Build Back Better? Toward a Holistic Approach to Sustainability and Disaster Recovery

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1. Introduction

It is predicted that 1.5 planets are needed to sustain current consumption levels (Isaksson, Garvare & Johnson, 2015) and therefore is reasonable to suggest that contemporary lifestyles are not sustainable. This considered, (non)sustainability presents one of the biggest and most significant challenges to society and also, to organisations. In parallel, disasters pose a significant threat to both society and organisations as it is predicted that disasters, and their effects, will increase in frequency and intensity (Institute for Economic & Peace, 2020).

2. Research Questions

I.   How can stakeholder theory aid in the understanding of the complex interactions between disaster recovery (DR) and sustainability in organisations?

II.   How might integrating the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) sustainability framework with the Build Back Better DR approach impact the implementation of sustainability and DR in organisations, with consideration of the possible practical, theoretical and policy implications?

III. How can a TBL sustainability framework of DR be implemented by organisations across different regions of Merseyside and the North West of England?

3. Aims and Objectives

This research aims to develop knowledge on the complex interplays that exist between sustainability and DR. Moreover, it strives to understand how integrating an ethical framework with that of the TBL provides organisations with the means to successfully recover from future disasters in a way that promotes long term sustainability and disaster recovery preparedness.

4. Expected Contribution

In applying stakeholder theory to the problem under investigation my expected theoretical contribution is to advance understanding of the complex relationship between sustainability and DR and ethics. My expected practical contribution is to advance understanding of how applying an ethically informed TBL framework can improve the applicability and effectiveness of sustainability and DR approaches and hence, provide organisations with the means to be both sustainable and disaster resilient.

5. Literature Review

Non-sustainability can result in negative consequences for organisations such as poor client-based reputation and threats to financial performance (Elkington, 1994). Disasters can also damage an organisation through, for instance, supply chain disturbances and disruptions to personnel and customer base (Marshall & Schrank, 2020). Consideration of these harmful implications alongside the larger threats that non-sustainability and disasters pose to the survival of humans and non-humans, suggests that it is essential that organisations are equipped with successful sustainability and DR approaches.

The literature suggests that sustainability and DR are conceptually similar. Both involve multi-stakeholders (Mannakkara & Wilkinson, 2014; Freudenreich *et al.*, 2020), both include at least three interdependent dimensions: economic, environmental, and social dimensions (Tate & Bals, 2018; Rousseau & Deschacht, 2020) and both present a commitment to fairness (Kennedy *et al.*, 2008; Böhm *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, sustainability and DR face some of the same, key operational issues including problems around measuring and reporting on progress and mitigating trade-offs. Additionally, there

seems to be a practical link between these two concepts namely, non-sustainability increases the frequency and intensity of disasters (Institute for Economic & Peace, 2020).

Research into organisational sustainability is already a well-established area of study (Ergene, Banerjee & Hoffman, 2020). While research into post-disaster business recovery is limited, there is a growing interest in DR in this context (Morrish & Jones, 2020). However, research into sustainability *and* DR is very limited in the field and thus, whilst the literature suggests that the two are connected, there is a lack of clarity regarding how this relationship works both conceptually and practically.

6. Theoretical Framing
This research examines the proposed connection between sustainability and DR through a stakeholder theory lens and an ethical lens. Stakeholder theory is the most applied theory within the sustainability literature (Frynas & Yamahki, 2016) which suggests that stakeholder theory is a viable theoretical lens for this research. Stakeholder theory also appears to be a suitable lens through which to examine DR as DR is also highly attentive to the needs of multi-stakeholders. An ethical theory is also required to attend to the many ethical issues that arise when researching sustainability and DR. Three prominent normative frameworks that have influenced business ethics are virtue ethics, deontology, and consequentialism (Alzola, 2015). Continued study of the relevant literature is required at this point of research to determine the most appropriate ethical lens to address the research questions.

7. Relevance of the Study
This study is both crucial and apposite as both non-sustainability and disasters present organisations with severe challenges that can have devastating implications. The effects of the latter being particularly palpable at present, following the most recent biological disaster, the coronavirus-2019. The implications of both also infringe on wider society as businesses are the backbone of society and hence, when businesses suffer the whole of society suffers through, for instance, job losses and lost tax revenues (Tierney, 2007). Given the significant impact that non-sustainability and disasters can have on organisations and society as a whole, it is clear that any research that aims to advance theoretical understanding of these concepts and improve the efficacy of their practical implementation, will be both relevant and significant. This research proposes to do just that through utilisation of a novel theoretical framework and approach that aims to advance understanding of the relationship between sustainability, DR and ethics whilst strengthening implementation at the organisational level. Thus, this research is relevant and important as it seeks to mitigate potential damage to organisations and hence to society and, in doing so, ensure long-term sustainability and disaster resilience at the recovery stage.

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