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Editors

# Enabling Responsible Living

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# Empowering Responsible Consumers to be Sustainable Intrapreneurs

Ulf Schrader and Christoph Harrach

**Abstract** Responsible consumers are often employees, spending more time in their professional life than in their private life. Many of them are willing to live up to private values, attitudes and experiences during working hours as well. Some even would like to act as sustainable intrapreneurs and pull and push colleagues and management towards increased sustainability of their organisation. Empowering responsible consumers to act as sustainable intrapreneurs has the potential to support job satisfaction and retention, i.e. typical goals of human resource management (HRM). It can in addition prevent that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is considered to be greenwashing only. In this chapter we will show—after a short introduction—how private life and working life generally interact with each other. Then, we will concentrate on the outside-in spill over effects, i.e. on how private responsible behaviour might be utilized by HRM and CSR management. For that purpose, we will first present the concept of sustainable intrapreneurship and then the determinants of psychological empowerment. We combine these two by showing how relevant HRM measures might create and increase empowerment for sustainable intrapreneurship. After that, we will discuss chances and risks of this approach before we finally give some conclusions for managers and researchers.

**Keywords** Responsible consumers · Corporate social responsibility (CSR) · Empowerment · Human resource management (HRM) · Intrapreneurship · Lifestyle of health and sustainability (LOHAS)

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## 1 Introduction

This work has been inspired by the formula “CSR – HR = PR” which was first published in a report by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2005). The authors highlight the importance of human resource (HR) management and the creation of an internal bottom-up process in order to develop a credible Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) management. An employee-driven CSR management has a greater chance to avoid the image of “greenwashing” than a purely management-driven approach:

If employees are not engaged, Corporate Social Responsibility becomes an exercise in public relations. The credibility of an organisation will become damaged when it becomes evident that a company is not ‘walking the talk’ (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2005).

In the past, CSR was often regarded as a concept with relevance for marketing or product development only. To integrate CSR fully in an organisation requires contributions from people across all functions and departments (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2005). Consequently, authors like Boudreau (2003) have claimed that “sustainability [...] must become a part of HRM”. Today, the topic of sustainability has eventually reached many human resource management departments (Ehnert 2009), but still it is usually restricted to “HR policies and practices, such as child labour, worker representation, health and safety” (Boudreau 2003). These are important issues, but there is a much greater potential if HRM and sustainability were linked more comprehensively.

An important step in that direction would be to consider employees not only in their role as workers but with regard to their whole living, including private experiences, values and attitudes connected to sustainability (Muster and Schrader 2011). Thus, “green” or “sustainable” HR managers should be aware that at least some of the employees they deal with are people who try to practice sustainable consumption in their private life. In surveys like the Eurobarometer, more than 90 % of the respondents declare that they are interested in environmental issues (European Commission 2011). The World Values Survey (2010) also shows high levels of acceptance for sustainability oriented values on a global level. Even when a social desirability bias is taken into account it is obvious that sustainability orientation is no longer restricted to a small niche of eco-pioneers. Not only sustainability marketing but also HRM could build on this relevant and growing segment of people. This points to an important link between responsible private living, The Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) usually deals with, and working life.

Employees acting as responsible consumers in private life might have or could develop the willingness, the ability and the freedom to foster sustainability within their corporations by pulling and pushing colleagues and managers. If so, they are empowered to act as sustainable intrapreneurs.

This chapter will discuss the concept, the implementation, and possible effects of the empowerment of responsible consumers to be sustainable intrapreneurs.

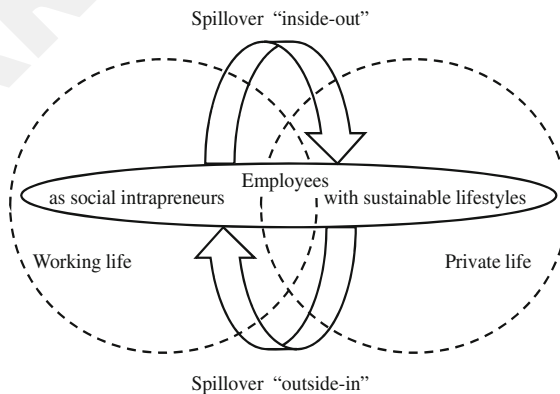
In the following we will first clarify, how private life and working life generally interact with each other and how this could be fertilized by HR and CSR management. After that we will show how a stronger influence of sustainable private life on working life could be generated by clarifying the concepts “sustainable intrapreneurs” and “empowerment of responsible consumers as employees”. Then, we will present a synopsis of possible chances and risks and finally propose conclusions for management and research.

