

## The many facets of responsibility communications

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You're holding the latest special issue of Lapland University of Applied Sciences' Lumen journal, focused on responsibility. Are you mentally congratulating us for investing in a sustainable future—or wondering if this is just another collection of exaggerated claims?

### Responsibility discourse - new normal in communications?

Responsibility is the central framework of our time, shaping economics, politics, and societal debate. Now more than ever, companies, organizations, and communities must communicate responsibly about their activities—and act accordingly. Green Claims are increasingly vital in marketing and communication, representing promises by organizations to incorporate environmental impact, ethics, and responsibility into their operations.

But how accurate are these claims? The reliability of sustainability claims often comes into question, especially when organizations struggle to verify alignment between their operations and their stated values. This mismatch can lead to greenwashing, where companies present environmental or responsibility claims that do not reflect their actual practices. At worst, such claims can mislead and erode both the company's reputation and consumer trust.

### Responsibility is a verifiable competitive advantage

Genuine sustainability claims are essential to an organization's marketing and communication strategies. They meet the rising expectations of consumers and stakeholders, fostering new business opportunities and market solutions. Until recently, organizations were expected to ensure that their Green Claims were accurate, justified, and measurable.

However, next summer, an EU directive will make it mandatory to substantiate these claims, establishing a basis for sustainable marketing where responsibility transcends a mere selling point and becomes a transparent operational approach.

### How are sustainability claims evident in practice?

Green Claims manifest in varied ways in organizational communication. Promises may include reducing carbon footprints, transitioning to renewable energy, or committing to the circular economy. As consumer and stakeholder expectations around responsibility increase, so does the pressure for organizations to translate promises into action.

Thus, building credible sustainability claims is crucial to avoid greenwashing. Organizations must provide measurable indicators, like accurate environmental impact reports or third-party audits, to validate that their claims align with their operations.

### In this special issue

This Lumen issue demonstrates that responsibility at Lapland University of Applied Sciences is deeply ingrained in the institution's values and activities. The articles showcase how responsibility is integral to our everyday work, research, education, and development initiatives.

In his column, climate policy expert Markku Ollikainen addresses the urgency of tackling climate change, examining the challenges and opportunities in the green transition. He reviews international and national efforts to curb global warming and stresses the importance of every action. Ollikainen also highlights the risks of greenwashing, emphasizing that the green transition must avoid creating new problems for nature and society.

Hannu Gyldén, Director of Sustainability at Lapland University of Applied Sciences, explores sustainable development's significance globally and in Lapland specifically. He depicts a world undergoing rapid change, where societal and environmental challenges necessitate a shift toward ecologically and socially sustainable practices. Lapland University of Applied Sciences is committed to promoting responsibility and sustainability in education, RDI activities, and community impact.

### **Responsibility as a compass of leadership**

This issue's articles encourage readers to reflect on their roles in advancing responsibility and sustainability.

Several articles delve into organizational management and the development of responsibility strategies, highlighting how leadership and strategic decisions shape policies and integrate sustainable principles into daily operations. For instance, Häikiö and Partanen's article discusses effective long-term approaches to building and implementing responsibility strategies. The piece offers insights into management models and strategic choices crucial to successful responsibility efforts across sectors.

This section also considers how responsibility management can enhance resilience and adaptability within organizations, a timely topic as businesses and public bodies face evolving market and societal expectations.

### **Embedded responsibility in the core processes of higher education**

Another set of articles focuses on advancing responsibility in teaching and RDI (Research, Development, and Innovation). Ruoppa and Hendriksson's article, for instance, illustrates how curriculum design can foster responsibility thinking among engineering students and explores the transformative impact of new manufacturing technologies on the steel industry.

Other articles present practical examples of how responsibility is woven into everyday academic life, offering strategies to further integrate sustainability in teaching and RDI work.

### **Innovations toward a more responsible future**

The final section of this issue highlights innovations that have driven responsibility forward. Palmgren and Hirvonen's article discusses a project family centered around social impact, where responsibility is a core element of mutually supportive projects. Their long-term initiatives underscore that externally funded development projects can generate substantial value for both organizations and their stakeholders, advancing social sustainability.

Additional articles in this section explore how responsibility-focused thinking has sparked new innovations, with pilot projects incorporating it as a crucial element in the development and application of technology across sectors. These articles provide practical examples of how collaboration with higher education institutions can fundamentally reshape organizational practices.

### Real action, not just empty talk

This Lumen issue illustrates that responsibility is a complex, multidisciplinary phenomenon with far-reaching impacts on organizations and communities. Each article is aligned with one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), framing a comprehensive approach to promoting sustainability across social, economic, and environmental domains.

I hope this issue offers readers genuine insights into how responsibility can be applied in their work. At Lapland University of Applied Sciences, responsibility is not just rhetoric—it is an ingrained cultural value guiding us toward a more sustainable and inclusive future for everyone.