

Developing Sustainable Capabilities in Companies

In exchange with companies, researchers from FH Wien der WKW explored the capabilities required for the transformation to a more sustainable economy.

Vienna, June 19, 2024 – Over the past three years, the City of Vienna Competence Team “Change for Corporate Sustainability” (TransformS) has developed practical models to support companies in actively and successfully meeting the challenges of sustainable management. Daniela Ortiz Avram, Martine Andraos and Katharina Salomon, researchers at the Institute for Business Ethics and Sustainable Strategy (IBES) at FH Wien der WKW, focused on sustainable innovations in companies and the associated supply chains.

In exchange with Austrian companies such as VERBUND AG and Metalltechnik Vils GmbH, the necessary dynamic capabilities were analyzed and further developed. As part of the project, which has now been completed and funded by the City of Vienna, sustainability competencies were established in the curricula of all study programs at FH Wien der WKW. In addition, a qualification program was designed for FH Wien der WKW students to train specialists as sustainability change agents. The course will be held for the third time in the winter semester 2024/25.

Step-by-step transformation with a new typology

The TransformS competence team has developed a new typology for companies to categorize their sustainability strategy. This typology helps with optimization measures at company level as well as with the systemic transformation of entire value chains. According to project leader and Head of IBES Daniela Ortiz, managers can use the four types to "manage their company's sustainability strategy in a more targeted manner, analyze the current situation and define goals".

The typology includes four stages that companies can use to develop a comprehensive sustainability strategy step by step. These begin with the company's own "eco-efficiency" and a "transformation at company level". This includes, for example, the use of alternative energy sources or new sustainable business models. Beyond the company itself, the third and fourth stages describe "eco-efficiency in supply chains and at network level" as well as a "systemic transformation" that takes into account the processes of all stakeholders, similar to the circular economy.

Sustainable transformation in dialogue with industry

In a further step, the researchers of the TransformS competence team analyzed sustainability-oriented innovation projects in large and established companies (including VERBUND, Neuman Aluminium, Lenzing, Post AG). In order to successfully develop these projects, companies need so-called "dynamic capabilities for sustainability". Nikolaus Egyed, Transformation Lead at VERBUND, describes working with the TransformS competence team as "a good opportunity to examine our transformation process at VERBUND from a scientific perspective and to compare it with the experiences made by other companies. The interviews and the concluding workshops resulted in very helpful recommendations that were immediately incorporated into our mission for more sustainability."

PRESS RELEASE



Sustainable dialog on the supply chain

The analysis made it possible to develop a well-founded model for the emergence of "dynamic capabilities for sustainability". Three productive dialogues between the companies involved in the supply chain were identified. While multi-stakeholder dialogues often trigger sustainability-oriented innovation projects, intra-company and supply chain dialogues lead to the pooling and coordination of resources in order to implement the initiated projects. For Rainer Keller, Managing Director of Metalltechnik Vils GmbH, participating in TransformS was "an absolutely valuable experience, as we came across aspects of sustainability that we would not have discovered in our day-to-day work, or would have noticed too late. The approaches we gained at an operational level will also be very useful for our company in the future."

Integrating sustainability into all degree programs

To initiate and support transformation processes towards sustainability in companies, motivated specialists with sustainability knowledge and the corresponding skills are needed. FHWien der WKW has therefore integrated sustainability as an interdisciplinary subject into all of its study programs. In addition, the project developed a voluntary qualification program to promote sustainability skills, which will be offered for the third time at FHWien der WKW in the winter semester 2024/25. This course promotes the individual skills of students that enable them to take responsibility for shaping sustainable change in organizations.

Photos:

TransformS project leader Daniela Ortiz discusses the research results with international scientists at the European Academy of Management (EURAM) 2023 in Dublin.

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The TransformS competence team in exchange with Austrian companies: Katharina Salomon and Daniela Ortiz (both FHWien der WKW) with Olga Loidolt-Shen (Transformation Manager / Corporate Development - VERBUND) and Nikolaus Egyed (Transformation Lead - VERBUND), from left to right.

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