

CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

A Literature Review

By Wayne Visser

Abstract

This paper introduces the literature and theories of corporate sustainability and how these have been applied at the level of the individual. It begins by defining corporate sustainability, reviewing the concept origins, demonstrating that it is an essentially contested concept (overlapping with related terms like corporate social responsibility, business ethics and corporate citizenship) and exploring some of the underlying principles. The paper then gives an overview of academic research that has been conducted on corporate sustainability generally and on the role of the individual in corporate sustainability in particular. In term of the latter, five themes are explored: the importance of values congruence of managers and employees with organisational values; the instrumental association between individual concern, knowledge and commitment and corporate social and environmental responsiveness; narrative accounts by sustainability managers of corporate "greening"; the role of sustainability managers as champions, entrepreneurs or agents of change in their organisations; and the application of psychology to understand individual responses to sustainability issues. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

Defining "Corporate Sustainability"

A Synthesis Definition

In this paper, I point out that corporate sustainability is a contested concept, which to a greater or lesser extent (depending on the author) draws from and overlaps with notions of sustainable development, corporate citizenship, corporate (social) responsibility, environmental management, business ethics and stakeholder management.

I have been guided in my own synthesis definition of corporate sustainability by the practitioner perspective that I often encountered (and adopted) in my work as a consultant in the field and which my research participants generally embraced, namely that we should focus on the essence of commonality among these terms, rather than (as viewed by them) the pedantic differences.

Perhaps less acknowledged in practice, but clear from the literature and my philosophical position¹, corporate sustainability is in no way an objective, scientific or neutral concept, but rather a normative construct, which always contains a set of implicit or explicit values.

Hence, for the purposes of this paper, I define *corporate sustainability as a values-laden umbrella concept, which refers to the way in which the interface between business, society and the environment is managed.*

Concept Origins

Corporate sustainability evolved as a derivation of the concept of sustainable development, which was first introduced by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and defined as "development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (43). The ideas behind sustainable development are much older, traceable at least back to the preservation and conservation movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but the Brundtland definition quoted above marks the concept's entry into the modern lexicon.

¹ i.e. My ontological and epistemological position as tending towards the subjectivist, interpretive end of the philosophical spectrum of research paradigms

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or more commonly, the Rio Earth Summit) popularised sustainable development and also signalled the beginning of business's coordinated engagement with the sustainability agenda. This happened in two ways.

Firstly, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) drafted a 16-principle Business Charter for Sustainable Development, in which it declared that "business thus shares the view that there should be a common goal, not a conflict, between economic development and environmental protection, for now and for future generations" and that "the objective remains that the widest range of enterprises commit themselves to improving their environmental performance in accordance with these Principles, to having in place management practices to effect such improvement, to measuring their progress, and to reporting this progress internally and externally as appropriate" (ICC, 1992).

Secondly, under the leadership of Swiss business entrepreneur Stephan Schmidheiny, a coalition of around 50 international companies formed the Business Council for Sustainable Development (Timberlake, 2006). The BCSD prepared a "Declaration of the Business Council on Sustainable Development" and a book, *Changing Course* (Schmidheiny, 1992). "Gathering the expertise of more than 50 leaders of multinational corporations and backed by an array of case studies showing existing best practices", the book claimed to provide "an extensive analysis of how the business community can adapt and contribute to the crucial goal of sustainable development - which combines the objectives of environmental protection and economic growth." After UNCED, the ICC formed the World Industry Council on the Environment, which merged with BCSD on 1 January 1995 to form the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

The other major shaper of the corporate sustainability idea is John Elkington – activist, consultant and author in the sustainability field. Among his most influential achievements have been the publication of the million-copy bestseller *The Green Consumer Guide* (Elkington & Hales, 1997) and the seminal *Cannibals With Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business* (Elkington, 1997), as well as helping to popularise key terms like environmental entrepreneur, environmental excellence, green consumer, people-planet-profit or people-planet-prosperity, sustainable corporation and triple bottom line (Elkington, 1994, 1997, 2004).

The most important of these for our purposes are the concepts of the sustainable corporation and the triple bottom line. Elkington's (2004) concept of the triple bottom line (or TBL) was introduced in 1994 and "focuses corporations not just on the economic value that they add, but also on the environmental and social value they add, or destroy" (3). In the forthcoming *A to Z of CSR* (Visser, Matten, & Pohl, 2007 forthcoming), Elkington recalls that he developed the concept with the aim of "countering the narrower focus on the then fashionable term *eco-efficiency*, which focused on the financial and environmental dimensions of performance. TBL thinking, by contrast, extended to social impacts – and to the wider economic impact issues that are rarely captured in the traditional financial bottom line."

