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Increasing the Competitive Advantage of Halal Businesses – Interdependence Between Internal and External Processes

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ABSTRACT

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Halal standards have been developed in order to offer goods to Muslims, which do not contain any forbidden substances. At the beginning, this monitoring was limited to the internal production process. But, it was realised that this was not enough and that certification should be expanded, in order to include the input and output processes related to the final product. For a successful implementation of halal standards, it is necessary to communicate these standards to all stakeholders. This paper argues that the implementation of “halal standards” in primary and support activities cannot be achieved without a good and just relationship with all people and other creations included in the implementation of a business. A long-term relationship with stakeholders will help to develop internal processes by efficiently implementing a process-oriented, quality management system based on continuous innovation. On the other hand, short-term success can be achieved with a great product, but when the rights of employees, suppliers, financiers etc. are ignored, profits will diminish very fast. Ignoring the interests of others will inevitably lead to the destruction of infrastructure, manufacturing of long-term harmful products and other actions that will harm people, animals or the environment.

1. Introduction

The market for “halal products” has been continuously growing, not only due to demand from Muslims, but also from non-Muslims. “Halal” means permissible according to Islamic law (Shari’ah), whereas the opposite is “haram” (prohibited). It is almost a well-known fact that Muslims neither consume alcohol nor pork. But the concept of “halal” and “haram” is much more, because it is based on the firm belief that Allah, the Lord of all worlds, the All-Knowing, the Creator of the visible and the invisible, is the best knower of His creatures, and therefore knows what is best for them. Just as the manufacturer of a device knows at best the pros and cons of his device, the Creator knows what

is good and what is bad for His creatures. Humans cannot know everything, and therefore have to use everything created according to the guidance of Allah: “Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favours, [both] apparent and unapparent? But of the people is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening Book [from Him].” (Luqman 31:20)

Sometimes people think that Muslims talk too much about prohibitions. However, the reason for this is simply because the general rule in Islamic law in the relation between creations is: “Everything is permitted, except what is forbidden”. (El-Qaradawi, 1997) Here, the

principle of permission is emphasised, because the number of prohibited things is much smaller compared to the permissible ones. From this perspective, halal standards have been developed in order to offer goods, which do not contain any forbidden substances, so they can be used by Muslims. At the beginning, this monitoring was limited to the internal production process. But, it was realised that this was not enough and that certification should be expanded, in order to include the input and output processes related to the final product. In this way, halal standards cover the production process of food and beverages, but also clothes, medicine and cosmetics.

In this paper, we want to analyse the impact of halal regulations on the competitive advantage from the aspect of Porter's value chain. Porter's value chain looks at the company as a system consisting of primary and support activities. Primary activities contain: inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, sales and marketing, and service; whereas support activities contain: firm infrastructure, human resources, technology and procurement. Depending on the way how value chain activities are carried out, revenues and costs are affected. In order to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage, a company must understand every component of this value chain. From this perspective, halal standards currently cover all primary activities. But what about support activities? Are they halal? Will the implementation of halal standards increase competitiveness? In which way?

In order to answer these questions, we will start analysing internal processes in a company by Porter's value chain as a map. We will examine these hypotheses by analysing what the Shari'ah says about the organisation of resources in a company, i.e. analysing halal standardisation not only from the production process, but including all necessary resources, and what principles in the management of a company can be derived from these rules. In order to achieve this goal, we have also to analyse the relationship of a company to its stakeholders and all other persons and creations. In other words, our analysis will include what is called in modern management the "stakeholder approach". The stakeholder approach sees a company as a socio-economic system, where different groups (stakeholders) with different interests work together. (Wöhe, 2000) Every group makes a certain contribution to the company and asks for adequate compensation. The major task of the

company's management is to balance between the interests of these different stakeholders. If the interests of a group are ignored, this will inevitably decrease competitiveness of the company and lead to its end. Therefore, we will additionally analyse the effect of stakeholder management from an Islamic perspective on competitiveness.

