

Motives for Keeping Green Mindfulness and Firm Size

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ABSTRACT

While integration of environmental concepts and business operations has become a fundamental part of value creation strategy, environmental management has received sustained research interest over time. Organizational green mindfulness is a way of organizational attitude during environmental management marked by preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise. The study expects that firms should keep mindfulness thinking while engaging in environmental management. The main purpose of this study is to propose a theoretical framework exploring the moderating effect of firm size on the motives for keeping green mindfulness. The motives proposed in the study include economic motive and social motive. Firm size would moderate the influences of economic motive and social motive on keeping green mindfulness.

Keywords: firm size, green mindfulness, economic motive, social motive

INTRODUCTION

There is a remarkable increase in both interests and reactions to the concept of preserving the environment in recent years. This has been attributable to the life-threatening of global ecosystem deterioration, the pressure from consumers, and the increasing statutory requirements of government policies and regulations (Buisse & Verbeke, 2003; Corbett & Kleindorfer, 2001; Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2006). While environmental issues have become critical concerns all over the world, firms are constantly under pressure to develop environmentally responsible and friendly operations (Arend, 2014; Christmann & Taylor, 2002; Husted, 2005). Commitment to the natural environment has become an important variable within the current competitive scenarios while companies worldwide are continuously trying to develop new and innovative ways to enhance their global competitiveness. Many firms have implemented environmental management practices to enhance their competitiveness through improvements in their green performance to comply with mounting environmental regulations, to address the environmental concerns of their customers, and to mitigate the environmental impact of their business activities.

Firms can achieve considerable environmental performance by successfully implementing environmental practices into their work systems. However, a firm may fail to achieve deep usage beyond initial adoption because engaging in environmental management often constitutes complex technologies and processes and calls for significant investment of organizational resources. Successful implementation of environmental management requires significant involvement in developing operational responses to environmental issues (Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Fussel & Georg, 2000; Prajogo, Tang & Lai, 2014). Implementation of environmental management constitutes a complex information processing and decision making scenario that involves making sense of a new green concept or practice that the firm is unfamiliar with and is typically characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity over the outcomes of the implementation process (Aragon-Correa & Sharma, 2003; Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Winn & Angell, 2000). Thus, managers are faced with the task of analyzing the ramifications of the green concepts or practices on their firms (Sonenshein, DeCelles & Dutton, 2014; Wals & Schwarzin, 2012). Under such circumstances, deciding on whether a particular green concept or practice is a good thing for the firm, whether the timing of the implementation is appropriate, and how the implementation is best carried out requires firms to be mindful of engaging in environmental management with reasoning grounded in their own facts and specifics (Fussel & Georg, 2000; Jenkin, McShane & Webster, 2011; Ranerjee, 2011). Firms require mindfulness thinking in the implementation of environmental management (Ho & Lin, 2014b; Wals & Schwarzin, 2012).

In organizational decision-making, mindfulness is a state of being alert and aware. It is a characteristic that is believed to aid in making contextually differentiated interpretations of situations and information scenarios (Ndubisi, 2012b; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). The mindfulness approach recognizes the value of managerial flexibility in structuring and timing investment decisions on the face of uncertain conditions, varying levels of risks at different stages of an investment project and irreversible investments (Fiol & O'Connor, 2003; Ndubisi, 2012b). Accordingly, mindfulness theory is deemed suitable for application to the investigation of a firm's implementation of environmental management, more specifically when a green concept or practice is relatively new and uncertain in terms of its likely outcomes and managers have the flexibility of timing the implementation decision depending on factors such as prevailing market conditions and availability of information (Fichman, 2004; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Firms need to keep green mindfulness when engaging in environmental management. As a result, it is necessary to understand the issues about green mindfulness in environmental management. Although mindfulness has been considered by researchers across different disciplines and subjects, the concept of mindfulness has been scarcely employed in research on environmental management in the literature (Ho & Lin, 2014b). To fill the research gap, this study attempts to explore the motives for keeping green mindfulness in firms.

In summary, the main purpose of this study is to propose a theoretical framework analyzing the motives for keeping green mindfulness. As to the structure of the paper, the next section illustrates the theoretical backgrounds of organizational green mindfulness and. The third section introduces the motives for keeping green mindfulness, and the fourth section discuss the moderating effects of firm size. The final section gives research conclusions.