The notion of the sustainable corporation was also introduced in 1994 when Elkington (1994) defined it rather loosely as "some of the ways in which business is now developing new 'win-win-win' strategies in this area [sustainable development] to simultaneously benefit the company, its customers, and the environment" (90). More recently and perhaps more usefully, Elkington has defined corporate sustainability as "the field of thinking and practice by means of which companies and other business organisations work to extend the life expectancy of: ecosystems (and the natural resources they provide); societies (and the cultures and communities that underpin commercial activity); and economies (that provide the governance, financial and other market context for corporate competition and survival)" (Visser et al., 2007 forthcoming).

This triple bottom line conception of corporate sustainability is now widely used among business practitioners. For example, the WBCSD claims to bring together its 180 member international companies "in a shared commitment to sustainable development through economic growth, ecological balance and social progress." This is made more significant by the fact that, in 2006, the WBCSD was rated by sustainability experts worldwide as the business organisation most likely to

play a "major role" in advancing sustainable development over the next five years (Globescan, 2006).

Another example of the triple bottom line's growing acceptance is its use in the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, which has a vision that one day "reporting on economic, environmental, and social performance by all organizations is as routine and comparable as financial reporting." As at 1 September 2006, nearly 1,000 organizations in over 60 countries had used the GRI Framework as the basis for their reporting.²

Contested Concept

Described in this way, corporate sustainability can be regarded as related to the older concepts and theories of corporate citizenship (Andriof & McIntosh, 2001; Gosset, 1957), business ethics (Carr, 1968), corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1979) and stakeholder management (Freeman, 1984).

Despite, or perhaps because, of the blending of these terms, their confluence is highly contested. Commenting on the "interwoven" concepts of CSR, sustainable development and a stakeholder approach, Wheeler, Colbert et al. (2003) observe "these concepts are often assumed to be consonant but are variously advocated from political, sociological, ethical, ecological, and business perspectives. Their academic and civil society proponents frequently employ normative overtones and assumptions, but sometimes balance their arguments – according to the commentator, the context or the audience – with a more instrumental 'business case'. Thus it is safe to assume that even proponents and sympathetic practitioners risk becoming confused." (2) With regard to the triple bottom line conception of sustainability, they argue that "sustainability is not equated *per se* with environmentalism, social justice, economic prosperity or spiritual development, though all of those ideals are consistent with a sustainability mindset" (18).

The links and overlaps between these terms can be illustrated with examples.

Overlap Between Sustainability and Other Related Concepts

- The World Economic Forum, quoted in Gardberg and Fombrun (2006), defines *corporate citizenship* as "the manner in which a company manages its economic, social and environmental relationships, as well as those with different stakeholders" (329);
- Matten and Crane (2005) observe that "in much of the CC [*corporate citizenship*] literature, scholars currently use the concept in this sense, stressing various aspects of CSR [*corporate social responsibility*], such as sustainability and the stewardship role of business" (169).
- Crane and Matten (2004), in the Introduction to their text on *business ethics*, argue that sustainability "is one of the most commonly used (and misused) terms in the current discourse on business ethics" (1);
- SustainAbility (2004) define *corporate responsibility* as "an approach to business that embodies transparency and ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholder groups and a commitment to add economic, social and environmental value" (4); and
- Freeman, Pierce et al. (2000) introduce concepts like "the environment as a *stakeholder*" (56) and "stakeholder green" – based on the principle to "create and sustain competitive advantage by responding to the environmental preferences of stakeholders" (14).

In a bibliometric analysis of 30 years of research and theory of CSR and corporate social performance, De Bakker, Groenewegen et al. (2005) identify three views on this literature: 1) that development occurred from conceptual vagueness, through clarification of central constructs and their relationships, to the testing of theory (the progressive view); 2) that the realisation of progress in the literature on the social responsibilities of business is obscured, or possibly even hampered, by the continuing introduction of new constructs, which includes, according to their analysis,

² www.globalreporting.org

sustainable development and the triple bottom line (the variegational view); and 3) that hardly any progress has been made, or can be made, because of the inherently normative character of the literature (the normativist view). Their research concludes that there is evidence to support both the progressive and variegational views.

