J Bus Ethics (2018) 147:241–259
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2938-0

Business Cases and Corporate Engagement with Sustainability: Differentiating Ethical Motivations

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Received: 23 February 2015 / Accepted: 2 November 2015 / Published online: 6 November 2015

Abstract This paper explores links between different ethical motivations and kinds of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to distinguish between different types of business cases with regard to sustainability. The design of CSR and corporate sustainability can be based on different ethical foundations and motivations. This paper draws on the framework of Roberts (Organization 10:249–265, 2003) which distinguishes four different ethical management versions of CSR. The first two ethical motivations are driven either by a *reactionary* concern for the short-term financial interests of the business, or *reputational,* driven by a narcissistic concern to protect the firm's image. The third *responsible* motivation works from the inside-out and seeks to embed social and environmental concerns within the firm's performance management systems, and the fourth, a *collaborative* motivation, works to bring the outside in and seeks to go beyond the boundaries of the firm to create a dialogue with those who are vulnerable to the unintended consequences of corporate conduct. Management activities based on these different ethical motivations to CSR and sustainability result in different operational activities for corporations working towards sustainability and thus have very different effects on how the company's economic performance is influenced. Assuming that corporate managers are concerned about creating business cases for their companies to survive and prosper in the long term, this paper raises the question of how different ethical motivations for designing CSR and corporate sustainability relate to the creation of different business cases. The paper concludes by distinguishing four different kinds of business cases with regard to sustainability: reactionary and reputational business cases *of* sustainability, and responsible and collaborative business cases *for* sustainability.

Keywords Business cases · Corporate sustainability · CSR · Ethics · Reactionary · Reputational · Responsible · Collaborative

Introduction

The 'business case' has been much used as a device to represent the perspective managers of businesses take on commercial activities related to sustainability (e.g. Salzmann et al. 2005, p. 27; Carroll and Shabana 2010; Hemingway and Maclagan 2004; Hockerts 2014). In general business case logic can be seen as a rationale which guides management thinking and the justification of management decisions and activities. If these activities are effective a certain kind of business case results. In the decade since Salzmann et al. (2005) penned their findings about different moral positions of company managers, corporate social responsibility and corporate sustainability have developed from a niche topic to a mainstream theme in management literature and corporate practice (e.g. Benn et al. 2014). However, little has been done to move understanding of the ethical underpinnings of the business case for sustainability forward in spite of a growing focus on CSR, corporate

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sustainability and business ethics (see Joyner and Payne 2002; Garriga and Melé 2004; Taneja et al. 2011; Calabretta et al. 2011). This paper aims to examine the literature on CSR and the notion of a business case by exploring the relationship between different ethical motivations of managers and different kinds of business cases of and for sustainability.

In the light of a large range of definitions proposed for CSR and corporate sustainability Van Marreweijk (2003) concludes that the idea of a 'one solution fits all' definition for CSR and CS should be abandoned, accepting more specific definitions which match the awareness, ambition and development levels of organisation. In the attempt to cope with prevailing challenges corporate responses and stakeholder activities provoke new attempts, resulting in different views and development stages of what CSR and corporate sustainability entail. Acknowledging that different perceptions exist (e.g. Henriques and Sadorsky 1999; Hockerts 2014), this paper refers to an ethically founded categorization of four different groups of CSR proposed by Roberts (2003) and analyses what kind of business cases relate to these four groups.

For this analysis, CSR is used to refer to a company's voluntary social and environmental activities in societal interactions whereas corporate sustainability in addition considers planetary boundaries (e.g. Whiteman et al. 2013) and social issues beyond direct stakeholder pressures (e.g. Hörisch et al. 2014). Corporate sustainability management covers all activities which design, measure, analyse and improve environmental, social and economic activities in order to firstly create a sustainable development of the organisation itself, and secondly to enable the company to contribute to sustainable development of the economy and society as a whole.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the literature on the potential relationship between critical and responsible sustainability management activities and corporate economic performance. Critical studies view unfavourably the imputation of links between CSR activities (such as sustainability reporting), sustainability and corporate economic performance (e.g. Laufer 2003; Milne and Gray 2013), whereas responsible sustainability management follows a path of encouraging corporate activities which contribute to the lessening of un-sustainability (e.g. van Marreweijk 2003; van Marreweijk and Werre 2003; Schaltegger and Burritt 2005; Benn et al. 2014). The second section traverses different ethical approaches to CSR drawing on Roberts' (2003) discussion of the 'manufacture' of CSR founded on Levinas' philosophical perspective (1991). Roberts' four different versions of CSR provide a constructive framework of different motivations of managers but offers only brief examples of the way that these then inform management conduct. These versions are taken further in this paper which seeks to offer a more comprehensive review of typical CSR and corporate sustainability activities and measures relating to the four CSR motivations identified. The third section develops an analytical framework which distinguishes between the ways voluntary corporate environmental and social activities and corporate economic performance may be linked. Based on this analysis, the paper considers how differences in management motivations to address CSR and related differences in the choice of CSR activities can generate different business cases in relation to sustainability. The last section offers conclusions.

Literature Review on CSR Activities, Business Performance and Business Cases

With regard to sustainability, a business case logic can be seen as a rationale which guides management thinking and the justification of sustainability relevance for management decisions. Two main strands of literature about CSR activities and business performance can be distinguished; critical studies which emphasise the contradictions between ethical behaviour and economic success, and management studies which aim to align sustainability activities with increases in corporate competitiveness and profitability. Whilst such strategic orientations to CSR have as their aim to integrate approaches to the pursuit of sustainability for the most part such discussions seem to be somewhat dispersed taking place largely in different journals and scientific circles (e.g. Scherer and Palazzo's political approach was published in the 'Journal of Management Studies' in 2011, whilst Fleming et al.'s special issue in 'Organization' focussing on critical studies was announced in the same year; Scherer and Palazzo 2011; Fleming et al. 2011, 2013).

Most of the business ethics literature has emphasised either the philanthropic character of voluntary social and environmental activities of companies (e.g. Carroll 1979) or, in particular authors devoted to a critical perspective, have proposed some contradictions (e.g. Gray 2010; Milne and Gray 2013). The arguments highlight adverse incentives and compromising structures which impede sustainability management behaviour. Much of the critical literature sees the creation of a business case as antithetical to achieving sustainability (e.g. Gray 2010). Milne and Gray (2013, p. 24) capture this view when they argue: "…the 'business case' for measuring, managing and reporting organizations' by the authors to view sustainability as being all about themselves rather than ecological economic, social and environmental impacts has been instrumental in expanding and shaping organizational practice, it has also become dangerously confused with advancing a just and sustainable world".

Businesses are claimed or social thinking, a point taken up by Roberts (2003).

Whereas much of the early CSR literature and corporate practice were characterised by discussions of corporate philanthropy (e.g. Carroll 1979, 1991), more recent management literature has focused on the effects of sustainability management on competitiveness and economic performance (e.g. Schaltegger and Synnestvedt, 2002; Wagner 2010; Porter and Kramer 2011). It places emphasis on the necessity to design voluntary social and environmental activities in ways that improve financial performance and hence make a business case for such activities (e.g. Carroll and Shabana 2010; Porter and Kramer 2011). In the literature as well as in corporate practice, tension arises because both negative and positive relationships can be found between voluntary environmental and social activities and corporate economic performance.

