Corporate leaders and sustainability:
The role of value orientation in sustainable change.

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Abstract

How might the interests of self and organization, global humanity, and the biosphere be balanced in the cultures of organizations that pursue sustainable practices? The focus of this research study was the relationship between the value orientations of US-based Fortune 1000 CEOs and their organizational sustainability practices (OSP) using data collected in surveys. Data on environmental concerns, awareness of consequences, social value orientations, CEO perspectives on sustainability initiatives, and OSP were used to explore the salience of such factors in the diffusion of sustainability practices in industry. The theoretical frameworks of Stern and Dietz’s value-belief-norm theory and Schwartz’s social value orientation were employed, and an instrument created by Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson, and Gärling which assesses self-oriented, other-human-oriented, and biospherically-oriented preferences was utilized. The data from this instrument was compared with CEO participants' open-ended answers to questions including personal views of corporate sustainability initiatives, reasons for pursuing such efforts, alignment of personal values with organizational identity and sustainability performance, and comparison to other popular corporate programs to generate qualitative and contextual information. Finally, these data sets were then analyzed against each CEO's OSP, as measured against the Global Reporting Initiative’s G3 performance indicators. While value orientations as measured by the instrument did not bear a significant relationship to OSP, the qualitative data on CEO perspectives do offer notable patterns. Those CEOs in firms with strong OSP incorporated more environmental, moral, and positive economic reasoning to their answers, whereas CEOs in firms with weaker OSP more often cited negative economic reasoning and social pressure as motivation for OSP.

Keywords: Corporate sustainability, corporate social responsibility, responsible leadership, social value orientation, CEO values, organizational sustainability practices
Introduction

This research explores the social value orientations (SVO) of chief executive officers (CEOs) in American-based, multinational, Fortune 1000, for-profit corporations, in relation to their organization’s sustainability practices (OSP), specifically as to environmentally and socially significant issues. The values, beliefs, and attitudes of business leaders toward social and environmental sustainability may constitute what could be one of the most substantive influences on progress toward social justice and the reduction of global warming, deforestation, desertification, pollution, and resource degradation.

The success and breadth of sustainability initiatives undertaken by business organizations is affected by the support of executive leadership in those organizations (Laszlo, 2008; Willard, 2002, 2005). Sharma (2000) found that managers tend to perceive environmental issues as an opportunity, versus a threat, when the company’s strategic leaders legitimize environmentally significant behaviors by institutionalizing them within the organization’s identity. As the values of an organization’s leaders underlie their beliefs and attitudes and drive their organization’s behavior, such a study may provide data to supplement theory on barriers to sustainability in the literature on environmental values, attitudes, and behaviors, and that of organizational behavior.

Corporate sustainability practices

Sustainability initiatives vary from far reaching and substantive to shallow and deceptive. Some organizations are truly sustainability leaders, and others engage in little more than “green-washing” as a technique to enhance an organization’s public relations image. Sustainability performance measurements and reporting are not yet standardized,
although there are formats that are in the early stages of institutionalization, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (2008), the ISO 14001 and ISO 26000 (International Organization for Standardization, 2010), and financial market indices such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (SAM GrmbH Indexes, 2009). Organizations are now also more regularly issuing their own sustainability reports (Bartels, 2008).

Implementing organization-wide change of any kind is rarely easy, but sustainability efforts come with their own set of difficulties over and above the usual barriers, particularly in the balancing of financial, social, and environmental priorities. Institutional, cultural, cognitive, and values-based components exist on levels ranging from micro to macro (Epstein, 2008; Willard, 2005). In theoretical and empirical studies of values, attitudes, and norms in correlation with environmentally significant behavior there has been little quantitative research on how the values of business leaders may constitute a substantive barrier (Thompson, Panwar, & Hansen, 2010).

Willard argued that organizational agents for sustainability must make the business case to executives, appealing to their concern for the business assumptions mentioned above, as moral arguments will be ineffective (2005, p. 21). Others, such as Salzmann, Ionescu-Somers, & Steger (2005) similarly imply that the conception of the firm supports solely the economic basis for engaging in sustainability practices.

