

Mainstreaming Sustainable Business

20 years Business-Society Management, 20 year impact?

The Business Society Management Anniversary Book

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Most corporate leaders are no longer asking 'why' they should become sustainable. Corporate concerns have slowly moved towards 'how' 'what' and 'when' questions: how to achieve sustainability in business models, what topics to focus on and in what sequence best to 'walk the talk' (when). **Not profit maximization but value creation has become the leading challenge** for small and large corporations alike. How to achieve this ambition in a financially sustainable manner, however, is far from settled. Society is becoming increasingly unpredictable and trust is limited.

Companies are being stimulated to take an active role in addressing society's "grand challenges" such as formulated in the Sustainable Development Goals. Business schools are being challenged to make sustainable business their core business. They have to organize research and teaching around sustainability issues, not as a luxury – as an add-on in functional areas of management – but as a core and integrative activity. The legitimacy of business schools increasingly depends on how they support the value creation role of business towards society.

This book covers 20 years 'coming of age' of a discipline and a department. It reveals the unfolding narrative of the **Department of Business-Society Management (B-SM)** at the Rotterdam School of Management and the way staff, students, and practitioners interacted in defining and studying topics of relevance over the years. The Department of Business-Society Management was founded in 1998, in the aftermath of major ecological issues such as the Brent Spar affair (1995 - Shell) or in the middle of unfolding fraud scandals like Enron (2001). The department has been at the forefront of these developments from an educational and scientific angle. It has combined scientific rigor and societal relevance, while at the same time teaching relevant skills and insights to students. It currently has more than 100 Master students and a research programme that is considered 'excellent' by independent visitation committees. This can be considered a major achievement. But like in the "real world", this position has not necessarily been the result of an intricate planning exercise. The department and its teaching and research program are the result of **dynamic interaction** between academic staff – many of whom have moved on – and students, practitioners, and alumni. Due to its mandate, the department operates at the interface between science and society.

This book provides testimony of the way the discipline has evolved. It follows in the footsteps of the **department members** and their research priorities and initiatives – such as the set-up of **expert centres**. This book also considers how **students** have shaped the field through their collective action (by applying or not applying for the master) and are currently shaping society in a wide variety of occupations and activities. A selection of the more than 1200 **alumni** were invited to write a personal account of their experience with the master and to describe how they apply the gained insights in their current occupations. Finally, the book considers the **future of the discipline**, of sustainable business, and the department along the personal views sketched by some of its present faculty members.