Whether the ethical concerns of individuals inevitably contradict the economic imperative of business objectives or can be aligned with business success has long been debated in different strands of literature (see e.g. Hamilton 1995; Porter and van der Linde, 1995a, b; Burke and Logsdon 1996; Pava and Krausz 1996; Griffin and Mahon 1997; Russo and Fouts 1997; Edwards 1998; Heinze et al. 1999; Margolis and Walsh 2003; Orlitzky et al. 2003; York 2009; Carroll and Buchholtz 2014) or characterised by an assumed implicit or explicit relationship (e.g. Carroll 1979; Roberts 2003).

Much of the earlier management literature assumes that the optimum level of corporate environmental or social performance is defined by the 'morally light' (Hendry and Vesilind 2005) need for legal compliance. Such a "traditionalist" view (Wagner et al. 2001) argues that firms face a trade-off between higher environmental and social responsibility and lower economic performance or competitiveness (e.g. Walley and Whitehead 1994; Palmer et al. 1995; Simpson and Bradford, 1996; Xepapadeas and de Zeeuw 1999; Wagner 2007)—a view which has been re-emphasised again more recently (Hahn et al. 2014). Although based on different motivations, consequences of the traditionalist perspective coincide with the statements of reactionaries who maintain that any kind of voluntary activity outside the narrower focus of economic performance will hamper profit (e.g. Friedman 1970; Hemphill 1997 who calls this perspective the "minimalist" view) and may be more risky for future economic performance.

In contrast, recent management literature has explored the relationship between voluntary social and environmental measures and economic performance either in a positivistic manner by analysing case studies or datasets to identify what the relationship could be from an empirical perspective (see e.g. von Weizsäcker et al. 2009; Wagner 2010; Lioui and Sharma 2012), or offered normative injunctions, mainly in the strategic management literature, to link desirable action towards sustainability with survival or advantage in increasingly competitive situations (e.g. Hendy and Vesilind 2005; Porter and Kramer 2011; Kiron et al. 2012; 2013).

Initially most of the debate in the management literature was about whether a positive link between social and environmental and economic activities, or a business case, exists (see e.g. Esty and Porter 1998; Reinhardt 1999; Dyllick and Hockerts 2002). But research in the environmental and sustainability management area has shifted in the last few years to focus on the question of what kind of links exist between voluntary environmental and social engagement and business success (see e.g. Margolis and Walsh 2003; Pearce 2003; Wagner et al. 2001). Most of this literature emphasises the possibility of win–win or triple-win potentials (e.g. Berry and Rondinelli 1998; Reinhardt 1999; Schaltegger and Synnestvedt 2002; Wagner et al. 2001; Margolis and Walsh 2003; Pearce 2003; Wagner 2007; von Weizsäcker et al. 2009; Porter and Kramer 2011; Schaltegger 2011).

One conclusion of this research is that it is an illusion to believe that any kind of automatic relationship exists between voluntary societal activities and business success (Schaltegger and Synnestvedt 2002). Examples can be found for both negative as well as positive effects. End-of-pipe measures that simply create new costs are an example of profit-decreasing measures, whilst the marketing success and profitability of innovative green products offers an example of profit-increasing measures. The economic return from environmental or social initiatives will vary depending upon whether cost reducing or profit-increasing activities have been implemented.

Hence, theoretical and empirical research indicates that most companies seem to have the potential for developing one or more business cases for sustainability (Steger 2004; Schaltegger 2011; Carroll and Shabana 2010; Burritt et al. 2013). In other words, there is no general answer as to whether it 'pays to be green' (e.g. Reinhardt 1999, 2000), but whether environmental and social engagement can contribute to economic success of the company depends on the specific activities and measures undertaken in the name of sustainability. Business cases for sustainability are realisable but do not just happen and are the result of activities and measures chosen by company managers.

Among the main reasons the potential of business cases for sustainability are not realised in practice are the novelty of the area, lack of knowledge and inadequate information and lack of management motivation and commitment (e.g. Montalvo 2008; Montalvo and Kemp 2008). In addition, organisational structures (Gray and Bebbington 2000; Gray 2010) and the business model may exert structural disincentives for creating business cases for sustainability (e.g.

Johnson 2010; Schaltegger et al. 2012). One main conclusion from the literature is that different economic effects can be expected depending on the kind of social and environmental activities implemented in companies. Although addressed in passing in a few publications (see e.g. Joyner and Payne 2002; Graafland and van de Ven 2006) the available body of literature has not analysed in depth how different ethical motivations for CSR and corporate sustainability influence the degree and nature of the economic, environmental and social effects of business and the business cases that are subsequently created. Whereas some authors position CSR in practice as a subordinate approach to profit-making and increasing competitiveness (e.g. Porter and Kramer 2011) others are horrified by the idea that making a profit could be seen as a legitimate goal of sustainability activities (e.g. Milne and Gray 2013). Both groups, however, appear to refer to the same perspective that a business case refers to maximising a corporation's financial performance and managers strive for creating business cases. While alternatives to the "conventional materialist-individualist ideal-type of management" (Dyck and Schroeder 2005, p. 705) have been discussed in the general management literature to take up "Weber's call for the articulation of alternative moral-points-of-view" (Dyck and Schroeder 2005, p. 707) the CSR and corporate sustainability literature has so far not discussed how specific ethical motivations of managers give rise to different understandings of the purposes and practices of sustainability management.

The next section distinguishes different ethical motivations of managers for CSR and discusses the specific sustainability activities and measures which typically follow. After this section, the sustainability management measures are then discussed in the context of the resulting business cases.

Ethical Motivations of Managers and Sustainability Measures

Corporate managers have different motivations for dealing with CSR and corporate actions to move their businesses towards sustainability. Roberts (2003) proposes four different ethical motivations for CSR based on earlier work by Levinas (1991; see also Becker 2013). In what follows we introduce these four motivations to distinguish between different forms of business cases developed in relation to sustainability management activities, and the very different economic, social and environmental consequences that flow from each. Figure 1 shows the structure and argument of this paper starting with ethical motivations as distinguished by Roberts (2003), related sustainability management activities and business case rationales leading to different kinds of business cases with regard to sustainability.

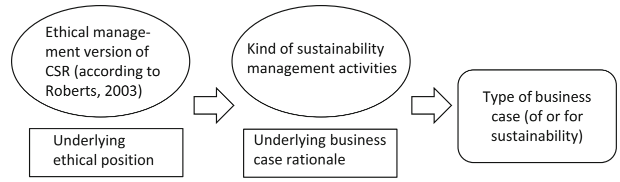

Fig. 1 Differentiating types of business cases and sustainability

While Levinas (1991) makes no reference to sustainability except by way of a pejorative example and is instead preoccupied with "responsibility for my neighbour" (Levinas 1991, p. 144; Roberts 2003, p. 251) elements of his work are instructive for understanding the different motivations that might inform the ways managers of corporations embrace sustainability, as well as related substantive effects.

The first two motivations relate to indifference with regard to material sustainability issues or an ongoing construction of the appearance of caring. These two motivations are driven either by the protection of the existing way of doing business and short-term financial interests of the company or by the narcissistic concern to protect the reputation of a company and the managers themselves. The second two motivations emphasising material aspects of sustainability are concerned about reducing undesired environmental and social impacts and about creating positive effects for society and the environment. The first seeks to embed social and environmental concerns within the performance management systems of a business, and the second seeks to go beyond the boundaries of the entity and create a dialogue with those who are vulnerable to the unintended and unacknowledged consequences of corporate conduct.

