

Posters

How can companies and environmental groups cooperate more successfully?

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Background

Companies' cooperation with environmental groups will be increasingly necessary in the future. This opinion is held not only by people who think that firms can attain competitive advantage by being environmentally responsible but also by those who think that companies' environmental strategies should not be based on the so called win-win situations and that successful firms protect the environment in order to increase the market-value of the company.

Acting together, not to mention cooperating, has not been easy for companies and environmental groups, and many joint undertakings between the two parties have run into difficulties. What characterizes most company-environmental group relationships is that the ultimate interests of the parties in terms of the environment are quite contradictory, even if the company has integrated environmental considerations into its core business processes and strategies. Companies tend to - in one way or another - utilize nature in order to maintain their short term and/or long term profitability whereas environmental groups aim at preserving nature from "overutilization" and, thereby, furthering sustainability. One significant problem in the discussions about company-environmental group relationships has been that they have often been reduced to this mere contradiction between economic benefits and nature protection. This type of confrontational juxtapositioning obscures the notion that the parties' conceptions are not as mutually exclusive as is generally thought and, in the worst case, hinders effective communication between companies and environmental groups.

Aims of the study

- To discover both differences and similarities in the meaning structures of companies and environmental groups through which they view nature and its protection or use, and, thereby, - to find new and more successful ways for the parties to communicate and collaborate with each other.

Research design

Environmental writings from the Finnish forest company Enso Group and the environmental organization Greenpeace are examined. The study applies a type of narrative analysis method by which the shared values and other premises which the parties' arguments rest on are studied in detail. An analysis of the deep meaning structures of the parties' arguments enables one to find and compare both the common and distinctive characteristics of their interpretations.

Practical relevance of the study

If the parties want to benefit from cooperation, they should aim at understanding each others' interpretations thoroughly instead of emphasizing their own limited viewpoints. Even in value conflict situations it is possible to reach mutually satisfactory solutions when all parties' viewpoints are handled equally. Thus, gaining knowledge about the meaning structures of companies and environmental groups, through which they view nature and its protection or use, helps in finding the kind of solutions to company-environmental group conflicts that ensure or even improve the company's profits and competitiveness and, at the same time, help to fulfill the demands of sustainability.

Results

At the Eighth International Conference of the Greening of the Industry Network, preliminary research results will be presented.

Key words

Forest industry, environmental group, cooperation, meaning structure, narrative analysis