

The Unbearable Lightness of appearing

Scris de Pierluigi Orati
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CSR, Sustainability, Environmental, green, ethical, social, dialoguing, cooperation, engagement, commitment. Should we look for some “tags” related to the matter, these are some of the keywords, till the next “innovator” will find and/or invent the next “cool word”, that gives Corporations an excuse to proceed on the way of appearing sustainable and acting as ever instead.

Reading most of the Reports on Sustainability around the world, the first page will start often with a “medal collection” where there is no “assurance” over the credibility of the prize giving but that page surely helps the readers to be advised on the showed quality of the Corporation.

This is another signal of the current state of art regarding Corporate Sustainability and its capacity to make the business a better “place”.

Unfortunately, as the track record of facts showed, some of the best awarded corporations by an Environmental, Social and Ethical point of view, finally were dramatically discovered to be deeply unethical, Environmental unfriendly and “socially dangerous” or in some cases directly or indirectly affecting human rights as only some intelligent (and silent) bombing could do.

With these unfortunate experiences all the professionals working on sustainability issues surely have the right tools to detect and report this disgusting disguise. Very often is too easy to discover which company is wearing the sustainable mask and acting instead with few qualms keeping as sole driver the mishandling of the stakeholders.

I think is the right time to step forward for those professionals involved directly or indirectly with sustainability in order to start avoiding fancy receptions and cocktails repeating the same words for ages and shake-up instead the whole sustainability matter at the rallying cry of “Being and not appearing”.

The medals obtained with friendly sponsorships and proudly showed up in the Sustainability reports are no more critical items to be sustainable, especially when “externally controlled KPIs” can give the actual check-up of the companies. On the long run those medals will not come in handy for the Corporations but could even create biases. I think all the time it takes to understand the real Sustainability level of a corporations is well worth and cannot be just simply and proudly showed off in the first page of a Report it needs to be constantly discussed and analyzed.

I propose and I am willing to launch with interested partners, a “democratic rating” originated over the actual sustainability of corporations that would start directly from the stakeholders. Not only a web space where is possible to collect the grievances of clients or shareholders but a sort of Agorà of Sustainability (there is even already a LinkedIn group with such charming and neoclassical name) where would be possible to discuss and work in double harness over the matter analyzing figures and policies and not just promises. A sort of Facebook of Corporations

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where registered stakeholders could post their experiences and ideas.

Let's ring out the old and bring in the new in this space and even if it can be argued (by the most "just prized" corporations) that this wouldn't work or is a dangerous tool in the hands of a possible competitor, the Actual Sustainable (or really committed) ones just need to build up their confidence and participate the "game of democracy" and healthy (R-Evolutionist) competition.

Surely the Corporations and the multinationals that now are showing off their disguised sustainability could become stuttering once they lose their pride of place, but, in an ideal system, (which is not just a fairy tale) this would force them to bear down towards some actual policies to consider the stakeholders and not just to mesmerize them.

I am sure many companies and professionals, academics, analysts, consultants and managers would have the nerve to try this democratic exercise, meeting, doing so, the large demand of ACTUAL sustainability needed in time of recession and after the storm will pass.

Pierluigi Orati has a Master Degree in Social Sciences and he is a doctor in Economics with a strong background on these topics, he has been several years in charge of relations with Sustainability Analysts and Social Responsible Investors answering their questions and providing them with all the necessary information about Enel's CSR.

The creation of a section of Enel's CSR home page to involve stakeholders directly through multidimensional scaling (Sustainability Meter) was one of Pierluigi's specific tasks and the broad response of stakeholders seemed to indicate the success of the initiative.

Pierluigi has been a member of the international GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) Working Group Board, involved in revising and discussing worldwide with Enel's competitors and NGOs in order to cooperate with them in writing the new CSR guidelines and detecting the key performance indicators for companies in the energy industry (EUSS).

He is also a free lance journalist and a member of the International Scientific Board Committee of "La Finanza" two-monthly magazine of Economy, Finance and Geopolitics.

Pierluigi is currently working, in the little spare time, as free lance independent sustainability consultant and daily with renewed interest and effort in the Country Risk Management unit for Enel where he manages relations with the ECAs (Export Credit Agencies) at a global level.

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