A first perspective on CSR is to be taken from Levinas' (1991) writing relating to *self-seeking* behaviour. Roberts (2003) identifies one polar extreme of a key distinction which Levinas (1991, p. 100), makes between what he terms the 'ego' and 'psyche' (Levinas 1991, p. 100). The ego represents a person's internal feeling of self-importance, whereas the psyche represents the soul or spirit and encompasses ethical inter-subjective relations. At the level of the individual ego Levinas states that people are pleasure seeking and self-absorbed. Defending their economic self-interest can thus be seen as one motivational logic for how sustainability issues can be perceived and approached by managers. Self-interest is also assumed in neo-classical economics, with its traditional approach to companies maximising productivity and profitability, and within a Taylorian management rationale (Ferraro et al. 2005). Whereas self-interest or self-seeking does not represent an ethical position as such it does provide one reference point in a spectrum leading towards an ethical understanding of corporate responsibility. The defence of the existing way of doing business and profit maximisation dominate all aspects of behaviour towards sustainability. CSR activities are thus only realised if necessary to protect the existing business case and measures such as end-of-pipe filters are chosen which do not require a change in the current production methods and ways of doing business. In a similar vein, Helmig et al. (2013) examine a case where philanthropic CSR engagement results from stakeholder pressure and serves to protect the existing business.

A second motivation in the work of Levinas is *narcissism* which brings the individual and the "other" together. For Levinas, the ego includes the synthesis of a series of images of the self, including face to face experience and, hence, the social. An important aspect of the ego is a person's concern for recognition from others, including the perceptions of others of our individual goodness. It is here that Levinas contrasts the pre-occupation of the ego with its own self-interest which he describes as the "soul of the other in me" (Levinas 1991, p. 100). For Levinas, the soul of the other is reflected back in a narcissistic manner and becomes an integral component of self-interest. This perspective transfers to corporate management as the narcissistic defence of reputation. For such managers it is more important how they are perceived by others and what others think than what is actually done or achieved. The narcissistic motivation sees CSR as an option to defend or increase corporate and individual reputation through voluntary social and environmental activities which may evoke praise from stakeholders. Narcissistic self-seeking is expressed through seeking applause when addressing issues which are positively perceived by stakeholders. CSR activities in line with reputation seeking include a variety of options such as interviews in prestigious manager magazines, glossy brochures, press releases and VIP events. Miles and Covin (2000) provide empirical illustrations for this approach with cases on reputational, competitive and financial advantages of environmental marketing.

At the level of the ego lies the competitive struggle for existence of the self *against* others. At the level of the psyche resides a felt sense of responsibility *for* others that cannot be displaced or avoided, grounded in recognition of individual vulnerability and the vulnerability of others as living sentient beings. The obvious danger is that the imaginary pleasures of the competitive game are pursued at the cost of our responsibility for others, or simply blind us to or distract us from our mutual vulnerability as living sentient beings.

A third motivation goes beyond the defence of the existing way of business and the superficiality of events and communication management *towards genuine improvements in social and environmental performance.* Managers may be ethically motivated to *improve performance in relation to sustainability by striving for organisational excellence.* CSR is then a means towards the end of overall improved corporate performance and management excellence. Stakeholder concerns, social problems and planetary boundaries are recognised and seen as challenges for which the organisation needs to create outstanding solutions in an economical manner. A focus on looking for combined benefits from cost savings created through improved environmental and social impacts provides a change in emphasis from the reactionary view that social and environmental improvements must lead to an increase of costs. Likewise for managers motivated by responsible sustainability management striving for organisational excellence the desire for continuous improvement over time in environmental and social performance through the development and sale of greener and more socially acceptable products and services is *de rigeur*. In this view, sustainability management is about meeting the highest international standards in environmental and social management, performing better than others with a more resource efficient production and achieving an 'excellent job' by designing innovative products which exceed the competitors' environmental and social quality levels. Empirical examples for this perspective are for example discussed by Mills et al. (2008) on outstanding energy management in high-tech industries.

A fourth alternative motivation behind sustainability measures is a social notion which places the interest of others ahead of self-interest (Rest 1986), and as such it has an overriding *focus on the "other" through social relations, dialogue, participation and collaboration*. Unlike neo-classical economics and management based on methodological individualism, for Levinas (1991) the ability for a person to have feelings for others including the vulnerable in society is a fundamental foundation for ethical capacities. Levinas argues, paradoxically, that as people we forge our identity only through going against the self in following the assignation of responsibility for the "other". Changing actions of corporate managers towards sustainability possibly involves a similar rethinking of the actual nature of corporate interests, which of course lie between entities rather than being internal to any one entity. Such is, for example, the challenge of sustainable supply chain management which goes beyond the traditional entity and requires different responsibilities, accountings and accountabilities from those of conventional procurement (Burritt and Schaltegger, 2014). CSR activities which support the vision of collaboratively creating a sustainable business which solves social and environmental problems include cooperation with stakeholders including vulnerable groups such as the poorest. Empirical cases of this approach are for example discussed by

Argenti (2004) on how Starbucks works with NGOs to improve the living conditions of smallholder farmers.

Acknowledging higher ethical values (e.g. Dyck and Schroeder 2005) and the social embeddedness of the corporation (e.g. Freeman 1984), broadens responsibility to a larger stakeholder environment and the vulnerability of societal groups. Taking a broader perspective thus reveals that ethics is not the product of reason, as it is conceived of by so much of applied moral philosophy, but rather is grounded in our existence as an embodied and sentient being. As humans Levinas insists that it is simply impossible for us to sever ourselves from such responsibility and concern ourselves only with ourselves. We are vital to everything and irreplaceable in the process of reducing vulnerability. The ethical motivation of managers from this perspective would be to engage with stakeholders, collaboratively achieve an understanding of problems and to develop possible solutions to societal issues.

The four motivations, related sustainability activities and business cases, each with their own logic, move from self-interest of managers through to concern for others: first is the perception of CSR as a mere cost-driver and constraint on profitability; next is acceptance of CSR as puffery implemented through public communications with a view to profitability; the third motivation focuses on optimization of environmental and social activities including the linking with profitability; finally, corporate sustainability as dominated by a participatory approach, including the vulnerable to, as a minimum, ensure sustainability solutions, value creation for stakeholders and successful business survival. These different motivations and the approaches to sustainability are catalysts for the four different business cases examined next.

Distinguishing Business Cases with Sustainability

Understanding of what characterises a business case and how it relates to sustainability varies substantially. Whereas the view that a "business case" is all about maximising the financial performance of a company and thus only about maximising a corporation's financial performance (e.g. Burke and Logsdon 1996; Robinson and Dechant 1997; Holliday et al. 2002; Steger 2004; Salzmann et al. 2005) is the prevailing view in the CSR literature other authors have proposed different perspectives in the general management literature discussing theological and moral points of view (e.g. Dyck and Schroeder 2005) and in the corporate sustainability literature addressing non-monetary benefits as being part of business such as reputation, the 'licence to operate', employee motivation, or creating markets and affordable products in developing countries (e.g. Thorpe and Prakash-Mani 2003; Weber 2008; Hahn 2009; Carroll and Shabana 2010; Schaltegger et al. 2012). The different views have in common that they address the relationship between activities usually seen to be outside the narrow range of economic activities such as voluntary social and environmental activities, and the respective concept of successful business.

Stemming from the previous motivations and implications about sustainability measures four business cases can be distinguished: reactionary, reputational, responsible and collaborative. Each of the business cases and their underlying rationales are examined in turn.

Defending the Existing Business Case with Reactionary Management

The notion of being *self-seeking and defending the conventional business approach* is consonant with and possibly the product of the assumptions of neo-classical economics. This utilitaristic view is deeply embedded in conventional accounting and performance management systems (e.g. Maunders and Burritt 1991). Managers are encouraged to act as self-seeking, opportunistic individuals in a competitive environment to maximise personal economic interests. They aim to answer the question "what is in sustainability for me and my company?".