Unless issues such as environmental and social equity issues inform sustainability initiatives, however, they will amount to little more than window dressing, further delaying progress on global environmental and social sustainability. Business assumptions such as unending growth of production or sales, the externalization of indirect costs, and the
privileging of economic growth and market share over broader social and environmental wellbeing must be reevaluated. Yet these assumptions are associated with core beliefs about whom and what is (and is not) valued and privileged, and it is therefore a complex and difficult matter to address.

As such, to approach business leaders with sustainability issues from an economic perspective may be effective to get their attention, but it will not be sufficient in the longer term unless it is accompanied by a significant paradigm change that places economic values on a par with social and biospheric values.

Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Norms, and Behavior

Schwartz’s often-cited work examined values across cultures. His analysis is based on the social practices and institutions across 75 countries to support a theory of seven cultural value orientations (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). These value orientations coalesce into four primary values of power, achievement, benevolence, and universalism, which further divide into two opposed sets of value dimension structures. The first is the social orientation, which may be either pro-self/egoistic or self-enhancement, or pro-social/altruistic/biospheric, alternatively labeled self-transcendent (see Figure 1).

The biospheric aspect of this dimension has been added more recently by environmental behavior researchers (de Groot & Steg, 2008; Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson, & Gärling, 2008; Joireman, Posey, Truelove, & Parks, 2009; Knafo, Schwartz, & Levine, 2009; Stern, 2000; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999). The second set of dimensions places a conservative or traditionalist value dimension which emphasizes security and
Figure 1. Theoretical model of relations among value types and value dimensions shows value types as they fit into bipolar value dimensions. Dotted lines on either side of hedonism indicate that this value type empirically links with both the dimension of openness to change and to the dimension of self-enhancement (adapted from Schwartz, 1992a, p. 45).

status quo, as opposed to an openness to change dimension, valuing self-direction, and emotional and intellectual autonomy.

Hansla et al. analyzed and correlated data on the first set of dimensions with awareness of consequences (to self, other humans, and the environment) and environmental concerns (for oneself, others, and the biosphere). Their study and others provide empirical support for the biospheric dimension as separate from the egoistic and altruistic (de Groot & Steg, 2008; Hansla et al., 2008; Steg, Dreijerink, & Abrahamse, 2005).

These dimensions have been studied in a variety of populations in regard to environmental attitudes and behaviors. Student samples, and state, national and cross-
national population samples have been studied, but there has been scant research specifically examining the social value orientations of business leaders.

Egri and Herman (2000) studied SVO in leaders of nonprofit environmental groups and for-profit environmental produce and service organizations, and reported “a lack of quantitative research on the structure and strength of the values held by these individuals” (p. 573). Business leaders constitute a proportionally tiny population in contrast to nonbusiness leaders, and as a group they are responsible for making decisions that affect a vast amount of resources and people. Thus, social value orientations may form a significant influence upon environmental and social sustainability, for better or worse.

Method

The study combined qualitative and quantitative measures. An instrument employed by Hansla and colleagues (2008) examines beliefs, attitudes and values toward the environment. This instrument is an improvement on previous instruments based upon Schwartz’s (1992, 1994) value typology, the Value Belief Norm theory (VBN) developed by Stern and collaborators (Stern, 2000; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kaloff, 1999; Stern Deitz, Kalof, Guagnano, 1995), which extends Schwartz’s norm activation theory of altruistic behavior to environmentally significant behaviors, and Schultz’s (2001) measurement of environmental concern. Specifically, the Hansla instrument validates a biospheric value of awareness and concern, in addition to self and other values.

The empirically tested instrument designed by Hansla et al. relates value dimensions to spheres of environmental concern (EC) for self, other humans, animals, and plants and awareness of adverse consequences (AC) for self, others, and the biosphere due to
environmental problems. Awareness of consequences, according to VBN theory and research, activates a moral obligation or personal norm that ascribes responsibility to perform corrective behavior and is therefore an indicator of environmental behavior intentions.