## 2 Interdependencies of Private Life and Working Life

Work-life research in the fields of sociology and HRM has shown that the different life spheres and roles of employees are interdependent (e.g. Edwards and Rothbard 2000; Kanter 1977; Lambert 1990). Challenges and experiences related to working life can influence the private life and vice versa. Numerous studies on work-life-balance (WLB) reflect on these interdependencies. They present measures how both life sphere can be balanced—in favour of companies and employees alike (e.g. Kossek and Lambert 2005; Ryan and Kossek 2008). However, up to now sustainability aspects have been neglected in WLB research (Muster and Schrader 2011).

Similarly, research about sustainable consumption has hardly considered the influence of and on work behaviour. An exception is the study by Berger and Kanetkar (1995), which has shown, that successful recycling programmes at work can have a positive spillover effect on private recycling behaviour at home. However, this effect at home was not the goal but a positive collateral effect of the CSR activity. Other studies have concentrated on negative effects of modern working life on sustainable consumption (e.g. Reisch 2001; Muster 2012).

Against this background, Muster and Schrader (2011) proposed the concept of a green work-life-balance which includes measures to consciously stimulate



**Fig. 1** Interdependencies of private life and working life (according to Muster and Schrader 2011)

sustainability related spillover effects between the two life spheres. In this context, spillover effects can occur either “inside-out” or “outside-in” (see Fig. 1).

Muster (2011) focused on the inside-out perspective and analyzed how the workplace could be better developed as a place to learn for sustainable consumption. This chapter now focusses on the outside-in perspective and will show, how the employer and the employee could profit from better integrating private values, attitudes, and experiences into working life. Employees with sustainable lifestyles who are successful in generating the described outside-in spillover effects for themselves and others can be described as sustainable intrapreneurs.

### 3 Sustainable Intrapreneurs

Based on an extensive review of existing intrapreneurship definitions, Antoncic and Hisrich come to the conclusion that the most common description of the concept is “entrepreneurship within an existing organization” (Antoncic and Hisrich 2003, p. 9), i.e. acting like an innovative owner-manager and not like a risk-avoiding clerk. The idea of intrapreneurship goes back to the year 1978, when Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot wrote a paper titled “Intra-Corporate Entrepreneurship”. In that paper the authors argue that the large corporations are too big to be innovative and that a “free market entrepreneurship within the corporate organization” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978) is demanded. This would ultimately lead to a “social invention of considerable importance, both for the individuals in it, and for the productivity and responsibility of the corporation” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978).

In their research paper, Pinchot and Pinchot already refer to a “new class of information and idea handlers” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978) in corporations, whose “achievement needs are not primarily for money, but for having their ideas acknowledged and used” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978). Pinchot and Pinchot write that these employees are idealistic and have a very strong yearning for freedom.

Although the concept originally was not founded as an element of environmental or responsible management, but focussed on innovativeness and competitive advantages of companies, Pinchot and Pinchot have already claimed that intrapreneurs have a strong social and environmental motivation and that they “need to feel sure they can avoid creating effects in the environment or in society that they consider wrong” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978).

Pinchot and Pinchot (1978) identified two major challenges for corporations dealing with this “new class of intra-corporate entrepreneurs”. The first challenge is to give those employees the most possible freedom in their work without losing track of the corporation’s goals. The second challenge concerns the innovativeness of the corporation and how to maintain it. Pinchot and Pinchot recommend to set up a system in which those employees could act just as independent as entrepreneurs “while still holding over them the technological, financial, and perhaps most significant, the informational umbrella of the corporation” (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978).

Although the social and environmental motivations of intrapreneurs were described by Pinchot and Pinchot already in 1978, the intrapreneurs in general are not specifically focussed on sustainability. Thus, this paper refers to a new and specific form of intrapreneurs, the so-called “social intrapreneurs”. According to SustainAbility (2008, p. 4), a social intrapreneur is

1. Someone who works inside major corporations or organizations to develop and promote practical solutions to social or environmental challenges where progress is currently stalled by market failures.
2. Someone who applies the principles of social entrepreneurship inside a major organization.
3. One characterized by an ‘insider–outsider’ mindset and approach.