Their findings could be explained by Moon's (2002) contention that these various "contending appellations" "each has its own virtue and is designed to reflect some special aspect of business-society relations that its proponents wish to draw attention to" (3). Drawing on the work of Gallie (1956), he concludes and celebrates the fact that CSR, like democracy and justice, is an "essentially contested" concept "whose meaning is always part of a debate about [its] application" (4).

The contested nature of corporate sustainability, which continues unabated (Fergus & Rowney, 2006), may be attributed to various factors, such as its political origins (WCED, 1987), its application as a normative construct (Wheeler et al., 2003), its relatively short history as an emerging area of research and practice (Lockett, Moon, & Visser, 2006) and its frequent appeal to values (Ehrenfeld, 2000).

Sustainability as a Contested Concept

We can apply Gallie's (1956) criteria for essentially contested concepts – that they are appraisive, internally complex and relatively open – to corporate sustainability:

- It is not hard to argue that corporate sustainability is *appraisive*, since companies try to avoid being labelled as *unsustainable*;
- The challenge of measuring corporate sustainability performance and relating this to financial performance suggests its *internally complex* nature; and
- The way in which various stakeholders interpret and use sustainability to further their own agendas satisfies the criteria of *openness*.

Despite this contested nature, I am distinguishing corporate sustainability from other related concepts by emphasising its integrative characteristics (embracing the triple-bottom of social, environmental and economic performance) and its normative (values-based) nature.

Underlying Concepts

It is evident in many of the definitions and concepts that they contain an implicit appeal to values and/or self-transcendent behaviour, i.e. that we should be contributing to something or helping someone beyond our selfish concerns, or acting in the interests of the common good. Ehrenfeld (2000), for example, makes the following observations about sustainability: "I define sustainability as the possibility that humans and other life forms will flourish on the earth forever. Flourishing means not only survival, but also the realisation of whatever we as humans declare makes life good and meaningful, including notions like justice, freedom and dignity" (36).

Values and Sustainability

Welford (1995) reveals various values implicit in sustainable development:

- The *environment* – "The environment must be valued as an integral part of the economic process ... [and] all businesses must have a clear and unequivocal commitment to environmental improvement" (199).
- *Equity* – "A sustainable strategy must consider the inequalities inherent in modern society and begin to tackle issues such as the distribution of income and wealth and widespread discrimination" (199).
- *Futurity* – "To ensure that longer term, intergenerational considerations are observed, longer planning horizons need to be adopted and business policy needs to be proactive rather than reactive (200).

- *Biodiversity* – “Biological diversity is valuable for ecological, genetic, social, economic, recreational and aesthetic reasons. ... A full and proper respect of all living things is therefore an important element in any business strategy” (200).

Similarly, in a report sub-titled “Beyond the business case for sustainable development”, Forum for the Future and BT (2003) argue for a “moral case for sustainable development”.

Morality and Sustainability

Forum for the Future and BT (2003) refer to “four principle moral foundations”:

- *Equity today* – “recognising the centrality of equity and social justice” (5) and “meeting the needs of the present” (4) – from the Bruntland definition (WCED, 1987);
- *Environmental justice* – “equal access to a clean environment and equal protection from possible environmental harm, irrespective of race, income or class or any other differentiating feature of socio-economic status” (5).
- *Intergenerational equity* – “not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (5) – from the Bruntland definition (WCED, 1987); and
- *Stewardship* – the obligation “to secure the wellbeing of other creatures” and “taking responsibility for the rest of life on Earth” (6).

The *self-transcendence* assumptions of sustainability are also reflected in much of the literature. For example, Shar et al. (2003) give their book of “stories of transparency, accountability and governance” the title *Something To Believe In: Creating Trust and Hope in Organisations*. In the Introduction, they make their perspective clear: “We believe that humanity has much good work to do: good work to save ourselves from each other and to recreate our relationship with planet Earth” (11).

Wheeler, Colbert et al. (2003) conclude that sustainability “is aspirational in nature, a meta-ideal, one inherently infused with societal values of justice, integrity, reverence, respect, community and mutual prosperity” (18).

Corporate Sustainability Research

In their review of corporate social responsibility (CSR) articles published in top-rated management journals between 1992 and 2002, Lockett, Moon et al. (2006) found that environmental/sustainability and ethical subjects dominate CSR research in management, accounting for 36% (64 of the 176 papers) and 31% (54 papers) respectively, compared with papers on stakeholders (18%, 31 papers) and social (15%, 27 papers) themes.