Self-seeking managers assuming conflict between CSR and conventional business (and profits) defend the conventional business approach which is the basis for the existing business case. This is why either no CSR activities are realised or the costs of CSR activities are accepted to protect the conventional way of doing business. Costs of certain social and environmental activities are taken into account (e.g. when media or NGOs create the respective pressure) if they are expected to enable continuation of business like in the past. CSR is not expected to generate any profits, only to prevent that generating profits from conventional business activities are not endangered. As the main focus of reactionary managers is only on conventional business issues, CSR activities are assumed primarily to be a source of costs and to be "outside" or only coincidently part of core business activities. Accounting is a means to ensure economic profit maximisation, with voluntary social and environmental measures being considered as costs and only coincidently part of the calculation. CSR activities are not considered to pay off but rather to be philanthropic in kind (e.g. Carroll 1991) to 'pacify' critical stakeholders and (maybe) instrumental to securing the conventional business case (e.g. Helmig et al. 2013). CSR only addresses defensive activities. Concrete measures which resonate with this ethical motivation of selfhood are defensive and reactive in kind. For example compliance with water and clean air regulations is ensured with the installation of a sewage plant and filters. Such end-of-pipe technologies do not require any alteration of the existing production and profit creation logic and are applied when necessary to secure a continuation of the existing business case which is based on the current logic of operations. Similarly, if media and neighbours of a production plant express strong negative concerns or if employees are discontent, philanthropic activities, corporate volunteering projects or employee and social benefits might be adopted to pacify the stakeholders and reduce frictions in daily production operations. Communication efforts are targeted at blurring sustainability standards, at emotionally overestimating possible costs of societal and environmental progress for individuals and society and at creating exaggerated trade-offs (e.g. jobs versus clean production). What these CSR activities have in common is that they serve to secure the conventional business case in the face of societal pressure and that they leave the existing business logic unaltered. As a consequence, they do not create new economic benefits but only cause additional costs. Social and environmental activities are instrumental to the defence of existing structures and practices and in line with what Fooks et al. (2013) call "political CSR". As with reactionary economics language and assumptions in general (Ferraro et al. 2005), the view and motivation that social and environmental measures only cause costs and thus should only be undertaken if necessary to protect the conventional business case becomes self-fulfilling as a result of the reactive design of CSR activities.

Creating a Business Case with Reputational Management

A related but very different business case for engaging with CSR arises from the narcissistic concern of business leaders with the reputation of the companies with which they are so closely identified. With the need for self-aggrandisement or 'grandiosity' (Miller 1979), the global reach of social media and the increasing role of reputation for brands and companies, managers may be motivated to focus on societal issues in areas where high visibility is achieved and reputation enhanced or stopped from being put at risk (e.g. Jones and Rubin 1999). From this consequential utilitaristic perspective CSR is reputation management, public relations and communications driven. CSR activities which follow from reputational management are focused on maintenance, building and repair of the corporate (self)image; extensive sustainability reporting, public relations activities creating media coverage for board members, general reputational advertisement campaigns with (more or less substantiated) claims of sustainability achievements, and public relations events. A strong emphasis may also be placed on memberships of business associations with no or low sustainability requirements, political committees with low impact in substance but high visibility, and awards and prizes from organisation which can either be influenced or do not require substantial achievements. Managers following this perspective try to answer the question 'what is in dealing with visible sustainability issue for my reputation and my corporation's reputation and financial success?'.

What these CSR activities have in common is that they serve an intended reputational business case by focusing energies on societal, political and media attention. In conventional cost accounting, narcissistically motivated CSR activities are expressed in high budgets for communication expenditure and by locating the company's responsibility for sustainability in the PR department. These activities mostly do not affect the existing business logic, but they can create some new economic benefits through changed societal and customer impression management (e.g. Cho et al. 2012). They offer staff at all levels the possibility of an easier identification with a 'responsible' organisation but make little or no impact on business practices beyond the corporate management of reputation. The economics of reputational CSR, however, can be very mixed, firstly because the beneficial effects of reputation may not be easy to identify or quantify, and secondly because exaggerated communications resulting in greenwashing can be expected to be uncovered over time and may result in negative economic consequences for the company (Laufer 2003; Chen and Chang 2013). Indeed precisely because corporate image, rather than practices and sustainability performance, are the focus of activity there is arguably a heightened risk that perception and reality will diverge. This creates a further risk that senior management will come to believe in their own public projections in a way that blinds them to actual imperatives that drive conduct at lower levels of the organisation. The disconnection between policy and practice within BP and Volkswagen serve as salient recent examples of such a decoupling of senior management from operational culture in the attempt to manage corporate reputation and maintain grandiosity (e.g. Collier and Esteban 2007; Pollitt 2014).

Striving for Business Excellence with Responsible Sustainability Management

Responsible sustainability management is characterised by engaged striving for outstanding performance and substantial sustainability improvements (e.g. Benn et al. 2014; Filatotchev and Nakajima 2014; Hörisch et al. 2014). Of necessity, the ethical motives of senior managers have to find a place within the instrumental structures of performance management and reporting both in order to gain leverage on the conduct of staff throughout the organisation and to meet the demands of investors. In doing so there is the potential to create a whole new set of performance expectations, metrics and rewards which shift the focus of staff at all levels of an organisation in ways that can include a fuller consideration of issues of sustainability and even encourage a new cadre of staff to join the company.

Contrary to the defensive actions of selfhood or the confident offensive actions resulting from narcissistic motivation, responsible sustainability management may result in technocratic procedures, attempts to apply international and industry standards in a rigorous way (e.g. such as ISO 14000, Responsible Care, SA 8000, etc.), a focus on sustainability management control, improved key performance indicators, and over-fulfilled regulatory requirements. Typical examples of such activities are the application of (new) sustainability management approaches such as life-cycle assessment, introduction of sustainability reports which are in accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines or Integrated Reporting, cleaner production measures, etc. Corporate sustainability is seen as a management area to be a responsible 'corporate citizen' through increasing efficiency and performance of existing and yet to be developed processes and products. Efficiency gains and incremental process and product innovations are pursued (e.g. Hansen et al. 2010b). Improved products and services may result in sales increases or other competitive advantages. Overall, responsible sustainability management is characterised by, on the one hand, increased costs of introducing substantial sustainability measures and, on the other, reduced costs through efficiency gains, growth in sales and reputation, or improved operations, products and services. Managers taking this perspective aim to answer the question 'what is in sustainability for our corporation's overall economic, environmental and social success?'.

Developing Business with Stakeholder Dialogue, Participation and Collaborative Sustainability Management

Acceptance of a business case for having concern for the other, leads to empathic dialogue-based, participatory management. Whilst some of the most obvious unintended and undesirable social and environmental effects of corporate conduct can be internalised and re-embedded within performance management systems, most of the knowledge of such effects lies beyond the corporate boundary amongst those who are most vulnerable to its effects. Here Roberts (2003) argues for the importance of what he terms a dialogue with the vulnerable, whom he suggests might be all too willing to inform corporate ignorance of its actual effects. Such a dialogue can be taken as just one instance of the way in which full responsibility for corporate activities can only be achieved if the undesired effects, which the most vulnerable of stakeholders experience, are reduced or eliminated. Collaboration, particularly with vulnerable stakeholders, is thus the key to empathetic, participatory sustainability management. From a pragmatic perspective, ethical responsibility for sustainability then does not only lead to a concern with the sustainability of the corporation itself, but incorporates direct and indirect effects on supply chains, market structure, local communities surrounding production plants, planetary boundaries, etc. Corporate responsibility with regard to contributing to sustainable development is a main business driver, and part of the core business model as well as the communication (and selling) proposition. A business case is in this perspective a case where the involvement of business in finding, developing and implementing a solution to problems of un-sustainability makes sense to involved actors or is even necessary to create a solution (e.g. because it is unlikely that a good solution can be realized against business). Managers with this perspective aim to answer the question 'what is in sustainability for our corporation's *and society's* overall social, economic and environmental success?' together with stakeholders.

