Instructions for Case Studies

Journal of Industrial Ecology

Special Issue on
Industrial Ecology as a Source of Competitive Advantage in Business

We welcome case studies that help shed light on how industrial ecology (IE) is a source of competitive advantage in practice. A special type of case study is being solicited for this special issue—shorter than the journal’s standard articles—in order to increase contributions from the business community. The case studies should be 1500-3000 words and adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Case studies cannot promote an organization, product, standard, or otherwise.
2. Case studies can focus on any of several levels of analysis, including individual firms, sectors, regions, and others.
3. Case studies must present an industrial ecology-related practice or tool. Environmental practices that are not based on industrial ecology are not relevant for this special issue.
4. Case studies must be supported by extensive quantitative information to describe the changes that were made, and the competitive outcomes.
5. Case studies must discuss in an analytical and rigorous manner how industrial ecology contributed to competitive advantage, including the mechanism by which that occurred. For instance, describing implementation of a practice related to industrial ecology, and observing a subsequent improvement in competitive performance, is not sufficient. A convincing argument must be made that there is in fact a causal link between the adoption of the IE-related practice and the subsequent improvement.

A suggested template for case studies is as follows.

1. An abstract or summary of approximately 200 words.
2. An introduction including a description of the context, the IE practice implemented, and the competitive advantage obtained. Typically one paragraph.
3. Concise description of the unit of analysis of the case (the firm, the sector, the region, etc) and of the industrial ecology practice or tool. This should include a summary of the main environmental impacts of the subject of the case. Typically 1 page.*
4. Brief history of relevant events that preceded and led to the implementation of the IE-related practice. Typically 1 page.
   a. Who were the initiators of this project?
   b. Why did they initiate this, and why at that particular point in time?
   c. What did they expect to achieve? The more quantitative detail on the exact objectives, the better.
5. Brief history of the actual implementation of the IE-related practice. Typically 1 page.
   a. What resources were needed (people, time, capital, equipment, etc)?
   b. Who had to give approval, or be convinced? What arguments were used to gain approval or to convince key stakeholders?
   c. How did the implementation unfold? What unexpected pitfalls occurred, and how were they overcome?

* 1 manuscript page is ~ 275 words. About 3.5 manuscript pages produce 1 typeset page, not including figures or tables. The guidance in this document refers to manuscript pages.
6. Brief discussion of the effects of the IE-related practice, environmental and competitive. The summary of effects should tie back to what the original intentions were, as outlined earlier in the case study. The discussion should be heavily quantitative, including before-and-after figures for relevant environmental and competitive metrics. Simply stating that the firm achieved “improved corporate image” would not be sufficient, the improvement would have to be quantified. Typically 1-2 pages (plus various exhibits illustrating and quantifying the effects).

6. Analysis of how the IE-related practice contributed to the competitive improvement. This analysis should describe the pathways by which the IE-related practice had the claimed effects, and should consider possible alternative explanations for the observed outcomes. E.g., in a water recycling example, if freshwater consumption dropped, the case study should rule out that the reduction was a result of a drop in sales. Typically 1-2 pages.

7. A summary should discuss what lessons can be learned from the case study that might be generalizable, including a discussion of what settings the lessons are more or less likely to apply to. Typically 1 page.

Questions may be directed to:

Reid Lifset
Editor-in-chief
Journal of Industrial Ecology
indecol@yale.edu