This instrument addresses problems found in previous studies employing VBN, particularly in regard to three issues: differentiating the values of benevolence versus universalism in relation to environmental concern and awareness of consequences, the relationship between the value of universalism and the biospheric orientation, and the relationship between the value of benevolence and the social-altruistic orientation.

Demographic information, including age, gender, position, and length of time at organization for each participant was collected to assess any apparent relation between or among them to SVO and corporate sustainability practices.

CEO’s perceptions about organizational sustainability practices provide qualitative context as SVO is certainly not the only factor that may influence an executive’s decisions regarding corporate sustainability practices. The answers to such questions point not only to pressures that executives deem salient, but can also point to the values they use to make decisions on issues of sustainability.

Survey data were obtained from chief executive officers at Fortune 1000 multinational corporations headquartered in the United States. The corporate sustainability performance of the organizations of those CEOs participating in the survey who identified their firms was examined.
The findings of these data were analyzed to examine any relationships between values, awareness of consequences, environmental concerns, espoused values, sustainability performance, the executive’s contextual data from the interviews, and demographics. Below is Figure 2, a proposed theoretical research framework integrating organizational sustainability practices and social value orientation.

**Figure 2.** Theoretical research framework integrating organizational sustainability practices and social value orientation. Levels of inclusion among CEO considerations about organizational sustainability practices, from less to more sustainable.

**Sampling Selection and Procedures**

During the months of August and October 2010 a total of 1,032 chief executive officers of U.S.-based Fortune 1000 corporations were contacted by postal letter and email.

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and invited to participate in the research survey. The recruiting letter contained consent information and a link to an instrument accessed through SurveyMonkey.com™.

A hard copy recruiting letter was mailed to each CEO using U.S. Postal Service first class mail, and a copy of the letter was also emailed to each CEO, with up to 4 successive identical emails to any CEO who had not responded to previous e-mails or the hard copy recruitment letter.

A pilot study conducted in August 2010 included two sets of 100 CEOs. In October 2010 an additional 832 Fortune CEOs were approached using the same techniques as described above. Due to the low response rate on the qualitative questions during the August data gathering, the qualitative questions were added at the end of the online survey so as to improve the response rate for this set of data.

**Recruitment Results**

Of the total of 1032 CEOs approached, 356 e-mail addresses were reported as undeliverable. Of the hard copy recruitment letters, 27 were returned as undeliverable. A total of 32 firms responded to decline participation. In total, 27 survey responses were obtained in which at least some of the survey questions had been answered.

The total countable survey response rate was just over 2.6% (27 out of 1,032). Response rates to survey questions varied and, in general, declined as the survey progressed, with 27 answering the environmental concern questions, 25 answering awareness of consequences questions, 24 answering the values questions, and 19 answering all of the demographics questions except the firm name, to which 15 answered and four declined.
the qualitative questions, 11 respondents answered the first four questions, nine answered Questions 5, 7, and 9, and eight answered Questions 6 and 8.

**Corporate Sustainability Practices Assessment**

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) G3 framework performance indicators (Global Reporting Initiative, 2006), were utilized to measure corporate sustainability practices. These indicators are divided into categories: environmental, human rights, society, products, and economics, each with subcategories.

Some participating firms did not report on their OSP in terms of the GRI G3 Performance Indicators, so an OSP rating system was designed. Firms’ OSP were rated on a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 represents weakest and 7 represents the strongest OSP. At the low end, an OSP rating of 0 was assigned if a search of a firms’ website and attempted contact with media and/or investor contacts at the firm resulted in a lack of any evidence of any social or environmental sustainability practices except corporate governance or code of conduct documents. Additional initiatives increased their rating. These included, from weakest to strongest efforts, community relations, charitable giving, and/or diversity initiatives, recycling, energy efficiency, waste management programs, GHG measurement, carbon footprint programs, business lines that focus on reducing resource and energy intensity, ISO certification of multiple facilities, the use of renewable energy sources, conservation programs and compliance with GRI performance indicators.
Results

The demographics of the survey showed that the mean age of the 19 respondents answering the demographic questions was approximately 57 (the lowest age was 41 and the highest was 75). Of the 19 participants, 18 were male and one was female. One of these 19 respondents identified as Canadian in nationality, and one identified himself as Caucasian, with 17 identifying their nationality as US, USA, or American. Nine participants had earned master’s degrees, eight had earned bachelor’s degrees, one participant had earned a Juris Doctor degree, and one listed grade 10 as his level of education.

