

Determinants of professional commitment to environmental sustainability

Citation for published version (APA):

Kientzel, J. (2015). *Determinants of professional commitment to environmental sustainability*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Boekenplan. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20150909jk>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2015

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20150909jk](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20150909jk)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Summary

Environmental degradation, climate change and management of scarce natural resources are among the most pressing social issues humanity faces today and will face for generations to come. Climate change and environmental damage cannot be seen and treated as separate problems to be solved after other social issues higher on the political agenda have been solved. Due to the enormity of the environmental problems and the almost inevitable challenges that our and future generations will have to deal with, denial of climate change or general apathy is a common consequence. Similar to other areas in which people feel overwhelmed by an enormous task, procrastination and avoidance mechanisms are activated to defer actions and postpone important lifestyle and resource usage decisions. These characteristics are not solely confined to private and household behaviors but also apply to individuals in workplace and professional environments.

While policy-makers have the power to influence the way societies deal with the impending environmental and climate change issues, laws and regulations are often either not feasible or desirable given the considerable efforts involved and limited enforcement capabilities. Hence, Voluntary Environmental Programs (VEPs) have gained considerable popularity in policy-makers' toolboxes. At first sight, the advantages of these programs are clear: Organizations and individuals engage in environmentally desirable behaviors not because they have to but because they see value in engaging in pro-environmental behaviors.

Sustainable business strategies have been hailed as an important part of the puzzle and individuals in households have simultaneously become a target for government policies to entice them to become more environmentally responsible and save natural resources.

Studies as to what factors contribute to make them more likely to save water, energy and to favor environmentally friendly modes of transport are rife. Economic, sociological, psychological, anthropological factors influencing environmental decisions by individuals and groups have become a matter of interest for policy makers and governments. Particularly Voluntary Environmental Programs (VEPs) as a means of cost-effective environmental governance and regulation has become a major focus of policy and regulatory interest.

Research in cognition in organizations needs to receive more attention to better understand importance of individual differences to determine organizations' reaction to environmentally friendly solutions. Further development of green technologies and associated reduced costs, however, may not be sufficient to make environmentally friendly solutions in the private sector more popular. Identifying social and psychological factors on the individual, organizational and institutional level is needed to influence social structures by providing rewards and incentives (monetary and non-monetary).

To understand the determinants for voluntary environmental behavior and the effectiveness of VEPs is an intriguing topic. However, the decision processes of policy-makers themselves, business leaders and professionals in their work roles have not been studied extensively. The present dissertation aims to shed a light on environmental decision-making processes in the construction industry in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada as well as service and manufacturing companies in the Netherlands and Germany. The main focus of these studies is to investigate the actions of business professionals to adopt voluntary environmental programs. The studies presented in this dissertation are based on various theoretical approaches ranging from social psychological models to information science, diffusion of innovation as well as governance and management literature.

A large number of studies have identified factors that influence individuals' propensity for pro-environmental behavior. This dissertation studied the adoption of voluntary environmental programs (VEPs) in five different countries on two continents: Canada and the United States (North America) and Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Europe). The research project analyzes socio-psychological determinants of intention and behavior with regards to VEP uptake in several industries with a special focus on the building and construction industry. The data used in this dissertation were self-collected data from interviews and surveys in all five countries.

The factors studied include attitudes, norms, perceived behavioral control, social identity, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations within the contexts of professional decisions and cooperation behavior. This dissertation's main objective is to determine factors that drive voluntary and environmentally sustainable professional practices in the private sector. As voluntary professional behavior is extremely diverse, this thesis investigates "voluntarism" in the form of Voluntary Environmental Programs (VEPs). Several studies were conducted to explain professionals' environmentally relevant behavior within a professional decision-making context.

Results demonstrate that social and psychological variables can offer valuable contributions to explain variance in adoption behavior and all of the frameworks contribute to better understand the adoption of environmental professional behaviors. However, the results demonstrate that engaging in environmentally relevant behaviors is highly contextual. Professional behavior changes can be difficult as individuals are reluctant to question previously

learned practices and they rely on cooperation from other building professionals. As a consequence, this dissertation demonstrates that despite some common behavior patterns VEP adoption processes, the reasons for adoption among private sector professionals are complex, both from a contextual and psychological point of view. The results confirm, however, that policies and programs cannot be designed and implemented successfully without understanding workers' professional needs and social-psychological determinants that drive program uptake.