2. Increasing internal competitiveness from an Islamic perspective

The first step in starting a business is to think about a product. From an Islamic perspective, products, which are explicitly forbidden in the sources of the Shari'ah (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) are prohibited. These products are according to El-Qaradawi (1997):

- intoxicants (alcohol, drugs etc.),
- forbidden meat (pork; dead, non-slaughtered animals; blood; animals dedicated to other than Allah),
- gold and silk products for men,
- gold and silver dishes,
- statues,
- interest-based transactions,
- pornography,
- prostitution and
- gambling

It is not only forbidden to trade such products, but also to produce them or get in touch in any other way (Rahman, 2014). The same rule applies to raw materials, packaging or any other possibility to contaminate the final product. In order to avoid such problems, it is necessary to have a process-oriented approach in dealing with the production of halal products. It is indispensable to have a continuous quality control for the whole process from raw materials to the finished product. This implies four things, which are promoted in modern management:

1. Process-oriented thinking
2. Implementation of a quality management system
3. Innovation
4. Holistic approach

It is insufficient to implement halal only within an organisation or factory. It is necessary to communicate halal standards with suppliers and distributors. This is especially necessary in the production of food, beverages, medicine, cosmetics, clothing and shoes. The best way to understand this principle is to analyse the process of meat production according to halal

standards. Many Muslims understand under halal meat the ritual slaughtering, which is defined in detail in the Shari'ah. However, according to Shari'ah rules, it is necessary to investigate whether the animal was fed with fodder containing forbidden substances. If it was fed with forbidden fodder, a quarantine has to be observed. (BAS, 2010) In an industrial scale meat production, it is also necessary to check whether all tools and machines are free from forbidden substances, and whether during transport or sale, there could be possible contamination.

There are also other Shari'ah rules, which have to be observed at the acquisition of goods and materials. For example, it is prohibited to buy materials from dubious sources (e.g. smuggling, theft), because buying such material makes someone complicit in such transactions. Of course, this is quite clear, but it is an indicator that a company should be careful at selecting its suppliers.

This is a classic example for the implementation of modern quality management. This process-oriented approach is also the core of modern "kaizen" philosophy, which tries to implement standards for continuous improvement. We can see the parallel with the Qur'anic imperative of "competition in doing good", stated in the ayat: "... If Allah willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in good deeds. ..." (Al-Ma'ida 5:48). This competition is not a classic competition between companies, but a competition between the believers to provide the best possible products to its customers, by using all given resources in the best possible manner. In fact, this represents an act of worship.

This is a very important fact for any halal business. It is not sufficient to rely on customers, which will only buy a product due to the halal label (i.e. due to ideological reasons). We have to keep in mind that customers have certain expectations about a product. If these expectations are not met, it can be observed that consumers will switch to a product, which is close to halal standards giving themselves a certain justification.

In order to offer the best products, innovation is at the core. Creative ways have to be developed to fulfil Shari'ah standards and use resources in a rational way, on the one hand, and meet the needs of the customers, on the other hand. But to achieve all these goals, it is necessary to acquire knowledge. The first ayat in the Qur'an revealed

to the Prophet (pbuh) was "Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)" (Al-Alaq 96:1); a clear commandment to continuously acquire knowledge, apply it and further develop existing solutions. It is necessary to understand all Shari'ah rules and to develop halal products further. An example of this is the production of medicine. If there is a forbidden element in a drug, alternatives have to be developed. Another example is halal hospitality industry. In this case, different halal products are combined for a final service. It is quite clear to offer halal food and the absence of forbidden products in a hotel or restaurant (e.g. alcohol). But, in order to have full halal products, it is necessary to understand the lifestyle of a Muslim. Besides food, people also must have the possibility to fulfil their religious obligations, especially their five daily prayers. Therefore, a prayer room (masjid) is needed and a place to carry out the ritual washing before prayer (wudu). A company has to be fully aware that there will always be new challenges, so it is necessary to be prepared for such situations. This is in line with the words of Allah: "Whoever is within the heavens and earth asks Him; every day He is bringing about a matter." (Ar-Rahman 55:29)