The mean length of time that these CEOs had been in their current position was 10.6 years, with a range among participants of one year to 25 years and the mean length of time in their current firm was approximately 19.4 years, with the least being one year and the most being 50 years.

The chief executive officers (CEOs) participating in this survey, in aggregate, indicated that other humans were of concern to them: their environmental concerns were stronger for other humans (EC-hum) than their self (EC-self) or biospheric environmental concerns (EC-bio). The highest level of agreement regarding environmental consequences was for “pollution generated in one country harms people all over the world” an other-human-oriented measure (AC-hum).

The top value type that participating CEOs indicated as being a motivator was benevolence (mean value rating of 4.81), followed closely by achievement (4.10) and universalism (3.81), whereas the values in the power value type were those with the least
motivating force (2.61). As such, using the benevolence value type as a reference point to rate the variance in value types, achievement was 1.9% away from benevolence, universalism was 8.9% away from benevolence, and power was 37.6% away from benevolence. Relating each value type in distance to the value types in their order, achievement was 1.9% away from benevolence, universalism was 7% away from achievement, and power was 31.5% away from universalism. In Schwartz’s value circumplex, both power and achievement are associated with self-enhancement, yet in this study the two were not closely linked.

One explanation for this finding could be that the items included in this survey apply less to CEOs than to the public. For Fortune 1000 CEOs there is little likelihood of a personal impact in any of the environmental concerns items for “myself,” “my lifestyle,” and “my future,” and perhaps even “my health.” Similarly, given their earning power and position, they have attained a significant degree of social power, authority, and wealth, so these particular power values may, at this point in their lives, hold less of a priority for them.

A possible methodological problem is that social desirability may affect responses, leading to low mean scores for EC and AC self and power values. Corporate greed scandals and shareholder activism might lead executives to unintentionally or intentionally adjust their responses to such concerns and values.

Although the CEOs participating showed an orientation toward other humans as evidenced by scores on environmental concern and benevolence items in particular, there were patterns between EC and value survey items, and OSP (see Table 1). On the AC items, 80% of CEOs with OSP ratings of 3 or greater chose altruistic on AC items, and 80% chose...
achievement values as highest guidance. Only 10% of these CEOs chose benevolence values as being of the highest guidance.

In comparison, 30% of CEOs with OSP ratings of 2 or lower chose altruistic on AC items, 40% chose achievement values as highest. 50% chose benevolence values as highest. There did not appear to be a pattern among the CEOs with regard to the environmental concern items.

Incorporating the organizational context may add a level of complexity that such measures were not designed to account for. One may have differing criteria for values held personally than those held in the context of a professional role, or personal values may be sublimated so as not to be in conflict with those expected in the context of a corporate role.

It may also be that factors other than those measured by the items in the EC, AC, and values survey (as evaluated through this instrument) are more salient in driving OSP in the organizations of these participating CEOs, such as regulatory threats and the drive for competitive advantage, as their answers to the open-ended OSP questions indicate. Incorporating these concerns and consequences into the EC or AC items, if doing so proved reliable and valid, might reveal a different picture.

