BOOK REVIEW

Pursuing Sustainability: A Guide to the Science and Practice, by P. Matson, W. C. Clark and K. Andersson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016, ISBN: 0691157618, hardbound, 248 pages, US$35.00

The topic of sustainability has gained international significance in the past two decades due to reports of depletion of natural resources, climate change, and the growing concern for health and wellbeing. Especially because procurement and supply chain processes are globally connected - what happens in one part of the world impacts other regions in other parts. According to the World Economic Forum held in Davos Switzerland in 2016, sustainability is a three legged stool involving people, planet and profits. Businesses and governments across the globe are committing to working with their supply chains and procurement functions to adopt transparent sourcing, and distribution strategies in consultation with their local communities to enhance business growth while adopting sustainable practices. It is specifically on this background that books such as "Pursuing Sustainability" by P. Matson, W. C. Clark and K. Andersson become critical and have the opportunity to make important contribution to shaping practice and theory.

The underling purpose of the book is to develop an actionable framework for "mobilizing" sustainability knowledge. In Chapter 1, the authors introduce us to the concept of sustainability from a global perspective. They argue that definitions of sustainability and its implications vary depending upon the part of the world one lives in. Pursuing sustainability could be an expensive proposition is some parts of the world. In fact, the authors argue, in some cases, sustainability might cause ill effects to the economy and human well-being. How does one strike a balance between pursuing sustainable practices and advancing the greater good for humanity? There are no

simple answers. While sustainable practices are imperative for the long-term viability of the planet, people's perspective is more about here and now and existence of the present.

Chapter 2 introduces the idea of social wellbeing and how sustainability is not merely a consumption side concept, but encompasses the spectrum of supply chain and consummation of goods and services. The definition of wellbeing, similarly to sustainability, is different across the globe. In third world countries for example, the definition of wellbeing is simply having food to eat, a place to live and clothes to wear. While in richer economies, wellbeing is about reversing the ills of affluence. Given that goods and services are produced and consumed globally, one needs to draw a fine line between wellbeing for survivability versus wellbeing for longevity. The authors' idea of inclusive wellbeing starts to address this balance.

Building on the concept of social wellbeing, in Chapter 3, the authors discuss the idea of social environmental systems. When it comes to sustainability, there are factors that are within the control of humans and others that are not. Even factors that can be influenced vary by the geography of a region even within the same country. Given the complexity of social environmental systems, their connections, interactions and feedback need to be mapped so that we can start understanding how to influence sustainability. The process is iterative and to this extent, small changes can be made with what we do understand it could have a cumulative effect on progress towards sustainability. It will take an interdisciplinary approach and sharing of data to understand the different complex factors that go into understanding efforts that will impact sustainability.

Chapter 4 discusses the role of politics in pursuing sustainable practices. The authors cite case studies from other parts of the world where one group of people started an initiative and another group intervened and brought in the government to block the initiative from moving forward. Together these case studies demonstrate the influence of governmental agencies can have a significant bearing on sustainability initiatives moving forward regardless of the merits of the projects. Depending on the election cycles and campaign promises, projects that have lasting impacts might be hindered. These social environmental systems, as the authors define it, can help or hinder sustainability policies and practices. The key is to learn how to navigate through the politics by appealing to the interests of

the actors and players in power. The project needs to stand on its own merits assisted by savviness in the political realm.

Knowledge and the communication of information leads to a better understanding of facts and a call to action according to the author's in Chapter 5. Understanding sustainability and its short and long-term effects takes the presentation of facts and persuasion. The question about what is in it for the individual participating in the initiative or leading it and what it means to the social wellbeing of humankind needs to be articulated with credibility. The relevance of sustainable efforts for this generation and the difference it makes for the next generation needs to be scientifically laid out without bias. It is suggested that the dissemination of knowledge by trusted individuals across organizational and political boundaries with the backing of the scientific community will produce actions in the pursuit of sustainability.

Within Chapter 6, the authors assert that sustainability efforts have already stared in different parts of the world with varying degrees of success. People in all industries and job functions can contribute to the global sustainability efforts by taking actions in their own field and organizations. Small efforts towards sustainable practice by industries and individuals across a broad spectrum will add up to big gains across the globe. Sustainability is not an event, but a process and a practice. Sustainable thinking needs to become a part of the lifestyle whether it is at home or at work. Engaging people in the conversation about sustainability and challenging them to act will continue to expand the efforts. Progress comes slowly but in a consistent manner when efforts towards sustainability are collaborative, and multi directional. The transition effort however takes careful evaluation, diagnosis, design and adjustment in the pursuit of sustainability.

Taken together, this book informs its readers about several key concepts of sustainability as it relates to the greater good of humanity. The authors have taken a global approach with case studies that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities that exist when pursuing sustainability. While adoption of sustainable practices is complex, the authors have demonstrated practical ideas that can be implemented. The call to action is to start somewhere and be consistent and systematic. Small efforts towards sustainable practices accumulate over time and space and contribute to greater

significance. Although the topic of sustainability can be dry, the authors' way of unfolding the topic through real world examples made a highly informative book interesting to read. In this sense, the book is bound to be useful both for those who have a particular professional interest in the concept of sustainability as well as those who seek to learn about it for non-academic or work-related reasons.

Sustainability has been thought to be influenced by three important factors, environmental, social and economic. Similar to the term triple bottom line (TBL) coined by Elkington (1998), these three factors equally influence sustainability efforts. However, Montabon, Pagell and Wu (2016) argue that a new way of thinking needs to emerge, considering culture, logic and cognition. Given that the culture of an organization largely influences its practices, logical explanations about why an organization needs to pursue sustainability as well as the ability of its employees to comprehend the need and therefore to agree is very important for any initiative to be successful (Prier, Schwerin & McCue, 2016; Smith & Terman, 2016). Leaders need to use two cognitive frames – a business case frame and paradoxical frame to inform and influence employees on the importance of sustainability for their organization (Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse & Figge, 2015).

Since the impacts of sustainability are not always noticeable in the short term, efforts to market sustainability need to be taken on a consistent fashion. Pantelic, Sakal and Zehetner (2016) advocate that the merits of sustainability be built into the curricula of higher education so that students think about sustainability as they go through their university education. Students who understand the value of sustainable efforts can influence their organizations as they join the workforce. Sustainability is not just the responsibility of one person or a team who have the job driven responsibility to promote and track sustainable efforts. Sustainability is the responsibility of every employee within an organization. While the senior workforce might not be tuned to efforts leading to sustainability, if newer employees who come in already have the awareness and the zeal, it will lead to substantial gains.

Another factor that contributes to sustainability is assessment of the efforts and the outcomes. While assessment does not always lead to improved sustainability, it informs us of the practices that are undertaken. Alroe and Noe (2016) found that complementarity is a

fundamental factor tied to the conditions of assessment. If we want assessment to transform the processes that lead to sustainability we need to add different perspectives and values that might be connected to the current state. A holistic approach towards sustainability taking into effect the culture, logic and cognition and applying it with complementarity will encourage the organization to aim for better efforts and outcomes.

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