THE SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS: A MISSING INGREDIENT IN CREATING A SUSTAINABLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

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Abstract
In this paper we attempt to connect the corporate social responsibility agenda with current debates within sustainable construction. We reveal an apparent disconnect between the focus on sustainable products and processes and the orientation of the businesses within which they reside. Current agendas are characterised by a desire to create a more sustainable built environment, but with little regard for the businesses that enact such agendas. We argue that the firm is the enabler of a more holistic CSR agenda, and that sustainability needs to be present, visible and integrated in the business at all levels and in all functions of the sustainable construction organisation. An archetype of a sustainable construction business is developed based on a synthesis of related literatures that could act as a framework for enacting responsible strategies in the future. In arguing for a ‘business focus’ we seek to broaden the current debates within the sustainable construction literature, and to open up new research trajectories around responsible sourcing, business ethics and organisational change for corporate sustainability, which have hitherto been underplayed within built environment research literature.

Keywords
CSR, sustainability, construction business, corporate strategy.

INTRODUCTION

How to create and maintain a sustainable built environment represents one of the most pressing and challenging agendas confronting the construction industry globally. The building sector accounts for around a third of carbon emissions and there exists considerable scope for reducing the industry’s carbon impact (Ürge-Vorsatz et al, 2007). However, most of the legislation, guidance and good practice which has emerged in this area of the past 30 years has arguably originated from a desire to encourage the production of sustainable built assets rather than from a desire to embed sustainable practices as an integral component of corporate and social responsibility (CSR) policies. Given that CSR fits well within the sustainability agenda (Green, 2009) this infers that there is scope to improve the ways in which business strategy is aligned with a sustainability agenda. Indeed, taking a broad view of sustainable development should lead researchers to consider CSR as a part of the ‘sustainable development’ framework (see Sexton et al, 2009). Whilst ‘soft’