**Discussion of qualitative questions: CEO perspectives on OSP**

The two firms with the strongest set of organizational sustainability practices of those participating in the survey answered every qualitative question. Only one other CEO answered all qualitative questions: CEO J. This supports the notion that CEOs in
Table 1.  
**EC, AC, Values, OSP ratings, and OSP Questions Answered, Ranked by OSP**

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Note: CEO EC, AC, and Values ratings, OSP (from strongest to weakest OSP), and number of OSP perspectives questions answered. “P” indicates pilot study, in which OSP questions were not part of the electronic survey, but were to be asked in a follow-up telephone interview; only one CEO in the pilot study agreed to be interviewed (CEO G).
firms with significant OSP would be more likely to want to report on and/or participate in studies about corporate sustainability. Seven of the 15 participating chief executive officers who identified their firm, however, were part of the first set of study participants, for whom the qualitative questions were not part of the electronic survey; instead, those participants were asked if they would participate in a follow up interview during which these questions would be asked. Only one of these seven agreed to the follow-up interview. For those chief executive officers who did not identify their firms but answered the qualitative questions, it is not possible to evaluate their OSP for comparison purposes.

Six out of the ten participating CEOs answering the question “What has been your experience with sustainability programs in your organization” indicated they had considerable experience; from their answers it could be construed that the experience was largely positive. Of the other four, one indicated “some success,” one indicated “limited” experience, and one indicated no experience. Only one participant chose to answer with more of a qualitative than quantitative answer: “difficult to figure out ROI [return on investment]”. Such an answer indicates a prioritization of economic concern above other issues; it is possible that this participant’s experience included difficulty justifying the cost of OSP to his stakeholders.

In answer to the question, “From a personal, rather than professional, standpoint, how do you view these programs?,” nine out of ten participants responding to the question indicated what could be characterized as somewhat strong to very strong positive personal views. Those with the strongest OSP also indicated the strongest positive personal views, using words such as critical, satisfying, very proud, very pleased. It’s close to my heart.

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The three participants who identified their firms with OSP on the weaker end of the spectrum gave milder answers: “balance short term costs with doing the right thing,” “I’m supportive,” and “moderately important.”

Four of the ten participants answering the question, “What have been the most significant difficulties in implementing sustainability programs in your organization?” two themes were identified as salient: economic and logistical. Of the participants who answered this question that identified their firms, those with the strongest OSP gave answers that could be categorized as logistical versus economic.

The CEOs with the strongest OSP offered perspectives that posited sustainability as critical to organizational success or good for business growth. From a systems perspective it might seem ironic that sustainability efforts are viewed as a driver for business growth; the institution of industry does not, as yet, embrace the notion of system limits. Indeed, the CEOs with the strongest OSP may share a technological optimism that humankind can fix environmental, if not social challenges, through scientific advancements.

Two CEOs cited measurability issues with corporate sustainability and social responsibility efforts, that they are “less tangible” and had “a much less clear line of impact on day to day business.” The OSP of both of these CEOs was on the lower end of the spectrum.

Five participants answered the OSP question, “Who are the sustainability entrepreneurs in your organization, and what do you think drives them?” Three of the five noted that sustainability entrepreneurs in their organizations came from a variety of levels
and business units in their organizations. Four of them included an answer to the second part of the question about motivations. Two of these four mentioned what could be a biospheric motivation: a passion for the environment or for sustainability work. The CEO with the strongest OSP gave what could be considered a more altruistic, or other-human oriented driver: “a belief that our firm’s innovation can provide the products and services that help solve some of society’s biggest challenges.” Added to the altruistic was also a biospheric element at the end of his explanation “feeding a growing population, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and protecting people and the environment.”

Eight participants answered the question, “Tell me about the fit between your own values regarding social, environmental, and economic issues and those values as incorporated into your organization’s identity.” Six of the eight were CEOs who identified their organization. All eight reported alignment, ranging from “reasonably close fit” to “high alignment” and “very strong.” What was notable, however, was that among those identifying their firms those with the strongest OSP spoke to the social and environmental issues in the question, whereas those with weaker OSP appear to hedge.