Typical activities of collaborative sustainability processes are the management of open innovation processes, the organisation of alliances with NGOs to design more sustainable alternatives to existing products (e.g. such as with the Forest Stewardship Council, see e.g. Schepers 2010, p. 285), or the empowerment and involvement of the vulnerable in "bottom of the pyramid" businesses (e.g. Karnani 2007; Hahn 2009). Innovation processes are designed not as secrete internal company projects but with openness (e.g. Schumacher and Wasieleski 2013). All stakeholders, particularly vulnerable stakeholders, are empowered to contribute in management committees and on boards (e.g. Gnan et al. 2013). Decisions are based on agreements achieved through dialogue, and the vision of the company is to contribute to a structural change of markets and society moving towards sustainability. To be more effective in striving for substantial improvement in actions towards sustainability, collaborations with NGOs and other organisation and particularly the strengthening and involvement of socially less privileged stakeholders are part of the business logic. This management motivation is expressed in the role of sustainable entrepreneurship which aims to destroy existing un-sustainable market and societal structures by introducing and establishing superior, more sustainable products, services and organisational arrangements (e.g. Schaltegger 2002; Schaltegger and Wagner 2011). The societal interactions result in a co-created development process comprising the organisation, its regulators and stakeholders (e.g. Hörisch et al. 2014). All management activities and systems as well as the very existence of the business and its success are permeated by sustainability (e.g. Parrish 2010). It is important to distinguish between actual practice and mere good intentions, there being only rare instances of sincere engagement despite the proliferation of dialogues with stakeholders that suggest otherwise.

Discussion

Independent of whether a narrow financial perspective or a broader understanding of business case is applied, a business case does not just happen when implementing sustainability measures but results from the kind of activities chosen. Theoretical and empirical literature show that examples can be found of negative as well as positive relationships between voluntary social and environmental activities and the economic success of a company. Whereas most end-of-pipe measures such as sewage plants tend to create costs and reduce profitability many sustainable products are reported to have increased sales revenue and profitability (e.g. Haanaes et al. 2013). The economic effect of specific environmental or social performance and whether a business case can be created thus depends upon whether cost-driving or profit- and benefit-driving activities are the focus. Based on the characterization of CSR and sustainability measures which derive from different ethical motivations, this section therefore analyses what kind of business cases follow from the sustainability measures relating to the four different ethical motivations of managers. To map the analysis, we draw on an emergent framework (see Fig. 2) which describes the possible links between voluntary environmental and social activities and economic performance of a company.

Moving to the right on the horizontal axis in Fig. 2 represents incremental increases in CSR activity. When only cost increasing CSR activities are implemented initial economic success (e.g. ES_0 in Fig. 2) will be reduced with every new voluntary social and environmental activity (moving to the right in Fig. 2). The lowest curve sloping downwards shows the economic effects of voluntary social and environmental activities if they cause costs and do not create positive economic returns.

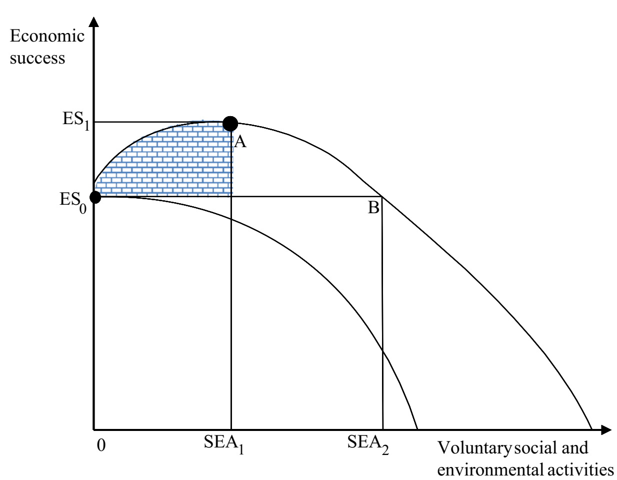

Fig. 2 Possible relationship between social/environmental activities and economic performance (*Source* Schaltegger and Synnestvedt 2002, p. 341)

However, if voluntary social and environmental activities are implemented in an economically beneficial way then the company's position will move to the right (e.g. up to point A in Fig. 2 where higher economic success is achieved with the amount of voluntary social and environmental activities at SEA_1). As economic performance will not continue to increase by adding an indefinite number of social and environmental activities net marginal benefits from sustainability activities (picking the "low hanging fruit" first) will decline after point A in Fig. 2 and after point B the increased sustainability effort will represent net costs relative to the initial position ES_0.

From the most evident perspective in the CSR literature (see e.g. Burke and Logsdon 1996; Holliday et al. 2002; Salzmann et al. 2005) that a "business case" is all about improving financial performance, a business case is created through sustainability if voluntary social and environmental activities increase economic performance, thus creating movements to the upper right of point ES_0 and towards point A in Fig. 2. From this perspective, the area with the brick pattern under the inverse U-shaped slope between ES_0 and A in Fig. 2 is the area where business cases exist. If further business benefits are considered to be part of a business case, then shifts to the right and upward shifts to the right constitute additional business cases, too. In this case, and if no trade-offs between social, environmental and economic improvements are accepted compared to the initial position ES_0 in Fig. 2, then the whole area below ES_0–A–B is available for creating business cases.

The question of whether sustainability activities result in a business case or just increase costs (i.e. whether movement is in the upper area to the right with the brick pattern or on the lower curve) depends on how different drivers of a business case are addressed. The drivers of a business case for sustainability are variables which directly influence economic success and business and therefore are related to the drivers of a conventional business case (for an overview of performance drivers see Olve et al. 1999; see also Schaltegger 2011). Table 1 provides an overview of important business case drivers.

Drivers of a business case can influence economic and business performance directly or indirectly. The most direct link is through costs and cost reduction (see e.g. Christmann 2000; Epstein and Roy 1996) resulting from energy savings, the reduction of material flows (e.g. Jasch 2009) or cleaner production. A related driver is the reduction of technical, political, societal and market *risks* (e.g. Schaltegger et al. 2012) through effective sustainability management. Opportunity oriented drivers are addressed when *sales and profit margins* (e.g. Porter and van der Linde, 1995a, b) or the companýs *reputation and*

Table 1 Core drivers of business cases for sustainability

Core business case drivers	Exemplary authors
Costs and cost reduction	E.g. Christmann (2000), Epstein and Roy (1996)
Risk and risk reduction	E.g. Schaltegger et al. (2012)
Sales and profit margin	E.g. Porter and van der Linde (1995a, b)
Reputation and brand value	E.g. Jones and Rubin (1999), van Marreweijk (2003)
Attractiveness as employer	E.g. Ehnert (2009), Revell et al. (2010)
Innovative capabilities and business model innovations	E.g. Cohen and Winn (2007), Pujari 2006, Hansen et al. (2010b)

brand value (e.g. Jones and Rubin 1999; van Marrewijk, 2003) are increased. Further drivers such as the *improved capability to innovate* because of thinking in diverse sustainability dimensions and the consideration of more diverse knowledge sources from stakeholders (see e.g. Cohen and Winn 2007; Hansen et al. 2010a; Pujari 2006; Schaltegger and Wagner 2011), easier market entry or development (e.g. Porter and van der Linde 1995b), or improved attractiveness as an employer (see e.g. Ehnert, 2009; Revell et al. 2010) can play an important role in increasing competitiveness and creating further business benefits.

