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An Approach to Business Model Innovation and Design for Strategic Sustainable Development

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Abstract
Successful business is increasingly about understanding the challenges and opportunities linked to society’s transition towards sustainability and, e.g., being able to innovate, design and build business models that are functional in this context. However, current business model innovation and design generally fail to sufficiently embrace the sustainability dimension. Typically, the business case of sustainability is not understood profoundly enough; the planning horizon and system scope are insufficient; the competence to bring together people into systematic ventures towards sustainable business is too low. A unifying framework for sustainability analyses, planning, cross-disciplinary and cross-sector cooperation, and cohesive use of the myriad sustainability tools, methods and concepts has been developed: the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD). Similarly, a generic approach to business model design has been put forward: the Business Model Canvas (BMC). In this paper we explore how the FSSD could inform business model innovation and design by combining it with the BMC and supplementary tools, methods and concepts such as creativity techniques, value network mapping, life-cycle assessment, and product-service systems. The results show that the FSSD-BMC combination can support business model innovation and design for strategic sustainable development, as well as strengthen each supplementary tool, method and concept in its own primary purpose. We apply the combined approach, for the purpose of initial testing and presentation, to a real case of business model evolution. Based on our findings we propose a new approach to business model innovation and design for strategic sustainable development. The new approach facilitates, e.g., business scalability and risk avoidance and clarifies the interplay between classical business model development and strategic sustainability thinking. The new approach highlights the opportunity for novel business model design for future sustainable success.

Keywords

Highlights:
• A strategic sustainability framework is combined with the business model canvas.
• An approach to business model design for strategic sustainable development is proposed.
• The approach links an organization’s sustainable vision, strategy and business models.
• The approach highlights the opportunity for novel business model design.
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