Seven participants answered the question, “Tell me about the fit between your own values regarding social, environmental, and economic issues and your organization’s sustainability performance,” five of whom identified their firms. Three participants expressed a good fit or better, and one said the fit was “improving.” Two addressed environmental issues specifically, one answering that “environmental issues are becoming an interest to me” and the other answering that there was a “higher degree of correlation” with social and economic issues than with environmental ones. Not surprisingly, these two
firms had weaker OSP. Only one participant, whose firm had the second strongest OSP of all firms evaluated, indicated a discrepancy between his values and his firm’s sustainability performance, indicating that his firm could and would do more.

Eight participants answered the final OSP question, “In terms of corporate sustainability and social responsibility, would you say your thinking about those concepts and their operationalization in your organization has changed at all in the last 5 or so years, and if so, how? What do you attribute that change to?” Six of these participants identified their firms. The CEOs of the firms with the strongest sustainability efforts indicated that there were qualitative changes in terms of the focus of their efforts. Two CEOs with weaker OSP ratings indicated a measure of social pressure as influencing the change in their thinking, with CEO J stating, “society is all about GREEN these days. It’s cool to be green” and CEO K citing the “demand in the marketplace.”

Ultimately, it may be that, although social value orientation plays a significant factor in driving OSP among those who have a self-transcendent orientation, a variety of social and institutional pressures form a stronger factor toward the diffusion of organizational sustainability practices among chief executives who are self-enhancement orientated. These drivers include employees advocating for sustainability, increased labor retention goals, media coverage of corporate social and environmental issues, customer requests, and shareholder and nongovernmental activism.

Comparison of the three research instruments
An other-human (altruistic) orientation, as compared with an orientation toward self or biospheric others was clearly a more frequent choice, in aggregate, in both the awareness of consequences and environmental concerns. This was also the case in the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) items in aggregate, in that the mean for the value in the benevolence type was prioritized over achievement, universalism, and power.

Individually, however, of the five respondents whose organizations scored a three or above on their organizational sustainability practices, the achievement value type was of a higher degree of guidance over the other values by 4 of them (or 80%). Of the 10 respondents whose organizations scored a 2 or below on their organizational sustainability practices, only four of these respondents (40%) chose achievement as more strongly guiding them than the other value types. Five of this latter group (50%) indicated that benevolence was of the highest degree of guidance compared to the other value types, and one (10%) prioritized universalism over the other value types. Individually, the group split similarly with regard to awareness of consequences items, with the four of the five CEOs with the strongest OSP (80%) choosing an altruistic orientation, and only three of the 10 CEOs with the weaker OSP (30%) choosing the same orientation. Interestingly, of this latter group of CEOs with weaker OSP, four (40%) chose a biospheric orientation to the AC items. As such, the AC measure shows the weakest relationship to OSP; this is unsurprising considering the validity and reliability issues that have plagued it.

Comparing the data from the qualitative OSP questions with the Schwartz Value Survey items and relating them to the ratings of the organizations with the strongest OSP, these CEOs indicated a strong degree of guidance by achievement values, also viewing OSP
as a path to their firms’ economic success while also addressing environmental issues, unlike those CEO’s with weaker OSP ratings.

Of those CEOs with the weakest OSP ratings of 0 or 1 who also answered the qualitative OSP questions (3 CEOs), the only EC or AC measure that was common to all three was they showed lowest agreement with biospheric AC items. Two of the three held benevolence values as their highest degree of guidance and one held achievement as the highest of the value types. None of the three mentioned their OSP efforts as a means to gain economic advantage or positively address environmental issues; instead their responses spoke more to customer, marketplace, or regulatory demand for action. Figure 3 portrays a model based on the research conducted in this dissertation.

Limitations

Two limitations of this study are the low response rate and the possibility that those with a prosel self orientation might be likely to self-select out of participation and those with a prosocial orientation might self-select to participate, thereby skewing the results. The best response rate was 2.7% for the EC items, 2.5% for the AC items, 2.4% for the values items, and between 1.0% and .7% for the OSP items. The small sample size does not allow for generalization to the wider set of Fortune 1000 chief executive officers.