Halal certification focuses around the customer. The customer should receive a product according to his/her expectations. From the customer's perspective, no forbidden element should be included in a halal product, and in this case his/her need is fulfilled. But, what about the entrepreneurial perspective? Is it enough to avoid offering forbidden products or to exclude prohibited ingredients in permissible products, so the business is halal (permissible)? This leads us to the next question: a holistic perspective. The process-oriented approach, in fact, represents a holistic approach to management of a company. We have not only to think about the individual welfare of a company (a "micro-perspective"), but inevitably have to think in broader terms, by including all necessary stakeholders and all necessary resources. This comes from the fact that the whole world is given by Allah as a trust to mankind, as mentioned in the following ayat: "It is He who made the earth tame for you - so walk among its slopes and eat of His provision - and to Him is the resurrection." (Al-Mulk 67:15) However, creation was not handed over to man unconditionally, but was entrusted to him as a trust to test how he will deal with all of creation. It is forbidden to violate or damage the rights of

creation towards man without reason. This fact obligates men and women to use all given resources with respect and in a sustainable way. If man subjugates creation, then he should do as little harm and use the best and most innocuous methods. We must always keep in mind the long-term effects of our deeds, for which we will be held responsible on the day of judgement. The lack of this “long-term responsibility” leads to all problems in this world, as said by Allah says in the Qur'an: “Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].” (Ar-Rum 30:41)

A good example for sustainable behaviour is the rule to avoid using too much water for ablution. The Messenger of Allah passed by Sa'd when he was performing ablution, and he said: 'What is this extravagance?' He said: 'Can there be any extravagance in ablution?' He said: 'Yes, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river.'" (Sunan Ibn Majah 425)

Thus, we have to think about the beginning and end of a product - what resources do we use and where do they end? What external effects do we cause? It is a kind of “Life cycle assessment”, which does not only assess environmental impacts, but also impacts on all creatures.

3. The relationship between stakeholders form an Islamic perspective

In our holistic analysis, we should not forget other stakeholders, except customers, who contribute in a certain way to the success of a company. They all have a certain claim towards a company. These stakeholders can be grouped in the following way, considering their claims towards a company and their contribution.

Table 1: Input and Output of Stakeholders to a Company; Source: Interpretation by authors

Stakeholder	Input	Output
Investors	Money	Halal profit, protection of capital and interests, investment in halal assets
Financiers	Money	Halal profit, repayment of debts
Employees	Work	Fair remuneration, working conditions, respect
Management	Work	Salary, respect, autonomy
Customers	Procurement of products	High quality halal products
Suppliers	Goods and services	Reliable payments, long-term relationships
Public	Infrastructure, law and order, environmental assets	Tax payments, complying with laws, environmental protection

The interaction between stakeholders is defined by formal contracts or social contracts (i.e. laws). It is necessary to consider the interests of all stakeholders in order to develop a long-term and fair relationship. Therefore, a dialogue between stakeholders is indispensable in order to receive continuous feedback that will enable a company to pursue its purpose more profitably, with more support and less tensions. Tensions will occur when contracting parties manipulate with the other side. Such manipulations are based on two things, which are mentioned in the Shari'ah:

- abuse of superior bargaining power,
- asymmetric information,

The abuse of superior bargaining positions occurs when a contracting party imposes unreasonable disadvantage on the partner by exploiting his/her position. This is the case when a contracting partner is in dire need of a certain resource. We may think about this situation, when a poor person asks for a loan from a rich one. But this can also happen, when a multinational company asks for a loan, because

it has to pay a certain surplus (interest) to receive the money. The difference between these situations is the amount of interest, but not the fact that interest has to be paid. In the same way, a company trying to build a shopping centre can be exploited, because it must pay an enormous amount of money for a small plot of land.

