



Young talent as the driving force towards a sustainable future

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Background

Legislation regarding climate change is becoming more ambitious. However, 59% of young people worldwide are still very worried and miss footholds to actively participate in coming to solutions other than making personal changes. On the other hand, personnel in professions relevant to the climate accord are extremely scarce. SAMEEN works on these challenges by giving young talent the opportunity to work on real sustainability challenges for clients besides their study.

Objective

SAMEEN faces challenges in the market of sustainable consultancy, for example, there is doubt about the proposed level of consultancy. The challenges originate from industry wide standards and beliefs, also called institutional forces, on how to work with young talent. This study aimed to identify these forces and to give advice on how to deal with these forces. The following research question was answered: *How can SAMEEN strategically change or use the institutional forces it faces in setting a new standard for young talent in the market for sustainable consultancy?*

Theory

Theory shows that reshaping institutional forces is essential for sustainable entrepreneurs to stay financially healthy without compromising on their mission. Institutional theory explains that the forces in the market are created and maintained by incumbents of an industry. These forces consist of the formal rule sets and agreements (regulative measures), the less formal interaction sequences (normative measures), and the taken-for-granted assumptions (cognitive measures). Institutional entrepreneurship highlights the ability of individual entrepreneurs or enterprises to change these forces using different strategies. The success of these strategies however is heavily depended on the state of the field. This study used the general theoretical concepts to make sense of these macro-level concepts in identifying the greater dynamics while allowing for an inductive approach to identifying the influences on a single company

Methods

This research stemmed from a subjective worldview in which the ability of organizations to affect the system is prominent. A qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews was chosen to ensure a full understanding of the institutional forces present in the field of sustainable consultancy. For this study 8 senior consultants with additional experience in management positions or business development were interviewed. Questions pertained to the state of the field, common practices, and perceived strategies for change, as deemed important in literature. The research has influences of action-based research as the researcher worked at the company alongside doing this study. Data was structured based on the theoretical concepts and analysed by looking for patterns within these concepts.

Results

This research has given insight in the main institutional forces that influence SAMEEN, the state of the field of sustainable consultancy and the strategies for change.

Institutional forces

Three main institutional forces were found:

- The field of sustainable consultancy is heavily driven by governmental legislation as well as governmental hiring.
- Consultancy firms acquire most of their business through reactive acquisition as a result of a leading knowledge position.
- Young talent needs to learn professional skills rather than specific expertise before receiving more challenging projects. Virtually all consultancy firms are looking for similar skill sets, namely that of a T-shaped professional.

State of the field

This study finds that the field of sustainable consultancy is rather stable but has yet to mature. The field consists of multiple submarkets which each have their own maturity, stability and external influences. The study finds a process in which these submarkets mature. In each step of the market different types of projects and consultancy are more prominent.

- A new market is mostly focused on strategic advice and doing pilots. Institutional forces are copied from adjacent fields and the pilots are used to acquire a leading knowledge position.
- A developing market translates strategies to practical projects. In this market companies with a leading knowledge position can quickly grow and dictate the new forces of the field.
- A mature market has standardized most products and procedures and a lot of work needs to be done. A leading knowledge position allows companies to take on difficult projects for high prices.

Strategies for change

The study finds three main strategies for dealing with, or changing, institutional forces.

- Use governmental development programs to create a leading knowledge position.
- Make choices for specific markets that are in line with expertise and interest and that have growth potential.
- Find partners that can help fast track the development of young talent with expertise and challenges

Conclusions

The research concludes with an advice for SAMEEN on how to change the perception of young talent fundamentally by creating a leading knowledge position in a new market. It additionally gives advice on how to deal with the present forces by, among other things, creating an onboarding track for young talent that's in line with the needs of the market and by having young talent play a central role in reactive acquisition.