Depending on how these social and environmental activities are shaped and realised, different business effects will result (either they will only create net costs, or they will improve economic performance and create a business case). Referring to the four ethical motivations and related sustainability activities distinguished above Table 2 shows how the drivers of a business case are addressed.

Assuming conflict between CSR and conventional business (and profits), reactionary management in self-interest is expressed either through refraining from CSR or through specific measures aimed at pacifying stakeholders and ensuring legal compliance with environmental and social regulations. In defence of the conventional business approach and in order not to change the existing production and profit creation logic these measures are characterised by end-of-pipe technologies and philanthropic projects. CSR is neither expected nor implemented to generate profits but to keep critics at bay. Based on the current operations logic these measures are applied only when considered necessary to secure continuation of the existing business case. As these activities are themselves outside the conventional business logic, they do not lead to new economic benefits. The ethical motivation of self-management in effect creates a self-fulfilling prophecy only to cause costs. This is why in Fig. 3 the *"reactionary protection of conventional business case"* is shown as a series of dots which move down to the right along the lower cost line from ES_0. With increasing societal, political and market pressure the *existing conventional business case is diminished over time*. As conventional accounting methods remain in place, however, they are not able to show this effect; they only express CSR as a cost, which motivates management to continue believing trade-offs are inevitable and to lobby against sustainability orientated activities. Helmig et al. (2013) show in an empirical analysis of 190 large industrial firms in Switzerland that philanthropic engagement increased as a reaction to stakeholder pressure and similar activities of competitors. 13 % of the companies perceived CSR "as a duty to society and a social obligation; therefore CSR expenditures are seen simply as costs". (Helmig et al. 2013, p. 21).

From the perspective of *reputationally orientated narcissistic management* CSR is driven by reputation management, public relations and marketing. CSR is seen as an economic opportunity but only with regard to reputation when it evokes applause from societal stakeholders. Management sees opportunities in showcasing voluntary social and environmental activities as this may increase reputation in the public. Only those activities are pursued which are visible and positively perceived in the public. Reputational CSR activities thus only address the reputation, brand value and in some cases sales increase, as drivers of a business case (see Table 2). Narcissistic motivation may result in a reputational business case *of* sustainability. The sustainability awareness of media, politics and society is used to profit from observed societal developments. Although the reputational approach is superficially oriented to creating positive stakeholder reactions it is not necessarily equal to greenwashing. If the activities are supported with material improvements then not only an upward shift but also a shift to the right in Fig. 3 is achieved. However, reputational activities which are only based on minor improvements and mainly greenwash may either only create an upward shift or if detected, the costs would exceed benefits and reputation losses may occur which would lead to a drop to the lower, down sliding curve in Fig. 3. As has been illustrated in depth with the case of BP (Balmer 2010; Balmer et al. 2011) ethical corporate

Table 2 Ethical motivations for sustainability and business case drivers X = key focus, x = potentially also a part of the motivation

	Reactionary self-management (philanthropic and end-of-pipe measures)	*Reputational* narcissistic management of sustainability and media sensibility (communication and reputation measures)	*Responsible* sustainability management and performance sensibility (efficiency increasing and incremental improvements)	*Collaborative* dialogue, empathy based management with vulnerable stakeholders (interaction and collaborations with vulnerable)
Costs				
Increasing	X			
Reductions			X	(x)
Reputation		X	(x)	(x)
Sales		(x)	X	(x)
Innovations				
Incremental			X	
Radical				X
Collaborative innovation processes				X
Employee attractiveness			(x)	X
Business model innovation				X
Examples of literature discussing cases with related sustainability management activities	Helmig et al. (2013) on philanthropic engagement resulting from stakeholder pressure	Miles and Covin (2000) with cases on reputational, competitive and financial advantages of environmental marketing; Balmer et al. (2011) on BP	Burritt and Saka (2006) with case studies from Japan; Mills et al. (2008) on "the business case for energy management in high tech industries"	Argenti (2004) on how Starbucks works with NGOs; Constance and Bonanno (2000) on how Unilever collaborates with the WWF

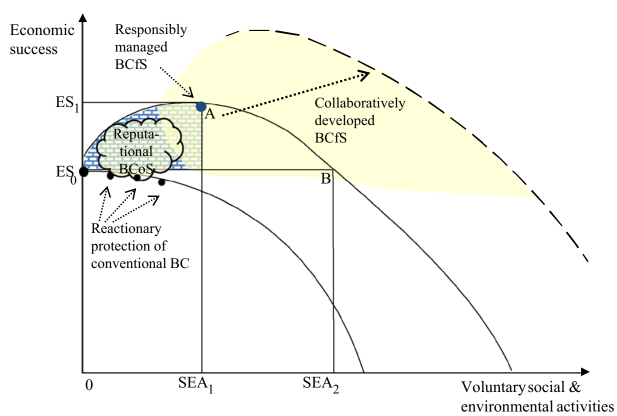

Fig. 3 Positioning of different business cases of and for sustainability

marketing which is not supported over time with sustainability performance can first lead to rising and then falling reputation.

In sum, as only some business case drivers are addressed, the *narcissistically motivated reputational business case of sustainability* ("Reputational BCoS" in Fig. 3) is limited and often fuzzy (thus shown as a cloud in Fig. 3), or may even drop into the negative where greenwash exists, i.e. if performance measures communicated are not backed up with real contributions towards sustainability (as in the case of BP; see Balmer 2010; Balmer et al. 2011).

The motivation for striving for business excellence with responsible sustainability management addresses various additional drivers, including internal drivers of a business case and increased sales through improved products (see "Responsibly managed BCfS" in Table 2). Corporate sustainability is neither seen as a duty nor as a showpiece but as a technical and managerial challenge for excellence to increase efficiency, performance and legitimacy of processes and products. Responsible managers are motivated to improve performance and strive for organisational excellence by applying procedures and implementing improvement projects and measures to increase sustainability performance, all being closely monitored with key performance indicators. By applying modern management techniques environmental and economic efficiency and the performance of processes and products are increased. This encourages creativity and results in cost reductions and incremental process and product innovations. Apart from systematically exploring cost reduction, sales potential and incremental innovations, reputational issues and brand value may also be addressed as a lower priority. The responsible management rationale is characterised by optimization and continuous improvement. The resulting business case *for* sustainability ("Responsibly managed BCfS" in Fig. 3 covering the area with brick pattern and the optimised point A) directly contributes to sustainable development; however, it remains in the feasible area of the existing operational and business model logic (bounded by the upper solid line and point A in Fig. 3). The responsibly managed BCfS area incorporates large parts of but extends the reputational business case area to the right as additional social and environmental activities which increase economic benefits (e.g. improving operational efficiency) beyond reputational activities are also addressed. Reputation gains are furthermore seen as a means to improve both social/environmental performance and economic performance. This is a distinct difference to the narcissistically motivated business case where personal and company reputation is seen as an end.

