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LEUPHANA UNIVERSITY OF LÜNEBURG

Steinbeis Innovation Center Logistics and Sustainability

"DEALING WITH CONTRADICTIONS" LEARNING MODULE

NOTES FOR TRAINEES/STUDENTS

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"DEALING WITH CONTRADICTIONS" LEARNING MODULE

You are sure to have experienced brief moments in your working and private life where you hesitate for an instant before coming to a decision. Car, bus, or bike? Coffee capsule or coffee pot? Print or work from the screen? Engage a sub-contractor or put the customer off? Dispatch the parcel as quickly as possible or wait until the lorry has reached full capacity?

Everyone faces dozens of situations like this every day. Ultimately, they arrive at a decision. Sometimes these decisions are even taken against their better judgement. But there is always a good reason for them. Or is there?

The world of work is teeming with decision situations between efficiency orientation and sustainability orientation. Sometimes we are not even aware of how important it is to identify such situations and consider the various options for action. The following learning tasks will help you to reflect upon the decision-making situations you face in your own individual working routine. You will apply the "systemic visualisation" method in order to present a contradiction between efficiency and sustainability from your own business world. You will rediscover your working day from a number of perspectives and discuss a wide range of possible courses of action.

During a workshop entitled "Sustainable logistics", experienced stakeholders from the transport and logistics sector have used the "systemic visualisation" method (for further information, see *Material 1*) to present the following illustration on the topic of "Network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector" (*Material 2*).

TASKS:

Tasks to complete individually

1. Read *Material 1* and use *Material 2* to help you understand the method of "systemic visualisation".
2. Use bullet points to describe the illustration (*Material 2*) with regard to:
   - stakeholders portrayed
   - their positions within the space
   - their viewing directions
3. Use bullet points to describe the network of relationships between the stakeholders portrayed in general terms. You may find *Note 1* helpful.
   a) Categorise your findings from tasks 1) and 2) within a context. To do so, use bullet points to interpret the illustration portrayed.
   b) Formulate a personal thesis that is capable of describing the illustration. Use the tips on how to formulate a hypothesis (*Note 2*).

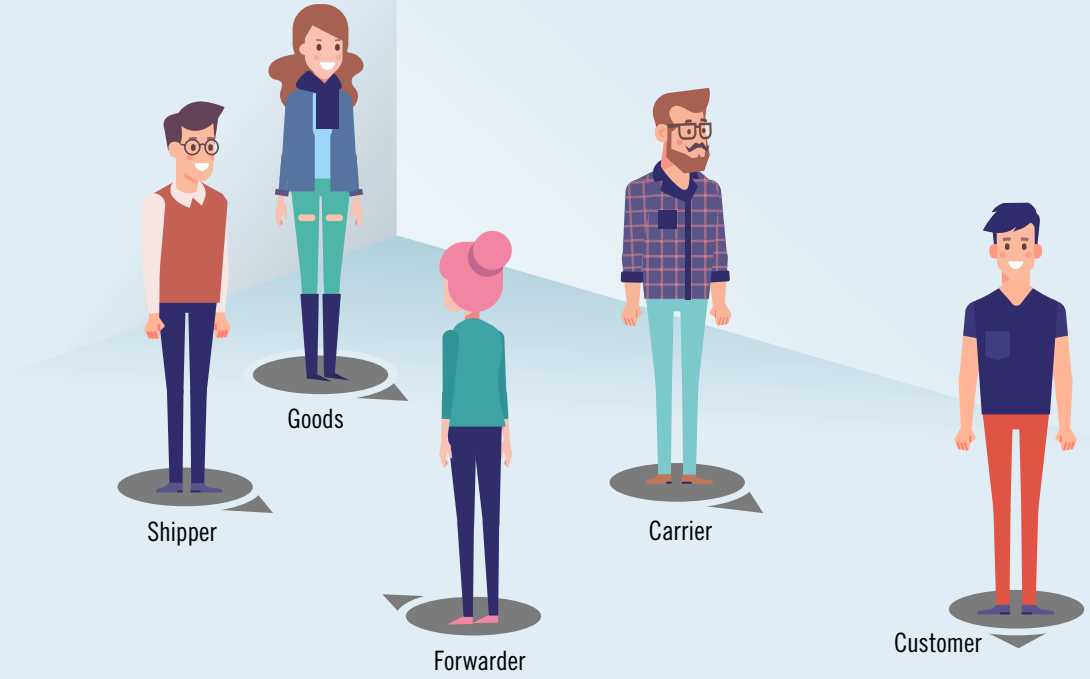
SYSTEMIC VISUALISATION:

MATERIAL 1

The "systemic visualisation" method enables structures and relationships in a company to be uncovered and the complex correlations of such structures and relationships to be presented. Six or seven elements of a company are selected for this purpose (e.g. management, staff, works council, profit, customers). These elements are then represented by people and placed in the space on a step-by-step basis. Their positions, viewing directions, and the distances between them allow these elements to generate a picture of the relevant facts and circumstances. Text is thus converted into or supplemented by pictorial language. The visualisation that has been created is then discussed and interpreted together with those involved and possible spectators. The visualisation facilitates a joint basis for debate, and this in turn allows a deeper understanding of the facts and visualised circumstances to evolve.