Exploitation of a bargaining position especially occurs at financing contracts. One of the major resources needed for an enterprise, no matter whether it is for-profit or non-profit purposes is money. In order to better understand this question, we will use the following definition for finance given by Professor Monzer Kahf: “[Finance] is the provision of factors of production, goods and services without requiring an immediate counterpart to be paid by the recipient. (Kahf, 1999)

This definition shows us that financiers of a company are not only partners, shareholders, financial intermediaries (banks etc.), but also suppliers and employees, because these stakeholders also do not ask for an immediate counterpart when they provide their services and goods. So, the complex question of corporate finance shows us that many different stakeholders contribute financially to a company. But, this position can be exploited. The Sunnah shows us how interest (or exploitation) can occur in simple exchange transactions. For example, when we look at the following hadith:

“The Messenger of Allah said: 'Dates for dates, wheat for wheat, barley for barley, salt for salt, exchanged hand to hand. Whoever gives more or takes more has engaged in interest unless they are of different types.'” (Sunan an-Nasa'i 4559)

Here six kinds of commodities are mentioned. A number of Islamic jurists classify these goods into two types: money and food. The Shari'ah prohibits the unequal exchange of the same type of goods, no matter whether it is a spot or a delayed transaction. A person, willing to receive a certain amount of money now, in order to repay a higher amount, is extorted in a certain way, because this is not a logical transaction. Famous Islamic scholar Ibn al-Qayyim explains this rule in the following way: “The secret which is behind the prohibition of unequal exchange of the same kind of precious metals is the preservation of their basic purpose, i.e. liquidity; and the reason for the prohibition of unequal exchange of the same kind of food is the preservation of their basic purpose, i.e. using as food.” (Islahi, 1996)

The Shari'ah stipulates detailed rules for goods

with monopoly power that can be used in order to develop just contracts between contracting parties. Therefore, if someone wants to invest money, he/she has to share the risk with the contracting partner or give him/her an interest-free loan. Another possibility is the exchange of a physical asset for money with a delay. In such a case a physical asset, which has no monopoly status is exchanged and therefore an individual cannot monopolise a good. The prohibition of the hoarding of food has not to be explained further, we think it is enough to quote the following hadith: The Messenger of Allah said: “Whoever hoards food (and keeps it from) the Muslims, Allah will afflict him with leprosy and bankruptcy.” (Sunan Ibn Majah 2155)

The hoarding or monopolisation of these or other goods would not happen, if these goods (precious metals, foodstuff etc.) would not have special characteristics, which cause a high demand for them. Money is used for exchange, foodstuffs are meant for nutrition. Money and foodstuffs are needed by every economic agent. Hoarding of both will lead to an exploitation of demanders. The same applies to all other contracts. Sometimes a company is a customer, sometimes a supplier - but no matter with whom a company has to deal, fair conditions have to be observed. This is clearly stated in the following ayat: “O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.” (An-Nisa 4:29) Allah the Most High forbids His servants, the believers, to take property from one another in an illegal way. Therefore, e.g. gambling, interest, bribery, alcohol, monopolies are prohibited because they cause damage to the other party. In order to mutually benefit, it is necessary to share risks and avoid any kind of exploitation.

Another problem is the so-called asymmetric information. Under asymmetric information, we understand that one contracting party possesses much more information about the object of contract. Therefore, the better-informed party can misuse his position. Such situations are mentioned in many hadiths. For example: “Both the buyer and the seller give the option of either confirming or cancelling the bargain three times, and if they speak the truth and mention the defects, then their bargain will be blessed, and if they tell lies and conceal the defects, they might gain some financial gain but they will deprive their sale of (Allah's) blessings.” (Sahih al-

Bukhari 2114) It is quite clear that in any contract the partners have to openly talk about the disadvantages of a product or the possibilities to fulfil contracts. Hiding any information (e.g. defects, financial problems) will inevitably lead to problems in the execution of a contract and prevent a successful cooperation. The hiding of information before concluding contracts is called “adverse selection” in modern economics. Another example for this situation is shown in the following hadith: Ibn ‘Abbas said, "The Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the meeting of caravans (on the way) and ordained that no townsman is permitted to sell things on behalf of a bedouin." (Sahih al-Bukhari 2274) In the first case, the meeting of caravans on the way to the market is forbidden, because the seller is not informed about the prices in the city. So, a well-informed buyer could misuse his/her information. A similar situation occurs when a townsman offers to sell things on behalf of a bedouin in order to achieve higher prices than the current ones. This offer leads to fall in supply and it is not sure whether the bedouin will not be cheated by the townsman. This is a situation called “moral hazard” in modern economics, where a contracting partner misuses information after concluding a contract in order to enrich himself. This would be the case, when a partner does not publish correct information about the real profits of the company. This situation is also mentioned in the following hadith-qudsi: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) having said: Allah, Most High, says: "I make a third with two partners as long as one of them does not cheat the other, but when he cheats him, I depart from them." (Sunan Abu Dawud 3383)

