Critical success factors for the transition to business models for sustainability in the food and beverage industry in the Netherlands

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Critical success factors for the transition to business models for sustainability in the food and beverage industry in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Businesses will play a key role in helping the transition towards greater sustainability. To maximise business sustainability performance, sustainability characteristics must be integrated at the business model level, creating business models for sustainability. Creating a business model for sustainability, or transitioning from a traditional business model, is likely to be a complicated and challenging process. Previous research has identified a range of barriers, such as low financial report or little legislative support.

The aim of this research is to explore and identify critical success factors and barriers for the transition from traditional business models to business models for sustainability. Previous research provides indications as to the barriers faced when attempting to develop BMfS, but does so using conceptual lenses that emphasise external influences and factors. We seek to explore the process of business model innovation for sustainability from a perspective that pays greater attention to internal processes and from a management perspective, building on concepts of organisational change management.

The research focuses on start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME’s) in the Dutch Food and Beverages Industry. This is an interesting empirical context, as this sector is a dynamic, economically significant in the Netherlands, and is under pressure to improve its environmental performance. Data is collected from 14 cases, using semi-structured interviews, and is then analysed to identify a range of critical success factors and barriers. We find that collaboration, a clear narrative and vision, continual innovation, a sustainable foundation, profitability, and serendipitous external events are all critical success factors for the transition to business models for sustainability. Barriers include external events, principle-agent problems as well as a lack of support from wider actors and systems. The results highlight that businesses wishing to develop a business model for sustainability must make sustainability the key principle upon which the firm is founded. Continual development and improvement is required in addition to the support of a range of different actor’s external to the firm, such as suppliers, customers, and government.

Keywords:

Organisational change management; business models for sustainability; business model innovation; sustainable business

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