MATERIAL 2

ILLUSTRATION ON THE TOPIC OF "NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS SECTOR"



NOTE 1

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE EXPLANATION OF A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS SECTOR:

- What tasks do the individual stakeholders depicted have within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector?
- What interests do the stakeholders portrayed have within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector?
- Within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector, who wants what from whom and why?

TIPS FOR THE FORMULATION OF A HYPOTHESIS:

A hypothesis ...

... is an assertion that can be proved or refuted by argument.
... depicts correlations.
... consists of a complete sentence.
... is controversial and serves as a basis for discussion.
... needs to be coherent and reasonable within itself.
... should be comprehensible and objectively formulated.

One example could be: "Forwarding companies are reliant on innovative means of transport (such as drones and freight bicycles) in order to cope with the rising number of parcel deliveries."

Once you have taken a close look at the external visualisation, you should now present and discuss a contradiction between efficiency and sustainability from your own professional environment.

TASKS:

1. Start by reading Material 3 in order to gain an understanding of what a contradiction between efficiency and sustainability actually means.
2. Now transfer the contents of Material 3 to your everyday working life by identifying one or more contradictions in your own world of employment. Record your thoughts in bullet points on flip chart paper.
3. Work in pairs or groups to discuss the contradictions you have identified in the following way:
   a) Present the selected contradictions verbally and note these in bullet points on a flip chart.
   b) Now check all the ideas for commonalities and differences. You may find Note 3 helpful. Note your results on flip chart paper.
4. Agree together on a contradiction you wish to work with further. You may find Note 4 helpful.

Tasks to be completed in pairs or groups

MATERIAL 3

SUSTAINABILITY AND EFFICIENCY AS CONTRADICTORY MANAGEMENT RATIONALITIES

One of the meanings of efficiency is cost-effectiveness. Using as little as possible of a necessary resource is considered efficient. One might be tempted to take the view that increases in efficiency in everyday working life at the company will lead to sustainable business practices. Surely less waste or lower use of energy also means placing less of a burden on the environment and thus results in longer availability of finite resources. Or does it?

Not necessarily!

An example will be presented to uncover the misunderstanding that underpins this assumption. German aviation has more than tripled since 1990. Technical innovations, better use of space and various other measures have enabled average use of kerosene per person to be reduced by 42 per cent since this time – a good development at first glance. However, a closer look reveals that traffic volume has risen sharply over the same period. Despite strong increases in efficiency, the consequence is that more and more kerosene is being used in absolute terms. In fact, the figure has gone up by 85 per cent since 1990.
This is why scientists also refer to the "efficiency trap". Although increased efficiency permits a relative degree of environmental relief to be generated, the challenge of absolute production growth remains in place. Efficient action may be expedient from an economic perspective, but it is questionable from an ecological point of view.
The conclusion we may draw is that the drive towards efficiency and the orientation towards sustainability are two independent rationalities to which companies need to accord equal attention in order to do business in a future-proof way. Successful company management over the long term would therefore derive as many economic returns as possible from the available resources whilst retaining the resource base. This would be a fair way of working in intergenerational and intragenerational terms. Future-oriented business administration and commercial actions should therefore face up to the challenges posed by both short-term efficiency rationality and longer-term sustainability rationality and link up these two perspectives.
The following figure illustrates this relationship. The efficiency perspective can be described by the terms "functionality", "economic efficiency", and "legal conformity". The sustainability perspective is denoted by the terms "ecological efficiency", "material preservation", and "responsibility".