No long-term success of an enterprise can be guaranteed when business partners are cheated. Partners have openly to talk about problems and jointly solve them. Business partners are not enemies, but share the success of each other. The same applies to one of the major financiers and most important assets of any organisation: the employees. Rights of employees are often ignored, but without highly motivated employees, no success can be generated. The first step is, of course, selecting employees. In the Qur'an, we can find several examples of how to select employees. For example, when the daughter of Shuayb (pbuh) said to her father about Musa (pbuh): “One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy."” (Al-Qasas 28:26) Here are two important selection

criteria: “strength” and “trustworthiness”. Strength does not only mean physical strength, but also generally professional knowledge to execute a certain task. This is highlighted in the following ayat: [Yusuf] said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian." (Yusuf 12:55)

A complete employee has also to be responsible - trust means that a person fears Allah, not people, and that he does not exchange Allah's commandments for worldly benefit. With these two characteristics, employees are able to fulfil the most complex tasks and any organisation will be successful, as said in the following hadith: “Abu Dharr said to the Prophet (ﷺ): Messenger of Allah, will you not appoint me to a public office? He stroked my shoulder with his hand and said: Abu Dharr, thou art weak and authority is a trust. And on the Day of judgement it is a cause of humiliation and repentance except for one who fulfils its obligations and (properly) discharges the duties attendant thereon.” (Sahih Muslim 1825)

Of course, it is not only sufficient that employees are skilled and trustworthy. Companies should offer adequate working conditions. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Yes, they (slaves or servants) are your brothers, and Allah has put them under your command. So the one under whose hand Allah has put his brother, should feed him of what he eats, and give him dresses of what he wears, and should not ask him to do a thing beyond his capacity. And if at all he asks him to do a hard task, he should help him therein." (Sahih al-Bukhari 6050) Therefore, the worker must not be overloaded with work by exceeding his abilities and possibilities, nor be exploited, forced or inflicted any kind of harm. This includes exploiting vulnerable groups (minorities, women etc.) or child labour. It is important to offer good working conditions, mentioned in the hadith above. This means that wages and salaries have to be realistic and received on time. The Prophet (pbuh) said: “Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries.” (Sunan Ibn Majah 2443)

Adequate working conditions will keep employees motivated to fulfil their tasks. But as important as working conditions is the basic reason for working for a company: that is its vision and mission. A company trying its best to offer halal products in order to facilitate the life of muslims and all other people is a major motivator, which will continuously motivate employees to give their best.

4. Conclusions

For a successful halal business, it is important to combine a good internal organisation with a good relationship with all stakeholders. Efficient processes, which avoid haram and meet customer expectations, are the basis for a successful business. Internal processes have to be organised by implementing a process-oriented thinking, a quality management system, innovation and by considering a holistic approach. It is not sufficient to implement “halal thinking” only in primary activities, but also in support activities. Implementation of “halal standards” in primary and support activities cannot be achieved without a good and just relationship with all people and other creations included in the implementation of a business. This general rule can be found in the following ayat: “Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.” (An-Nahl 16:90)

This approach will create competitive advantage because it avoids forbidden actions in all transactions. This will be perceived positively by all stakeholders and inshAllah rewarded by Allah. From a worldly side, this will reinforce the company’s reputation and loyalty among customers and other stakeholders and increase trust towards the company.