The recruitment letter explicitly noted that sustainability practices were part of the study focus, so a criticism could be that CEOs for whom sustainability was not of concern.
or whose organizations did not engage in such practices might have chosen not to participate. Yet, 47% of study participants had very limited to no OSP, so this concern may be groundless.

Some measures in each of the item sets may be unsuitable or at least a less valid measure of the social value orientations of chief executive officers, as mentioned above. A
new set of AC, EC, and value items might be developed and tested to better assess the SVO of executives. For example, EC self items could be “Concern for executive pay levels” and “Concern for my organization’s competitive advantage.” AC items might similarly include organizational consequences.

There is the possibility that the responses to the interview questions could be contaminated because they were answered immediately after the AC, EC, and values survey items, possibly prompting participants to include mention of concerns, consequences or values in their answers. However, participants’ answers to the OSP questions appear to be more related to their experiences with sustainability initiatives than the concerns, consequences, and values of the survey items. It is also possible that the study results may have been compromised by the different treatment of the respondents, with one being interviewed and others answering the OSP questions through the online survey.

Future study considerations

Being responsible for a large organization, Fortune 1000 CEOs must manage their personal and professional resources in ways that protect and enhance their organization’s viability. Responding to requests to participate in a research study, particularly from an individual they do not know representing an organization they are unfamiliar with, is unlikely to be a high priority for them. Where appropriate, researchers might “piggyback” on larger studies of Fortune 1000 CEOs; this might also reduce the number of CEOs who decline to participate because they are not inclined toward or engaged in OSP.
As discussed above, future studies should use an instrument that has been designed and tested to be valid and reliable for assessing social value orientation in an organizational context, specifically for executives in for-profit business organizations.

Conclusion

This research reveals that those CEOs who included a desire to protect the environment, act on moral principles, and create competitive economic advantage for their firms led companies that had stronger OSP than CEOs who did not mention all of these drivers. This does not necessarily mean that the CEOs of firms with stronger OSP have a biospheric orientation, at least as measured by the instrument. Most CEOs did show an orientation toward humans and benevolence, as well as achievement, regardless of OSP.

Although the value types of achievement and power are associated with a self-enhancement orientation, and value types of benevolence and universality are associated with the opposing self-transcendent orientation, in this study benevolence was closely ranked with achievement, which does not align with the Schwartz (1992) values-relationship model.

This study’s open-ended questions revealed that CEOs with weaker OSP also expressed weaker support for OSP, mentioned economic difficulties, and appeared more motivated by external drivers (regulation, government financial incentives, consumer and media pressure). Those CEOs with stronger OSP not only articulated more support and stronger alignment of personal values with organizational values and OSP, they also
expressed a desire to exert pressure on other businesses to integrate OSP into their operations.

More corporate boards, financial ratings institutions, and institutional investors recognize that the failure of corporations to adequately address sustainability issues constitutes risks to corporate viability and liability. The CEOs in this study with the strongest OSP viewed OSP as a means to reduce costs, increase profits, drive growth, and/or create competitive advantage. These same CEOs expressed concern for the environment in their answers to the open-ended OSP questions. As such CEOs who value environmental health and global social wellbeing might be considered better leaders, or at least more suited to 21st-century business leadership.

The institutionalization of organizational sustainability practices is necessary if progress is to be made toward sustainability on a global scale (Hart, 2005, p. 97; Hoffman, Bazerman, & Yaffee, 2007, p. 56; Post & Altman, 1994). Yet, widespread diffusion of such practices in the United States has been slow (Shrivastava, 1995, p. 37). Literature on the concept and practice of sustainability examines who and what we include in our decision making, on a spectrum from self to in-group humans, all humans, nonhuman life, and the biosphere. Much of the literature on organizational sustainability practices and corporate social responsibility examines how business management decisions are or should be made and highlights, either explicitly or implicitly, this same spectrum of consideration. The values of executive leaders in relation to corporate responsibility practices has been an ongoing thread in this scholarly conversation. The findings of this research indicate that the
strength of an organization’s sustainability practices is related to CEO attitudes about social
and environmental, as well as economic, issues.
References


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