ORGANIZATIONAL GREEN MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness denotes that the ability of individuals and organizations to achieve reliable performance in a changing environment depends on how individuals and organizations think, gather information and perceive the world around them, and on whether they are able to change their perspective to reflect the situation. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), in a study of high

reliability organizations, addressed that the mindfulness approach reflects the fact that many disasters are caused not by the presence of a large, catastrophic error but rather by the unfortunate combination of small ones. Mindfulness requires a desire to update situational awareness on a continuing basis, to cast doubt, and to probe further to resolve doubtfulness. Although normal business operations are carried out by firms under significantly less stringent conditions than high reliability organizations, inculcating the five characteristics in their organizational operations can reduce chances of failure by avoiding errors in the first place (Weick & Sutcliffe 2001). Thus, mindfulness can be thought of as a desirable property or state that all firms, irrespective of their line of operation should strive to achieve, since it will make them more adept in managing unexpected circumstances (Ndubisi, 2012b; Ray et al., 2011).

This study argues that the mindfulness concept is also suitable for environmental management. According to above discussions on the mindfulness concept, we hold that mindfulness in environmental management, here denoted as *green mindfulness*, is a way of working during environmental management marked by a focus on the present, attention to operational detail, willingness to consider alternative perspectives and an interest in investigating and understanding failures (Langer, 1989; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Firms need to keep green mindfulness when engaging in environmental management.

The notion of mindfulness has been used to study organizational engagement with innovations (Fichman, 2004; Fiol & O'Connor, 2003; Swanson & Ramiller, 2004; Valorinta, 2009; Wolf et al., 2012). Environmental management implemented in firms is often characterized by new and complex technical knowledge and process changes, resulting in unexpected or uncertain outcomes. Applying environmental criteria into corporate operations requires exploring new resource combinations and deploying existing resources in new ways. Undertaking environmental management sometimes involves using new or modified processes and techniques to reduce environmental harms, and can be regarded as an organizational innovation process (Hellstrom, 2007; Henriques & Sadorsky, 2007; Lin & Ho, 2011). When engaging with an innovation, mindfulness pertains to attending to the innovation with a contextually differentiated reasoning based on the firm's own facts and specifics (Swanson & Ramiller, 2004). Therefore, mindfulness in the context of environmental management refers to not only being knowledgeable about the green concept or practice and its implications, but also being able to contextualize this understanding regarding the concept or practice based on the specific circumstances prevailing in the firm and their implications on the implementation. Mindfulness is likely to have implication in environmental management because the decision of evaluating and adopting green concepts or practices underlines a firm's attempt to make sense of something that is uncertain and can result in unexpected outcomes.

Mindful firms encourage people to report all errors, near misses, and improvement opportunities and to treat them as systemic issues rather than individual events. With regard to environmental management, mindful firms who are preoccupied with failure, sensitivity to operations, and deference to expertise will pay more attention to the potential pitfalls associated with implementing new green concepts or practices as they appear. Mindful firms are more likely to empower knowledgeable team members allowing them to deal with an incipient problem and act on emerging opportunities. Also, they will be more likely to recognize problems not as isolated events that must be dealt with simply to maintain current operations, but rather as indicative of system issues that provide opportunities for further engagement in environmental management (Schultze & Orlikowski, 2004). Taking together these aspects of organizational mindfulness prepare a firm to be better able to manage both the initial introduction and subsequent implementation of environmental management practices. Likewise successful environmental management is often the result of not a single

large project or decision, but the outgrowth of a fortuitous combination of many small ones (Aragon-Correa & Sharma, 2003; Henriques & Sadosky, 1999). Small disruptions, errors, and opportunities are most likely to be noticed first on the front lines of the firm where individuals involved with a firm's day-to-day operations reside. If these unexpected situations are dealt with swiftly, there is an opportunity to avoid their escalation into larger problems or to leverage them to facilitate change.