To make clear that we consider environmental as well as social effects, we prefer the term “sustainable intrapreneur”, similar to Gerlach (2003) who uses the expression “sustainability intrapreneurship”. Thus, in the following we call our object of analysis sustainable intrapreneur, not social intrapreneur.

Our definition of a sustainable intrapreneur refers to SustainAbility (2008), but is slightly different:

- (1) A sustainable intrapreneur works in a corporation (or organisation) to develop and promote practical solutions for social or environmental challenges.

SustainAbility has focussed on intrapreneurs, setting up social businesses in the name of major corporations. However, the original idea of intrapreneurship is not limited to major corporations but can be also be applied to active employees in smaller corporations or (non-profit) organisations. In addition, there is no justification to reduce social intrapreneurship to “challenges where progress is currently stalled by market failures”. Thus, we take all opportunities to create social or environmental progress into account.

- (2) Someone who is able to push and pull management and colleagues towards these sustainable solutions.

We want to make clear what SustainAbility means with “the principles of social intrapreneurship”, i.e. the way how entrepreneurship within an organisation works. The motivation of a social intrapreneur is to “incubate and deliver business solutions” (SustainAbility 2008, p. 7) and to solve social or ecological problems (Gerlach 2003). Social intrapreneurs work in the corporate world and understand business processes as well as sustainable issues. The social intrapreneur has the same characteristics as a social entrepreneur with the slight difference that he or she is working within a corporation. Scientific research in the field of social or sustainable entrepreneurship is mainly focussed on the social and environmental dimension of the sustainable development scheme. Thus, Hockerts (2003, p. 50) defines sustainability entrepreneurship as

the identification of a sustainability innovation and its implementation either through the foundation of a start-up or the radical reorientation of an existing organization’s business model so as to achieve the underlying ecological or social objectives.

To be able to re-orientate the business model of an existing organisation—or at least parts of it—, a sustainable intrapreneur needs to convince others. How this is possible can be described according to Ray and Anderson’s study of “The Cultural Creatives. How 50 Million People are Changing the World” (Ray and Anderson 2000). Intrapreneurs with a strong sustainability agenda, based on personal core values, attitudes and experiences are able to pull and push colleagues and management towards social and environmental progress. With visible actions (like cycling to work, eating vegetarian in the canteen or turning off lights and heating when leaving the office) he or she might act as a role model. It might pull colleagues who are already “in transition” (Ray 2008, p. 6) towards a “lifestyle of health and sustainability” (LOHAS) in private and working life. With convincing arguments the intrapreneurs can additionally push others towards more sustainability. Both, the push- and the pull-effect can contribute not only to additional social business solutions, but to a “greening” of the core business.

- (3) One with a sustainable lifestyle and characterized by an ‘insider–outsider’ mindset and approach.

For the described approach of bringing private sustainability conviction into the workplace and use it as a resource for sustainable intrapreneurship a sustainable lifestyle is crucial. Private experiences and efforts to live more sustainably serve both as a learning opportunity and as a source for credibility to be used at the workplace. When the private life is the starting point for business development the maintenance of an outsider perspective as a complement to the insider perspective of the employee is inevitable. Thus, sustainable intrapreneurship and the spillover effects between private and working life, described in Sect. 2, have the potential to fit well together.

As mentioned before we assume that the type of employee who would like to act as a sustainable intrapreneur is in fact rising in numbers, due to the expanding ecological and social awareness of consumers in the private sphere and the natural spillover of values, attitudes and experiences to working life. The key question for organisations now is how to deal with this new situation of “substance seeking” employees and how to integrate their talents into the organisation’s CSR management. An important motivational theory that could be used in this context is psychological empowerment theory (Spreitzer 1995). There are good reasons to link sustainable intrapreneurship with the psychological empowerment theory. Intrapreneurship and empowerment are both positively related to innovativeness (Antoncic and Hisrich 2003; Spreitzer 1995) and to intrinsic motivation (Pinchot and Pinchot 1978; Zhang and Bartol 2010). Sustainable intrapreneurship depends on intrinsically motivated and empowered employees. Thus, it is relevant to know how employees, acting as responsible consumers in their private life, can be empowered to be sustainable intrapreneurs in their working life.



## 4 Empowerment of Responsible Consumers as Employees

Psychological empowerment at the workplace is described by Spreitzer (1995) as a motivational construct with four dimensions, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Her model is based on an extensive review of empirical studies and has been tested and validated (Spreitzer 2007). We will show that all dimensions can be applied to sustainable intrapreneurship. In addition we will give examples of how HRM can empower responsible consumers as employees to act as sustainable intrapreneurs.