On the other hand, short-term success can be achieved with a great product, but when the rights of employees, suppliers, financiers etc. are ignored, profits will diminish faster than we think. Ignoring the interests of others will inevitably lead to the destruction of infrastructure, manufacturing of long-term harmful products and other actions that will harm people, animals or the environment. However, it has to be always kept in mind that injustice will return to the cause, because the supplication of the oppressed is directly accepted by Allah, according to the hadith: “Three supplications are accepted, there is no doubt in them (about them being accepted): The supplication of the oppressed, the supplication of the traveller, and the supplication of his father against his son.” (Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 1905)

The relationship between all stakeholders can be shown with a radar chart, where the relationship is evaluated e.g. according to an ordinal scale (based on quantitative and qualitative factors). For example, the first situation (the first heptagon) contains the internal processes of a

company and in this case all points are equally distributed. If the interests of all stakeholders are respected, internal processes will go smoothly, as the company will not face external pressures. On the other hand, if the interests of some stakeholders are more important than those of others, then this will affect internal processes (illustrated by an unequally distributed heptagon) and therefore all offered products. In the second situation, for example, interests of investors and financiers are more important than those of suppliers, employees and the public. These injustices will increase dissatisfaction and the company will lack support to achieve competitive advantage.

Of course, this is a simplistic illustration – the concrete distribution of points is dependent on different situations and market conditions. But, we can conclude that the rights of all stakeholders have to be respected in order to earn a halal income.

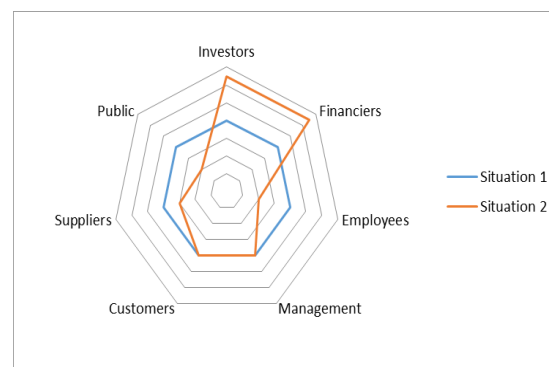


Illustration 1: The Relationship between Stakeholders According to a Radar Chart; Source: Interpretation by authors

Keeping in mind all these aspects, halal business is a more comprehensive concept than the classic certification of products. Many aspects have to be considered in this process, based on the fact that Muslims use halal and avoid haram out of conviction. This constant awareness of reward and punishment is the dominant mindset for all stakeholders to seriously follow Islamic rules.

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Povećanje konkurentske prednosti halal poslovanja – međuvodnost unutrašnjih i vanjskih procesa

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Stručni rad

PODACI O RADU

SAŽETAK

Ključne riječi:

halal, proizvodni proces, ključne osobe, halal standardi.

Halal standardi su razvijeni kako bi se muslimanima ponudila roba koja ne sadrži zabranjene supstance. U početku je ovo praćenje bilo ograničeno na interni proizvodni proces. Ali, shvatilo se da to nije dovoljno i da bi certifikaciju trebalo proširiti, kako bi uključili ulazne i izlazne procese koji se odnose na finalni proizvod. Za uspješnu implementaciju Halal standarda potrebno je ove standarde prenijeti svim zainteresiranim stranama. U ovom radu se tvrdi da se implementacija Halal standarda u primarne i prateće djelatnosti ne može postići bez dobrog i pravednog odnosa sa svim ljudima i drugim kreacijama uključenim u realizaciju poslovanja. Dugoročni odnos sa zainteresovanim stranama će pomoći u razvoju internih procesa efikasnom implementacijom sistema upravljanja kvalitetom orijentisanog na procese zasnovanog na kontinuiranim inovacijama. S druge strane, kratkoročni uspjeh se može postići odličnim proizvodom, ali kada se zanemare prava zaposlenih, dobavljača, finansijera itd., profit će se vrlo brzo smanjiti. Ignoriranje interesa drugih neminovno će dovesti do uništenja infrastrukture, proizvodnje dugotrajno štetnih proizvoda i drugih radnji koje će štetiti ljudima, životinjama ili okolišu.