Drawing on the literature of mindfulness, the study defines green mindfulness as a way of working during environmental management marked by a focus on the present, attention to operational detail, willingness to consider alternative perspectives and an interest in investigating and understanding failures (Langer, 1989; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Green mindfulness can also be discussed at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, green mindfulness can be conceptualized as a cognitive green ability that is reflected by openness to novelty, alertness to distinction, sensitivity to different contexts, awareness of multiple perspectives, and orientation in the present (Langer, 1997; Sternberg, 2000). At the organizational level, green mindfulness can be conceptualized as a cognitive green ability that is reflected by preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

MOTIVES FOR KEEPING GREEN MINDFULNESS

There are several researchers proposing a variety of motives for environmental management. In general, the types of motives can be classified into two types as economic and social. The economic motive refers to engaging in environmental management to improve organizational and market performance, whereas the social motive refers to engaging in environmental management to create social influence on others (Molla & Abareshi, 2012; Wiengarten et al., 2013).

Economic motive

The literature suggests that economic motive is one of the motives why businesses engage in environmental management (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2005; Gilley, Worrell & El-Jelly, 2000; Quazi, Khoo, Tan & Wong, 2001; Uecker-Mercado & Walker, 2012; Wiengarten et al., 2013). Many businesses have already realized cost saving by cutting resource use and waste generation. Examples of environmental management consist of adopting technology that allows for lower production and service costs and strengthens the financial benefits of environmental management (e.g., cost savings, reducing risks, tax incentives, etc.). Market expansion stems from the concern that business unit carries with it expected customer demand. Customers are becoming active in seeking information regarding the sustainability policies of businesses (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). When companies implement environmental management, there are opportunities to increase sales and improve market position, that is, there are advantages derived from the differentiating power of environmental awareness. This is mainly due to the fact that environmentally proactive companies generate affective feelings from ecologically committed customers and build up a reputation (Russo & Fouts, 1997). Firms with higher levels of environmental performance (i.e., success in reducing and minimizing environmental impact) would be rewarded through superior financial performance (Gilley et al., 2000). For example, UPS's adoption of an energy information system has reduced not only fuel consumption and cost but also emissions. Further, UPS has reduced trucks' mileage, and maintenance costs as the gathered information in its trucks are exploited to advance the company's sustainability objectives (Watson, Boudreau & Li, 2010). Implementing environmental management can pinpoint opportunities for cost saving in the areas of raw materials, waste minimization or elimination of pollution, and energy efficiency. Implementing environmental management can also make a good

business better, maintaining good public relation and enhancing image and market share (Quazi et al., 2001). To a great extent, the rationality of this reasoning rests on the growing customers concern about the natural environment (Wiengarten et al., 2013). The stronger the firm's belief that environmental management can stimulate demand and improve market position, the higher the probability that the firm will keep green mindfulness. Therefore, keeping green mindfulness is motivated by the economic motive. This study expects that

Proposition 1: Economic motive has a positive effect on keeping green mindfulness.

Social Motive

The literature suggests that social motive is one of the motives why businesses engage in environmental management (Bansal & Rothe, 2000; Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2005; Graafland & Mazereeuw-Van der Duijn Schouten, 2012; Molla & Abareshi, 2012; Quazi et al., 2012; Uecker-Mercado & Walker, 2012; Wiengarten et al., 2013). According to Bansal and Roth (2000), the adoption of environmental initiatives by a firm can be as a result of its concern for its social obligations and values. In other words, it can be a consequence of both a truly ecological awareness on the part of the decision-makers and a desire to improve their environmental performance. Ethical consideration stems from the concern that business unit carries with it expected social obligations and values that contribute the society. For this kind of firm, the implementation of environmental management can be seen as a first solid step to achieving an improvement on performance, because it establishes a framework in which different environmental initiatives can be developed in a coordinated and controlled way. Such firms do not specifically focus on the bottom-line or return on investment but rather focus on how their decisions affect the organization and the community. The decision to keep green mindfulness responds to ethical consideration. Furthermore, the political pressure comes from government regulations, standards and taxes whereas the social pressure comes from the institutional environment within which a firm operates. Firms engage in environmental management when they face regulatory and social pressures that threaten their legitimacy (Wiengarten et al., 2013). Firms carry out activities to satisfy their main stakeholders. Environmental consciousness of a firm implies harmonizing green performance with stakeholders' expectations. Under the circumstance of high stakeholder pressure, firms are apt to be reluctance to simplify interpretations of stakeholders' varied environmental requirements, and to keep commitment to resilience. Therefore, the stronger the firm's belief that the achievement of social obligation is necessary, the higher the probability that the firm will keep green mindfulness. This study expects that

Proposition 2: Social motive has a positive effect on keeping green mindfulness.