*Meaning* “is the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s ideals or standards [... It] involves a fit between the requirements of the work role and personal beliefs, values, and behaviours” (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). Thus, for an empowered sustainable intrapreneur it is personally meaningful to foster social and environmental change at work. Companies that want this kind of employees especially need to consider the respective personal beliefs, values, and behaviours in their recruitment policy, e.g. by addressing them explicitly in their job advertisements, interviews, and recruiting decisions. The willingness to act as a sustainable intrapreneur can also be increased by an adequate incentive and reward system. However, employers need to be careful not to destroy the intrinsic motivation and create crowding out effects by offering purely monetary rewards (Frey 1994). Incentives and rewards like allowing time and budget for “own” sustainability projects and corporate volunteering activities (e.g. Lee and Higgins 2001) might be more appropriate.

*Competence* “is an individual’s belief in his or her capability to perform activities with skill” (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). Accordingly, an empowered sustainable intrapreneur knows that he or she has the skill to use private knowledge and convictions to support the CSR management of a corporation. It is not a question of objective competences, but of the employee’s subjective conviction of his or her ability to act. Thus, Spreitzer’s understanding of competence is synonymous with Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997). The competence dimension has to be considered in the recruitment process. It can be fostered by companies via different measures of HR development, especially specific trainings to improve professional and social competences—and to increase the awareness of having the skills to act as a sustainable intrapreneur and being able to push and pull the corporation towards sustainable solutions.

*Self-determination* “is an individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions” (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). An empowered sustainable intrapreneur knows that he or she has the freedom to decide how to develop sustainable solutions for the company. HR and organisation management can increase self-determination by reducing regulation and delegating responsibilities to employees and by considering this within job descriptions. This should go along with a more frequent and intensive interaction of (top) management and interested employees (Sahoo and Das 2011). In addition, employees with sustainable lifestyles can be stimulated to bring in their private experiences via innovation workshops, idea

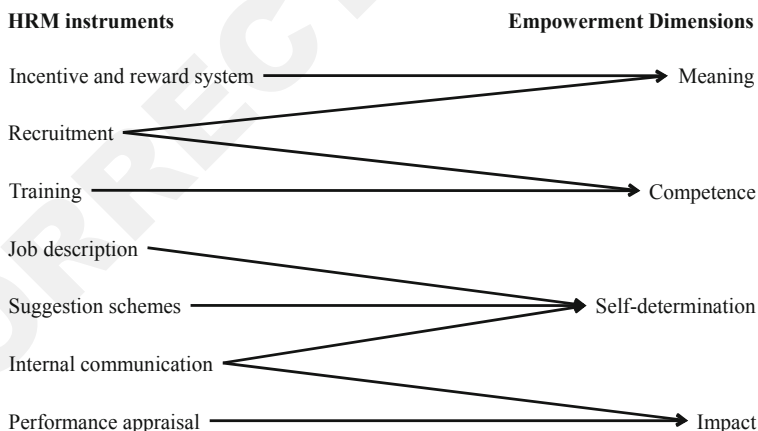
competitions and other innovative instruments of suggestion schemes. Access to specific tools for internal sustainability communication (e.g. intranet-platforms, newsletters, and personal dialogues) also allows empowered employees to influence their colleagues.

*Impact* “is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work” (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443f). For a sustainable intrapreneur impact means that he or she can influence other co-workers and the company towards sustainability. With performance appraisal, i.e. by measuring and accounting the effects of employee-driven activities on the CSR performance of the company and by making this transparent via internal communication, HR and CSR management can assure that sustainable intrapreneurs know about their impact.

To sum up, responsible consumers who are willing, able, and allowed to have a relevant impact on the CSR of their employer are empowered to act as sustainable intrapreneurs.

Figure 2 summarizes how HRM can empower employees. Only the most important relations are indicated since the mentioned HRM measures all have the potential to influence the complex construct of empowerment (Sahoo and Das 2011).

Struzyna and Marzec (2003) give empirical evidence that the four dimensions of empowerment have indeed a significant relationship with intrapreneurial behaviour. Thus, empowering responsible consumers as employees means turning them into sustainable intrapreneurs.



**Fig. 2** Most important influences of HRM on empowerment

## 5 Chances and Risks

Reflecting on what has been said so far, several chances and risks of the presented concept can be highlighted.