The existence of and belief in the existence of such a responsibly managed company is evident in a multitude of empirical publications. Knoepfel (2001) illustrates Procter and Gamble's outperformance of the industry average assessment for the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI). He claims that investors are increasingly "diversifying their portfolios by investing in companies committed to the concept of corporate sustainability. Investors are attracted to this new investment style because it promises to create long-term shareholder value by embracing opportunities and managing risks deriving from ongoing economic, environmental and social developments" (Knoepfel, 2001, p. 6). Lopez et al. (2007, p. 296) conclude in their empirical study comparing companies in the Dow Jones Global Index with companies in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) that "both firms and investors believe that strategies that take sustainability criteria into account have the capacity to create long-term value" (for an analysis how companies use the DJSI see e.g. Searcy and Elkhawas 2012). Drawing on a qualitative interview based study with decision makers in the office market in the UK Pellegrini-Masini and Leishman (2011) present qualitative evidence that companies, despite still regarding energy costs as a negligible part of their business costs, see energy efficiency in office buildings as an increasingly important driver to meet employee values and increase corporate reputation whereas Burritt and Saka (2006) show with case studies from Japan and Mills et al. (2008) for high tech industries that energy efficiency can create economic advantages.

The *collaboratively developed business case for sustainability* ("Collaboratively developed BCfS" in Fig. 3) results from empathetically driven dialogue-based management and engagement with vulnerable and societal stakeholders including NGOs and less organised groups who are affected by the business, supply chains, or consumption related impacts. While well-organised, powerful stakeholders with ample resources can enforce their claims and reflect a political management style which acknowledges power, collaboratively developed business cases also consider vulnerable stakeholders which are less well organised, lack power or may have less resources. Contribution towards sustainable development is a key characteristic of the business purpose, the business model, and a main business driver. This perspective goes beyond the dominant view that a business case is merely about maximising financial performance. Social and environmental business benefits are at the core of this approach which aims to join with vulnerable stakeholders to create societal benefits in an economically successful way. The business relevance of sustainability extends beyond the roles of communication and excellence in performance. Innovation processes and organisational development are created and fostered through interaction with stakeholders. All business case drivers are addressed through innovations in the business model (see Table 2) with the emphasis placed on collaboratively developed innovations addressing key sustainability problems and planetary boundaries, a radical cascade of interrelated innovations, and attractiveness to employees and communities. The company aims to contribute to solving problems of un-sustainability and to offer new solutions which make un-sustainable products and services obsolete. In the sense of a sustainable entrepreneur (e.g. Schaltegger and Wagner 2011) the company creatively destroys un-sustainable structures of conventional businesses and intentionally contributes to a structural change of the market and society (as shown by the arrow in Fig. 3). The societal interaction results in a co-created organisational development process linking the organisation and the regulatory and societal environment, thus shifting the curve in Fig. 3 upwards to the right. Although the collaboratively developed business case also includes the responsible business case area it aims to expand the area towards the right through a dynamic process. This may lead to an upward shift, too, but depending on the collaboratively developed understanding of what the business entails, for example, social businesses may also consider other shifts to the right as a business case.

The collaborative development of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) may serve as a case in point where Unilever and the WWF jointly developed principles of sustainable fisheries and founded an organisation which audits and certifies fisheries which adhere to these sustainability principles (Constance and Bonanno 2000; Cummins 2004). MSC introduced a standard for sustainable fishing which changes market conditions by enabling customers to make distinctions which were not possible before. With the development of sustainable fishery principles, the foundation of MSC as a new organisation to implement and support these principles and the establishment of auditing, certification and labelling, a new business innovation was created which reduced costs for Unilever, created sales for MSC and contributed to the sustainable fisheries.

Conclusions

In general, a business case logic can be seen as a rationale which guides management thinking and the justification of management decisions and activities. If these activities are effective the way they are meant a certain kind of business case results. With regard to sustainability the extant literature has so far not examined the ethical underpinnings of possible business cases related to sustainability. Based on the distinction of ethical motivations of managers for CSR by Roberts (2003) this paper analyses the relationship between ethical motivations, underlying ethical positions and related sustainability management activities to distinguish four versions of business case logics. These motivational possibilities range from at one extreme direct conflict between existing, conventional economic and sustainability objectives, through to situations where the objectives initially complement each other but eventually require a trade-off. In addition, situations are identified where the initial complementary phase between business performance and social and environmental activities can be extended. Depending on what motivates company managers—defence of the existing business case, self or group esteem, innate desire for sustainability performance as part of organisational excellence, or stakeholder collaborations—different approaches to CSR, sustainability management activities and types of business cases eventuate. Table 3 summarises the lines of argument and the four types of business cases with regard to sustainability.

From this foundation the paper makes several conceptual contributions. First, it points out that the relationship between sustainability and business case may not just be one-dimensional (where a business case for sustainability either exists or does not exist). Distinguishing different types of business cases allows further differentiation in discussions about the relationship between corporate sustainability activities and business cases. Second, based on the four versions of ethical motivations proposed by Roberts (2003) the paper develops a link between ethics literature on CSR and business case literature. We propose that different types of business cases may be a consequence of different ethical motivations of managers for sustainability. Third, an explanation for the conceptual links between ethical motivations and types of business cases is provided by inferring different kinds of sustainability activities from the ethical motivations. The paper emphasises that ethical motivations can have important implications for the operational design of corporate sustainability activities.

Based on the distinctions between the four broad motivations which may underpin the behaviour of managers in relation to sustainability, four main kinds of business cases can be identified:

A ***reactionary*** *business case* is characterised by implementing CSR activities only if they are viewed as necessary to secure the existing conventional business case with its profit driven, financial rationale. CSR activities are perceived to increase costs and either are refrained from or implemented to protect the conventional business if it is endangered. CSR is not considered to generate profits and is only part of core business activities by chance. The key motivation is to secure the continuation of the existing business as it is. CSR thus only relates to defensive activities which aim to protect the conventional business case. As these CSR activities are added to the unaltered core business and not designed to strengthen the business, they mainly cause costs. The relationship between CSR and the conventional business case is thus designed in a negative way and hence becomes ‘intrinsically hostile’ (Anderson 1998, p. 135). The initial view that CSR only causes costs becomes a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’.

A ***reputational*** *business case of sustainability* follows from narcissistic CSR management with a sole focus on media sensibility to reputational matters. It aims to realise reputational business benefits. With the global reach of media and the increasing role of reputation for brands and companies, managers can be motivated to deal with sustainability in areas where visibility is achieved and self-prowess cultivated. CSR is thus impressions management, public relations and communications driven. These kinds of CSR activities only address reputation, brand value and possibly also growth of sales as drivers of a business case. Such an impressions-based business case can be at the expense of sustainability if it represents greenwash. If detected as greenwash these kinds of CSR activities can, however, be at the expense of profitability. Narcissistically motivated reputational CSR activities can, however, also be accompanied by social and environmental benefits if achieving reputational gains is linked to material sustainability improvements. The reputational business case *of* sustainability is thus limited and may even be negative if the performance communicated is not backed up with real contributions towards sustainability and scrutinised in public.

