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The Age of Institutional Pressures: Adaptive Role of Sustainability Management

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Introduction

In recent years, sustainability has moved from the periphery to the core of managerial agendas. Organizations now operate in a context where institutional pressures (Contrafatto, 2014; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) are reshaping the foundations of management practice. Examples such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) illustrate how sustainability demands extend beyond compliance and disclosure obligations, creating new challenges and opportunities for strategy, governance, and decision-making (Hristov & Searcy, 2024). These institutional pressures influence corporate context in many ways, such as by requiring transparency, accountability, sustainability-focused investments, corporate governance structures, data collection, reporting systems, and strategic decision-

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2022) in how sustainability is managed and measured within organizations.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to sustainability management and reporting (Hummel and Jobst, 2024; Adams and Frost, 2008), it remains unclear how institutional changes, especially those triggered by regulatory reforms (e.g., CSRD), affect sustainability management practices (Beusch et al., 2022; Gond et al., 2012; Searcy, 2012; Simons, 1995). The evolution in sustainability raises critical questions for both scholars and practitioners: How do sustainability-related pressures transform managerial decision-making and organizational behavior? What governance structures and control mechanisms foster alignment between sustainability commitments and corporate incentives? In what ways do digital technologies, ESG reporting systems, and data analytics influence the timeliness, quality, and accountability of sustainability-related decisions? How do organizations navigate the tensions between short-term performance imperatives and long-term sustainability goals? What cultural and institutional factors shape the pathways from compliance-driven sustainability to strategy-driven sustainability?

This Special Issue invites theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that advance understanding of how sustainability management evolves in the face of growing institutional complexity. We welcome diverse perspectives – from strategy, organization theory, accounting and control, innovation, operations, and governance – to shed light on how sustainability becomes integrated into the fabric of managerial decision-making and organizational life. By reframing sustainability as a driver of strategic transformation rather than a compliance exercise, this Special Issue aims to broaden the conversation across disciplines, contexts, and levels of analysis.

List of topic areas

We invite contributions addressing (but not limited to) the following topics:

- The role of institutional, cultural, and stakeholder pressures in shaping

sustainability strategies.

- Governance structures, management control systems, and incentive mechanisms that support sustainability integration.
- The evolution of sustainability management from compliance-driven to strategy-driven approaches.
- Digital technologies, data analytics, and ESG reporting systems as enablers of sustainability-oriented decisions.
- Interactions between financial and non-financial performance objectives in decision-making.
- Organizational tensions between short-term performance imperatives and long-term sustainability goals.

Other research inquiries in related domains are welcome to be addressed within this Special Issue. Contributors are encouraged to contact the Editors (see below for the contact information) should there be a question regarding the topic fit.

Key deadlines:

Closing date for manuscripts submission: 30/11/2026

Email for submissions: ivodimitrov.hristov@univaq.it

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