If employees are empowered to actively create and implement bottom-up suggestions towards sustainable development, the first direct effect is the chance that the CSR performance of the organisation will be improved.

In addition, empirical studies have shown that empowerment can lead to more creativity and innovation (Amabile 1996; Antoncic and Hisrich 2003; Spreitzer 1995; Zhang and Bartol 2010). It can be expected, that this general increase in innovativeness is also valid for empowered sustainable intrapreneurs.

Both, the CSR performance and the ability to offer innovative products and services are important dimensions of corporate reputation (Fombrun et al. 2000; Walsh and Beatty 2007). As stated in the introduction, the integration of employees into all CSR activities reduces the risk that CSR is assessed by stakeholder as pure PR or “greenwashing”. Sustainable intrapreneurs have the potential to act as authentic brand ambassadors being engaged in positive word-of-mouth in favour of their employer. This most credible form corporate communication might further increase the organisation’s reputation.

Empowerment and intrapreneurship are also positively related to typical objectives of HRM. It has been shown that they can increase workplace commitment (Rhoades et al. 2001; Sahoo and Das 2011) and intrinsic work motivation (Antoncic and Hisrich 2003; Zhang and Bartol 2010). These general findings should also be true for sustainable intrapreneurship. In this case, positive effects on job satisfaction and retention, which have been found for CSR (e.g. Riordan et al. 1997; Maignan et al. 1999) and for work-life-balance activities (Forsyth and Polzer-Debruyne 2007) are also expectable.

There are also risks and challenges when empowering employees to be sustainable intrapreneurs. Usually there are costs (time and money) incurred, which are measurable and directly relevant. In contrast, positive effects that occur in the future are more difficult to measure and are uncertain. Thus, the investments in empowerment might be considered to be inadequate costs.

In addition, empowerment could possibly raise unreasonable expectations of employees that cannot be fulfilled by the organisation. The goal of an organisation usually is different from the (diverse) goals of its members. A strong conviction for sustainability does not mean that an organisation is able to put all ideas of their employees with sustainable lifestyles into practice.

What is more, some employees might even evaluate the request to utilize their private ideas and experiences in their working life as an intrusion into their private affairs. The attempt to foster the spill-over effects between life spheres and to reduce the borderline between work and free time might be perceived as exploitation of private life and a reduction of freedom—which could create reactance

**Table 1** Synopsis of possible chances and risks of empowering responsible consumers to be sustainable intrapreneurs

Chances	Risks
Improved CSR performance	Inadequate costs (time & money)
Innovativeness in the field of sustainable development	Increasing/unreasonable expectations of employees
Improved corporate reputation	Reactance of employees against exploitation of private life
Commitment, motivation, satisfaction, and retention of important employees	

(Brehm et al. 1966; Muster and Schrader 2011). Thus, the offensive demand of employers to bring in private ideas might result in employees' wish of an even clearer demarcation of work and private life.

Table 1 summarizes the mentioned chances and risks of empowering responsible consumers to be sustainable intrapreneurs.

## 6 Conclusions for Managers and Researchers

The challenge for managers is to take the chances of empowering responsible consumers as employees while reducing the risks. An important condition to prevent reactance is to find employees who would like to be empowered as sustainable intrapreneurs and to bring in their private experiences and ideas. This can be realized by involving employees in CSR activities on a voluntary basis. Then, potential intrapreneurs can be identified in a self-selection process. Additional tools, described in Sect. 4, allow empowering those employees who can really improve the CSR management of the company. These employees can support each other in inter-divisional working groups. To start a bottom-up process, it is important that the working groups stay open for other interested employees. Intensive exchange with top management would confirm that these activities are of high importance for the company. Top managers who could show a private sustainability interest themselves and relate this to their professional goals and activities can be helpful to guarantee the credibility of endeavors to empower responsible consumers to be sustainable intrapreneurs.

The corporate activities should be accompanied by scientific evaluation, since the proposed measures and effects still require conceptual foundation and empirical validation. The empirical results we refer to are related to our concept, but the specific measures and effects of empowering responsible consumers to be sustainable intrapreneurs have not been completely implemented and tested yet.

Thus, the next step should be cooperation of companies and researchers to implement and test the presented ideas. Maybe not all effects will turn out to be as relevant and successful as we have proposed. However, we are convinced that the

idea of empowering responsible consumers to act as sustainable intrapreneurs deserves further consideration. It has the potential to complement existing sustainability initiatives and to bridge the established areas of sustainable consumption and sustainable management.

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