johnson, 2015) and this unsustainability is likely to lead to an increase in the frequency and severity of disasters (Institute for Economic & Peace, 2020). Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that unsustainability will impact the prerequisite for DR. However, unsustainability can also impede DR efforts (Abrahams, 2014). Furthermore, this relationship between (un)sustainability and DR appears to be double-edged, with disasters also impacting on sustainability. Disasters, it is suggested, can negatively impact economic, social, and environmental factors (Fernandez and Ahmed, 2019), potentially leading to unsustainability in these areas. Sustainability and disaster recovery also seem to be linked in other ways. Both are conceptually similar suggesting there may be parallels when it comes to the application of the concepts, and both are inherently ethical. However, though this ethicality is theoretically explicit, it is not clear that ethics are currently being incorporated into organisational sustainability and DR practices. The following then, may be surmised: sustainability and DR involve a practical link, are conceptually similar and are inherently ethical. These conclusions suggest that this relationship between sustainability and DR, though complex and poorly understood, may be significant to the application of both concepts at the organisational level.

To investigate this connection, one sustainability framework (the Triple Bottom Line) and one DR framework (Build Back Better) are examined in the context of hospitality specifically, hotels. Owing to the proposed importance of ethics, a dual-theoretical lens consisting of one standard management theory, stakeholder theory, and one normative ethical theory, virtue ethics, is utilised to address the research aims and objectives. The study closely investigates an integrative and ethical approach to sustainability and disaster recovery, termed here as “sustainable recovery”. Consideration of “sustainable recovery”, and the central role of ethics in achieving this, leads to the following key propositions: sustainability can bolster an organisations potential to be resilient to disasters, disaster resilience can bolster organisational sustainability and crucially, ethicality strengthens an organisations opportunity to be both sustainable and DR ready.

Methodology

This research adopts the interpretivist paradigm and thus, as is typical from an interpretivist viewpoint, takes the ontological assumption of relativism and the epistemological assumption of subjectivism (Brand, 2009). A qualitative approach is adopted, and a research strategy of multiple case studies is used. Three matched pairs have been chosen and are matched according to literal replication logic, whereas theoretical replication logical is applied across pairs to grant relevance beyond the case under investigation (Ridder, 2017). The context for the study is hotels as hotels have many sustainability concerns and are vulnerable to disasters. In line with the methodological norms associated with this research strategy, the research questions will be examined using qualitative methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations and analysis of relevant secondary data such as organisational sustainability policy documents. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis and the computer software, NVivo.

Main findings

The main findings thus far are theoretical as the practical research is yet to be undertaken for this study. One key theoretical finding which has been derived from a thorough review of the relevant literatures is that it is critical that improvements are made in the operationalisation of sustainability and DR. The stakes are high and inaction in these areas may lead to many negative consequences for organisations and for the societies they operate in. Another key finding is that there is a link between sustainability and DR that is poorly understood and yet potentially significant. However, although this link between sustainability and DR seems to be theoretically explicit and recognition of it may have positive implications, an integrative approach is relatively uncommon in the field. Another significant finding is that both sustainability and DR are intrinsically ethical concepts and furthermore, many of the issues that arise in relation to these concepts require ethical

analysis. However, ethicality is often side-lined in the face of, for instance, competition or pressure from superiors to achieve certain outcomes.

Potential contribution

The potential contribution to knowledge is twofold. Firstly, the expected theoretical contribution is to advance understanding of the complex relationship between sustainability, disaster recovery, and ethics. Secondly, the expected practical contribution to knowledge is to advance applicability and efficiency of sustainability and DR approaches in organisations with the overall impact of protecting organisations, the people that operate in them and the environment in which they operate, from the threat of unsustainability and disasters.

3-5 key words

Sustainability, Disaster Recovery, Ethics

References

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