“Scoping research on sustainability performance from manufacturing industry sector”

AUTHORS
Ismail Hussien Droup Adam
Ahmad Jusoh
Abbas Mardani
Dalia Streimikiene
Khalil Md Nor

ARTICLE INFO

DOI
http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.17(2).2019.10

RELEASED ON
Tuesday, 07 May 2019

RECEIVED ON
Monday, 11 March 2019

ACCEPTED ON
Monday, 15 April 2019

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JOURNAL
“Problems and Perspectives in Management"

ISSN PRINT
1727-7051

ISSN ONLINE
1810-5467

PUBLISHER
LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

FOUNDER
LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

NUMBER OF REFERENCES
70

NUMBER OF FIGURES
6

NUMBER OF TABLES
2

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Abstract

Sustainability is a key area of concern for manufacturing firms’ long-term success. However, the manufacturing industry has not been fully conscious of the potential sustainable values across manufacturing system. There is a need to better understand how companies can improve sustainable value creation. Recent research and practices have shown that sustainable operations can be one way to create sustainable values (e.g. economic, environmental and social). This review article focuses on the available empirical studies on the impact of lean and sustainability practices on sustainable performance from 2000 to 2018 in the context of manufacturing firms. Integrating lean and sustainability practices into manufacturing system confronts operations managers with paradoxical tensions of sustainability objectives. Theoretically having paradoxical mindset will help firms’ managers make sense of and respond to such paradoxical tensions. In the context of sustainable operations studies, the issue of paradoxical mindset has been given less emphasis. Therefore, through the lens of the paradox theory, this study has developed a new conceptual framework for future research to investigate how paradoxical mindset moderates the impact of lean and sustainability practices on the sustainable performance of manufacturing industry. This study may add to the understanding of the circumstances, under which lean and sustainability practices impact sustainable outcomes.

Keywords

sustainability performance, economic performance, social performance, manufacturing firms

JEL Classification

Q56, Q010, L60, L25, M11

INTRODUCTION

The world over, program and activities are at feverish pitch to address the increasing challenges associated with the simultaneous management of the triple (economic, environment, and social) bottom line, which emerged as a concern on the consequences of humanity’s resource footprints (Liang et al., 2018). This concern is well matched by the increasingly large corpus of research on the question of sustainability, a development which motivated researchers to produce a significant volume of research syntheses, based on systematic and analytic methods (Cooper, 2017; Rajnoha & Lesníková, 2016, Marikina, 2018). However, most of these syntheses portray heavily skewed results in favor of non-African contexts not because of methodological shortcomings, but for the simple fact that research on sustainability in seven manufactures in Africa is scanty. To substantiate this point, we conducted a restrictive title-only Scopus search for manufacturing sustainability performance in November 2018. As a result, 1,640 documents for the 19-year period 2000–2018 were returned. This indicates that sustainability research in manufacturing sector is still in its infancy, and any attempt at synthesizing manufacturing sustainability empirical studies should be guided by a synthesis method that purposely targets relevant documents. Scoping review is one of the
methods. Scoping searches seek “to identify all relevant literature, to provide a broad overview of the topic, and to identify research gaps in the existing literature” (Franciosi et al., 2018, pp. 903-904). In this review, therefore, we apply the scoping review to map out research on the determinants of sustainability performance within the context of manufacturing industry in relation to the extent perception of researchers on what constitutes sustainability performance, the nature of the common criterion of interest in the field, its antecedents and relations to the triple bottom line and business case approach dominant in the received literature.

1. SCOPING REVIEW AND RESEARCH

According to Colquhoun et al. (2014), scoping review “addresses an exploratory research question aimed at mapping key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research related to a defined area” (pp. 1292, 1294). Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2011) conceptualize scoping review as a credible procedure for exploring fragmentary and minimally resourced knowledge domains, identifying parameters of interest in the literature, and integrating these in a logical manner to improve meaning and unravel implications. Scoping review as a method of knowledge synthesis has arguably come of age. It has certainly matured in the health research field (e.g., Larjow, 2018; Ports et al., 2019; Senanayke et al., 2018), where it all started due to the Cochrane connection (CCEPP, 1996). This health connection evidenced by the result of November 2014 title search (scoping review, health) of a 5-year span (2014–2018) from a single content provider (ScienceDirect) returning 214 scoping review articles in which only a few are non-health related. It is therefore time to upscale the use of scoping review in areas where it is little used, such as sustainability research. Brisbois et al. (2018) is a cognate boundary-spanning example, while Moore et al.’s (2017) work untangles the sustainability definitional maze. This study takes a cue from and builds on these collectively pioneering works.