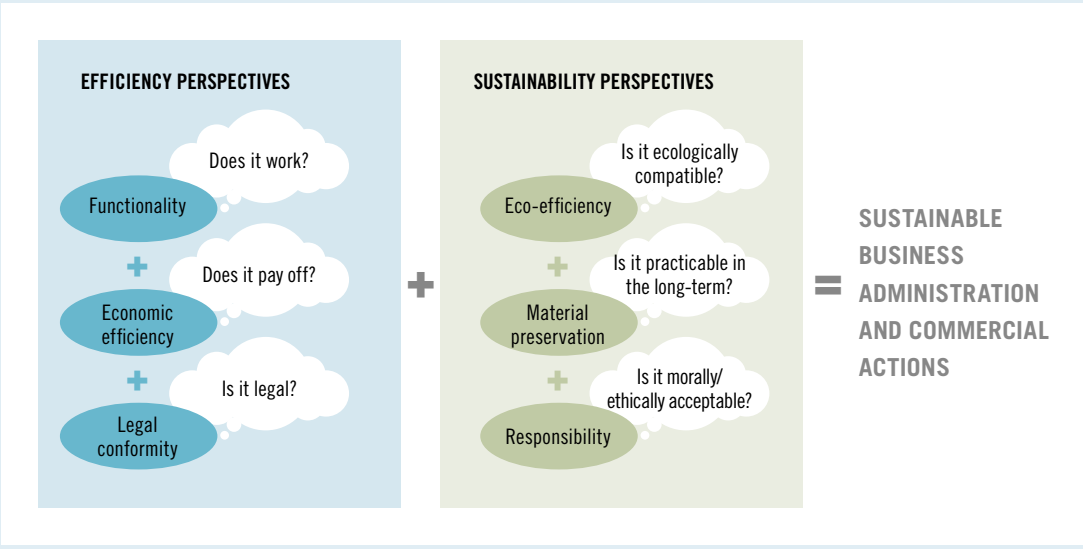


Figure 3: Efficiency and sustainability perspectives in business administration and commercial actions (representation by Müller-Christ, 2014)

Business administration and commercial actions that are aligned to sustainability are thus characterised by the fact that contradictions between the perspectives of efficiency and sustainability are recognised and dealt with in the daily decision-making situation.

KEY QUESTIONS TO CHECK COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONTRADICTIONS IDENTIFIED:

NOTE 3

- What tasks do the individual stakeholders depicted have within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector?
- What interests do the stakeholders portrayed have within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector?
- Within the general network of relationships in the transport and logistics sector, who wants what from whom and why?

TIPS FOR THE SELECTION OF A CONTRADICTION:

NOTE 4

The following aspects are important when choosing a contradiction:

- You should view the contradiction as being relevant for future-oriented and sustainable actions in everyday working life.
- The contradiction should include people taking action or decision-makers.
- The contradiction should actually be a contradiction. This means that opposing interests are affected.

Conducting a quick vote is also a way of selecting a contradiction. Each person is given a brief time to think and then places a sticker on the flip chart sheet next to the contradiction they favour. The contradiction receiving the most votes is chosen.

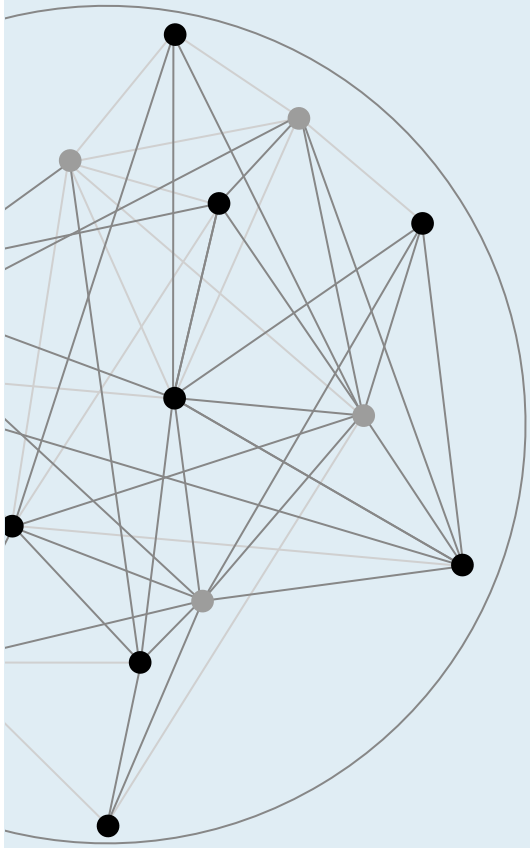
TASK:

Tasks to be completed in pairs or groups

1. Carry out a "systemic visualisation" on the basis of the contradiction identified. Your trainer/teacher will provide you with all the further information you require. The material for this learning task is included in the Notes for Trainers/Teachers. The task below may be completed as an alternative if implementation of this learning task is not planned.

Alternative task:

2. Discuss within the group:
   a) which stakeholders are involved in the contradiction selected
   b) which action options the stakeholders have against the background of the two perspectives of efficiency and sustainability



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