MODERATING EFFECT OF FIRM SIZE

Firm size is repeatedly taken as a relevant organizational characteristic influencing a firm's environmental activities. An amount of empirical studies reveal a significant relationship between company size and the implementation of green management practices (e.g. Arend, 2014; Etzion, 2007; Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2006; Nejati et al., 2014; Wassmer et al., 2014). In general, large firms tend to pay more efforts in implementing environmental management than small ones. The arguments used to explain this effect focus on different aspects: (1) large firms have more resource availability to devote to green management; (2) they receive more pressure from their social and economic environment and are frequently the primary objective of local governments and environmental nongovernmental organizations; (3) their scale allows them to face the indivisibilities associated with green management, that is those required investments in technology, human resources or certifications, which are similar for all the companies regardless of their size, and (4) the environmental efforts of large firms have a positive impact on a larger number of customers (Gonzalez-Benito & Gozzlez-Benito, 2006). Therefore, the effects of economic and social motives on keeping green

mindfulness for larger firms will be stronger than the effects for smaller firms. This study expects that

Proposition 3: Firm size will enhance the effects of economic and social motives on keeping green mindfulness.

CONCLUSIONS

Undertaking environmental management is generally believed to impart strategic and competitive benefits to the firms. However, it also involves significant resource commitments on behalf of the firm. Chances of failing to successfully implement environmental management or to appropriate business value from it are often quite high. Thus, firms are faced with a complex scenario of deciding to implement a green concept or practice that is relatively new and uncertain in terms of expected outcomes, but calls for large resource investments on the firm's behalf, or embrace the risk of becoming saddled with outdated technology, and losing the flexibility to deploy new environmental capability when the market conditions call for. Environmental management may be introduced with a great enthusiasm; nevertheless it may fail to be thoroughly deployed among many firms. While an increase in the number of environmental management articles appears in the literature, there is still lack of research focusing on utilizing the mindfulness concept in environmental management. This study proposes a theoretical framework regarding the motives for keeping green mindfulness, as shown in Figure 1.

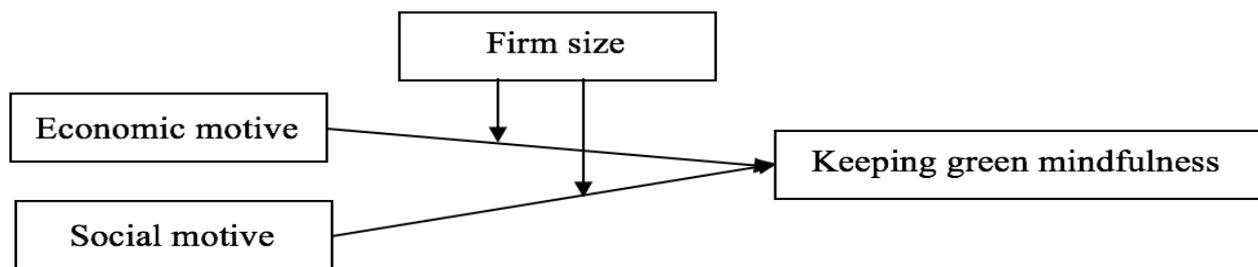


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

This study investigated organizational mindfulness behaviors in environmental management, and analyzing the effects of economic and social motives on keeping green mindfulness. Due to the lack of research on organizational mindfulness in green practice implementation, this study can broaden the scope of research on environmental management by clarifying the meanings of organizational mindfulness in green practice implementation, and providing some explanations as to the motives why companies keep organizational mindfulness when deciding on implementing green practices. The organizational mindfulness approach recognizes the value of managerial flexibility in structuring and timing investment decisions on the face of uncertain conditions, varying levels of risks at different stages of an investment project and irreversible investments. Accordingly, organizational mindfulness theory is deemed suitable for application to the investigation of green practice implementation, more specifically when a green practice is relatively new and uncertain in terms of its likely outcomes; and managers have the flexibility of timing the implementation decision depending on factors such as prevailing market conditions and availability of information. Firms require mindfulness thinking in green practice implementation. It is necessary to understand the issues about organizational mindfulness of green practice implementation within organizations. Understanding economic and social motives for keeping green mindfulness is essential for practitioners to best implement environmental management as well as for researchers to best understand the issues that need to be addressed.

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