2. METHODOLOGY

We adapted the scoping review method originally advanced in Arksey and O’Malley (2005), as later improved and elaborated in Levac, Colquhoun, and O’Brien (2010), and finally recommended in Colquhoun et al. (2014). The scoping procedure is a five-step heuristic involving the following: identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, charting the data, and collating, summarizing results and reporting the results. Figure 1 illustrates the process followed gathering evidence for this review.

2.1. Scoping horizon

Our scoping review covered the period from January 2000 to mid-November 2018. This time-span was chosen, because, according to Elkington (2004), the man who coined the term “triple bot-
In management literature, the firm’s performance has been limited to economic performance (Haddach, Ammari, & Laglaoui, 2016). The economic aspect includes: profit, return on assets, economic value added (Fauzi, Svensson, & Rahman, 2010). Recently the survival of firms never again depends exclusively on the economical related side of their operation, yet additionally how they carry on those operations (Haddach et al., 2016). Therefore, the economic focus performance is not well appropriate to manage the firm issue in a holistic manner (Hart & Milstein, 2003). Accordingly, the firm’s obligations are emerging,
Figure 2. The distributions of journal publications
it’s never again restricted just to include direct shareholders, but integrates different stakeholders (Haddach et al., 2016). The term firm performance has extended to incorporate, in addition to the economic aspect, social and environmental dimension. Along these lines, the expanded firm performance, commonly called sustainable performance (Fauzi et al., 2010; G. Karnitis & E. Karnitis, 2017). Sustainability performance “measures the extent to which a firm embraces economic, environmental, social and governance factors into its operations, and ultimately the impact they exert on the firm and society” (Artiach, Lee, Nelson, & Walker, 2010). This definition is fit with the triple bottom lines of the firm’s sustainability, economic, social, and environmental performance. Within the context of manufacturing industry, sustainability performance is defined as the extent to which the manufacturing firms have reduced its harm and produced regenerative impacts on natural and social systems.

4. SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE ANTECEDENTS AND DETERMINANTS

The identification of sustainability performance determinant shows the factors illustrated in Figure 3, the which reported the dominant determinant factors (with 66 papers) of sustainability performance in terms of lean manufacturing practices, environmental management, green supply chain, sustainable manufacturing practices, after excluding the minor factors (46 articles). Thus, these factors expected to have the biggest influence on sustainability outcomes for the industrial manufacturing context. In addition, for the purpose of our study, these antecedents are described as the sustainable operations and analyzed in terms of relation to sustainability performance.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on our scoping literature, we observed that most of the previous studies were mainly conducted in developed and developing countries, using single or across the countries. With respect to single countries, the United States, China, Malaysia, UK, Turkey, Taiwan, US, Indonesia, India and Brazil took
the lead in the studies conducted (see Figure 4). However, none of the selected studies were found to be conducted in countries such as Africa. These are very essential inquiries perceiving how manufacturing industry in Africa has always contributed significantly to carbon emissions, resources duplication, and environmental degradation (Chambers, 1992). Moreover, African countries are also characterized with the high level of holding inventories, low productive workforce, low operations capacity (Dafa’ Alla, 2016). If African countries would like to avoid these consequences while pursuing the next global manufacturing hub to maintain a manufacturing development, a cleaner path must be outlined. This implies that from the starting point of manufacturing development, the discussion on continent should include, sustainable operations in manufacturing industry (Chambers, 1992; Mukhtarova et al., 2016). We call research on sustainable operations management to fill this gap, taking this the advantage of this opportunity. Future research can examine how the sustainable operations influence sustainability performance in countries such as African countries.

Regarding the influence of the sustainable operations on the sustainability performance, the results are inconsistent, in order to understand the reasons due to inconsistency, we utilized the method of Van der Byl and Slawinski (2015) who categorized three sustainability approaches which have been used by researchers and practitioners for responding to sustainability challenges: trade off, business case, and triple bottom line; in trade off, one or two dimensions of sustainability were selected over another; within the business approaches, the focus was on the economic, profit and shareholders; the triple bottom line emphasizes the three dimensions of sustainability, namely economic, environmental and social. Accordingly, in our paper, we identified and selected the studies that focused on one of the dimensions of sustainability performance as trade off approach; the selected studies that focused on economic dimension of sustainability, defined as business case approaches, finally, the triple bottom line studies are those which addressed the economic, environmental and social sustainability (Gao & Bansal, 2013; Eslami et al., 2018; Petkeviciute & Streimikiene, 2017).