The ***responsible*** *business case for sustainability* results from technocratically driven sustainability management

Table 3 Ethical motivations, underlying ethical positions, kind of related sustainability activities, business case rationales and types of business cases of and for sustainability

Ethical management version of CSR	Underlying ethical position	Examples of sustainability management activities	Business case rationale	Type of business case
Self-seeking behaviour defending the conventional business approach	Utilitarianism: "What is in it for me?" (e.g. Kohlberg (1981)	End-of-pipe measures, philanthropy, etc. Costs incur to protect conventional business case	Sustainability is solely seen as a cost of doing business. The goal is thus to minimise expenses associated with sustainability to maximise short-term profits.	Reactionary protection of conventional business case
Narcissism, self-aggrandisement and seeking for grandiosity	Consequential utilitarianism: "What is in dealing with visible sustainability issues for my corporation's financial success?" (e.g. Friedman, (1970); see also Roberts (2003)	Visible sustainability projects communicated well in advertisements and reporting	Sustainability offers an opportunity to enhance corporate reputation (and thus profits). The goal is thus to create positive reputational effects associated with sustainability to maximise short-term profits.	Reputational business case *of* sustainability
Striving for business performance excellence	Business as a responsible citizen: "What is in it for our corporation's overall success (economically, environmentally, socially)?" (e.g. Porter and Kramer (2011)	Clean production and innovative product development	Sustainability offers opportunities to improve operations and create new business. The goal is thus to improve organisational operations by considering sustainability to optimise long-term success.	Responsible business case *for* sustainability
Developing business with stakeholder participation and collaboration	Pragmatism: "What is in it for our corporation's and society's overall success (economically, environmentally, socially)?" (e.g. Weick (1979); Wicks and Freeman(1998)	Joint development of a project, organisation, standard, etc. which is jointly valued to create a solution to a sustainability problem	Sustainability as an opportunity to enhance societal and environmental well-being including a firm's financial viability. The goal is thus to improve the whole business to create social, environmental and financial benefits by working with stakeholders including the vulnerable.	Collaborative business case *for* sustainability

and performance. CSR is considered an area of management excellence and corporate sustainability as a management challenge to increase efficiency, quality and performance of the given processes and products. Efficiency gains, costs reductions and incremental process and product innovations are pursued. A broad range of business case drivers such as cost reduction, innovation (mainly incremental), brand value, or sales are addressed. Technical and organisational excellence is targeted with optimization projects, incentive programmes, cross-disciplinary employee teams and task forces. This business case, although clearly contributing towards sustainable development, is limited in scope as it focuses on the corporate entity, its products and direct relationships. Furthermore, a responsible business case for sustainability is incremental as it is created from the logic of the existing operational and business model. Separate technological or regulatory developments may shift the upper curve in Fig. 3 to the right and/or upwards and responsible sustainability management will move along with this shift, but the focus is not on shifting the curve *per se* and thus also not on engaging with societal and political stakeholders to change the market framework and business environment.

The ***collaborative*** *business case for sustainability* results from dialogue-based management and engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, including vulnerable stakeholders. Striving for contributions to sustainable development is a main business driver, and a core part of the business model including the communication and selling proposition. This perspective reflects a broad understanding of business which entails social, environmental and economic benefits. Business success is thus defined as more than just maximising profits and includes social and environmental benefits collaboratively aimed for with all stakeholders. Innovation processes as well as organisational development result from the interaction with stakeholders, not just through representatives of international organisation but also through the less organised who are most vulnerable to the company's products and operations and reliant on the company for reducing such vulnerability. Business development is characterised by ensuring that through stakeholder engagement the company contributes substantially to solving problems of un-sustainability. It offers new solutions which make un-sustainable products and services obsolete and creates structural change in the market and society. The societal interaction results in co-structured participative development processes for the organisation, the regulatory and the societal environment. The focus is here on shifting the upper curve in Fig. 3 to the right to enlarge the markets and success for businesses providing superior sustainability solutions to society.

The four main business cases of and for sustainability and the relative movements towards sustainability provide a basis for differentiation. However, there are some important caveats in relation to the use of these four cases. First, movements towards sustainability are dynamic and this means different sets of business cases may co-exist within a single large organisation. Managers with different roles and in different departments may have different motivations and thus canvas and implement different kinds of business cases. Second, existing conventional organisations, with reactionary business cases to the fore, need to inculcate change if they are to move towards sustainability with their business case. In such organisations resistance to change can be endemic and destructive of moves towards sustainability. Mayes et al. (2013) analyse in a case study of BHP Billiton Ravensthorpe Nickel how a collaborative approach based on stakeholder dialogues "systematically privileges business-centred goals" (Mayes et al. 2013, p. 854). An external assessment whether a company pursues a collaborative approach or falls back to conventional reactionary business thinking is thus far from simple and cannot be assessed by identifying whether stakeholder dialogues take place. Mayes et al. (2013) point out that Roberts (2003) has underestimated the complexity and fraught nature of corporate engagement with vulnerable others not least in relation to discursive appropriation and power asymmetries, and that he was right to conceive dialogue as something other than stakeholder engagement and participation. Third, individual managers may have different business case perspectives for different areas of decision, such as whether the decision setting is embedded in an important customer relationship, related to investors, or has an impact on employees. Fourth, smaller organisations may have a natural advantage in moves towards the collaborative business case for sustainability as they have fewer layers of managers involved with decision making. For instance, ecopreneurs can establish their businesses case as empathetic and collaborative from the beginning and impose such a mind set on the few managers employed (see Schaltegger 2002; Parrish 2010). Fifth, the dynamic movement of business cases may be affected by relative economic, environmental and social contingencies over time. For example, Vel (2014) provides an ethnographic account of the role of brokers in Indonesian culture capturing and usurping the collaborative business case towards sustainability goals in relation to biofuels production and adopting the reactionary short-term monetary gains business case. For the collaboration of Starbucks with NGOs Argenti (2004) explains how managers can 'move' and be pressured from one business case logic into another one. Likewise, dominance of a collaborative business case has been reported to exist behind the polder culture of the Netherlands where the 30,000 polders, land areas below sea level surrounded by a dike to protect them against high water levels, requires empathy and consensus of the potentially disadvantaged businesses about system maintenance if business is to survive at all (Glasbergen 2002; Kolk and Perego 2014). Managers may realise decreasing success of implementing business cases driven by responsible management ethics and then open up for more collaborative approaches constituting new kinds of business cases for sustainability.

The possibility of different business cases towards sustainability identified in this paper takes CSR and corporate sustainability towards the recognition of possible change towards an ethically rich setting, an ideal which Roberts (2014) identifies as a mere possibility. Roberts (2014, p. 140) uses an analogy about accounting and accountability which argues that accounting having a financial focus housed in economics is incapable of ethics 'as it is condemned to recognise only discrete entities rather than inter-dependencies'—the others. He does hold out hope that 'accounting can itself be subverted from this exclusively financial focus through the development of new forms of social and environmental accounting', and the possibility of different business cases may temper the scepticism that new accountings such as a focus on responsibility or sustainability just presenting the world in fragments.

Recognition that managers may have different motivations to action on sustainability resulting in different foci of sustainability management activities and different kinds of business cases will help promote those who look towards support for adopting responsible and collaborative behaviour. The typology of business cases and sustainability developed and examined in this paper would encourage and facilitate further research to identify measures of the ethical stances of managers in different companies and different managers in the same organisation. The typology also encourages a balancing up away from the sole focus of conventional accounting on operations for profit and it provides a starting point for researchers to discover differences between profit and non-profit organisations, private and public sector and companies operating under different rules of law (e.g. Islamic, code and common).

From a pragmatic perspective, in this paper the links between ethical perspectives and business cases are developed based on four groups. The argument shows there is no one business case or ethical perspective available to managers, rather a set of cases. As a goal, collaborative practice articulates with care for the vulnerable including the environment, dialogic participation, a user orientation, non-hierarchical transdisciplinary teams and evidence gathered from the field. From such a perspective the strongest business case can be launched in settings where monetary motivations have been found heavily deficient.

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