Based on the selected studies results, about 63% of the trade off approach results support positive influence of sustainable operations on sustainability performance (Antomarioni, Bevilacqua, & Ciarapica, 2018; Bulgacov, Ometto, & May, 2015; Camuffo, De Stefano, & Paolino, 2017; Fu, Guo, & Zhanwen, 2017; Gotschol, Giovanni, & Esposito, 2014; Hajmohammad, Vachon, Klassen, & Gavronski, 2013; Hong, Roh, & Rawski, 2012; King & Lenox, 2001; Sambasivan, Bah, & Ho, 2013; Yang, Lu, Jing, & Bernard, 2013; Zhan, Tan, Ji, Chung, & Chiu, 2018). Other groups of selected studies which focused on business case approaches shows about 63 of the results are significant (Nawanir, Lim, & Othman, 2016; Sezen, Karakadilar, & Buyukozkan, 2012; Charles et al., 2017; López-Gamero, Molina-Azorin, & Claver-
Cortés, 2009; Gotschol et al., 2014; V. Wickramasinghe & G. Wickramasinghe, 2017; Lewis, 2000; Hofer, Eroglu, & Rossiter Hofer, 2012; Chavez et al., 2015; Kim, Sheu, & Yoon, 2018). However, a few of selected studies consider the sustainability performance according to triple bottom line approach, and 85% the studies supported positive results (Abdul-Rashid, Sakundari ni, Raja Ghazilla, & Thurasamy, 2017; Azevedo, Carvalho, Duarte, & Cruz-Machado, 2012; de Giovanni, 2012; Gadenne et al., 2012; Sandeep Gupta, Shivam Gupta, Dhamija, & Bag, 2018; Haddach et al., 2016; Longoni & Cagliano, 2015; Sajan, Shalij, Ramesh, & Biju Augustine, 2017; Sambasivan et al., 2013; Sezen & Çankaya, 2013; Wijethilake, 2017; Wu et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2013).

With the compression of three approaches of sustainability performance, we observed that triple bottom line approach tends to be more superior to the trade off, and business case approaches, the logic is that to be truly sustainable, firms shouldn't harm natural or human systems while creating economic value for its stockholders over an extended period (Gao & Bansal, 2013). Hence, the better results from triple bottom line approaches reflect how managers of these firms are successfully managing conflicting objectives of economic, environmental and social goals. In contrast, the articles that shows negative results reflect how manufacturing industry fails to respond to the conflicting sustainability objectives. This can be due to lack of abilities on how managers they can integrate the objectives of sustainability and find innovative solutions, how managers are approaching sustainability performance is still not fully understood (Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Thus, we call future empirical research on the sustainable operations of manufacturing industry for conducting the studies on how operations managers are addressing the conflicting demands of sustainability in terms of productivity versus environmental concern and employees wellbeing.

Considering the managerial level at which respondents are selected (see Figure 6), the review unveils that most of the studies conducted on the context of respondents from top or strategic level (i.e. top managers, President, CEO, senior manager, executives), as well as managers from multi-level; at the strategic level, the sustainability focus is more about the firms' stakeholder relationship, considering
their requirements and communicating the way in which their expectations are addressed (Asif, Searcy, Zutshi, & Ahmad, 2011). However, there are few studies that investigate sustainability at the tactical and operational level, in which the adaptation deals with the aspect of designing organizational structures, policies, and processes, as well as a system for their evaluation; moreover, at the operational level, the concern is about implementation of tasks, followed by monitoring and evaluation (Asif et al., 2011). The fitting among firms objectives and activities at operational level is necessary, since the work alternatives create confusion for workers and ineffective and inefficient use of resources (Asif et al., 2011). We call future research sustainable operation management for concentrating their studies on operational level and workers at manufacturing work due to a rise of confusing and conflicting demands of sustainability in real work practices.

REFERENCES


60. Sambasivan, M., Bah, S. M., & Ho, J. A. (2013). Making the case


# APPENDIX A

## Table A1. The description of sustainability performance, antecedents, approaches, country context and managerial level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Managerial level</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Fu, Guo, and Zhanwen (2017)</td>
<td>Lean improvement environmental improvement</td>
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<td>Trade off</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Trade off</td>
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<td>Multi-level</td>
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<td>Business case</td>
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<td>10</td>
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