It should be noted that CSR has been used by Lockett, Moon et al. (2006) as an umbrella concept, in much the same way as I use corporate sustainability as the overarching theme in this paper. The limited interpretation of sustainability as an ecological subject area is somewhat typical in the literature and reflects a clinging to the environmental roots of the concept.

Despite this confusing and limiting use of terms, the findings give some indication of the state of corporate sustainability research. They find that articles on environment/sustainability can be found in most of the top management journals, as Table 1 shows.

They argue that “this reflects the relatively more developed status of the environmental and ethical subjects both in their pedagogical orientations of ecological science and philosophy respectively, as well as their status as management issues” (125). There was no clear trend of increased penetration of the management literature by corporate sustainability scholars generally over the study period. Rather, the pattern seemed highly dependent on the inclusion of Special Issues on corporate sustainability (40 of the 176 CSR articles were from six Special Issues).

The examples in Table 1 also show that coverage of corporate sustainability in top management journals has continued since the end of the survey period (2002). However, it is more common for corporate sustainability research to be published in specialist subject journals.

Table 1: Environmental* Papers in Management Journals (1992-2002)

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Number and % of papers (1992-2002)</i>	<i>Recent examples of environmental papers</i>
Academy of Management Journal	14 (22%)	Kassinis and Vafeas (2006)
Academy of Management Review	8 (13%)	Shrivastava (2004)
Administrative Science Quarterly	0 (0%)	Hart (2004)
Journal of Management	1 (2%)	Deckop, Merriman et al. (2006)
Journal of Management Studies	4 (6%)	Brammer and Pavelin (2006)
Organization Science	0 (0%)	Freeman, Wicks et al. (2004)
Strategic Management Journal	7 (11%)	Bansal (2005)
California Management Review	17 (27%)	Orsato (2006)
Harvard Business Review	9 (14%)	Lockwood (2006)
MIT Sloan Management Review	4 (6%)	Wheeler (2006)
Total	64 (100%)	

* In Lockett, Moon et al. (2006), "environmental" included the terms sustainability and sustainable development.

Examples of Recent Sustainability Research in Specialist Journals

- On *environmental management*, such as in *Business Strategy and the Environment* (e.g. Kirchengorg & Winn, 2006) and *Organization & Environment* (e.g. Holland, 2006);
- On *corporate social responsibility*, such as in *Business and Society* (e.g. Hendry, 2006), *Business and Society Review* (e.g. Bondy, Matten, & Moon, 2005), and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* (e.g. Gallego, 2006);
- On *corporate citizenship*, such as in the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* (e.g. De Oliveira & Gardetti, 2006); and
- On *business ethics*, such as in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (e.g. Shafer, 2006), *Business Ethics Quarterly* (e.g. Spence, 2005) and *Business Ethics: A European Review* (e.g. Korhonen, 2006).

Given the concept origins described in the section above, it is unsurprising that academic research on corporate sustainability is not even two decades old (Elkington, 1994; Gladwin, Kennelly, & Krause, 1995). Much of the earlier research was strongly linked with environmental management (Hart, 1995; Hunt & Auster, 1990; Starik & Rands, 1995), and this association still persists (Banerjee, 2003; King, Lennox, & Terlaak, 2005; Marshall & Brown, 2003).

Sharma and Ruud (2003) observe that "just as scholars and practitioners concerned with sustainable development have focused mainly on environmental management, those concerned with corporate social responsibility (CSR) have focused on social and ethical issues such as human rights, working conditions and philanthropy. The social principles of justice and inclusiveness embedded in the concept of sustainable development have entered the corporate or research agenda to a very limited extent, even among firms making promising environmental efforts at a global scale" (205).

However, there are signs that this environmental bias and lack of integration, which might be regarded as one of the limitations of current corporate sustainability research, may be changing.

This could be the result of the greater emphasis given to social issues at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (Hamann, Acutt, & Kapelus, 2003) and the World Economic Forum (Nelson, 2003), as well as the adoption of the poverty agenda by leading scholars, some of whom formerly focused exclusively on the environment (London & Hart, 2004; Nelson & Prescott, 2003; Prahalad & Hart, 2002).

One way of classifying the literature on corporate sustainability is according to different levels of analysis. Sharma (2002) uses this approach to identify priority areas for future research in corporate sustainability, including at the following levels: global, institutional, inter-organisational, organisational and individual. Importantly for my dissertation focus, Sharma concludes that: "the role of individuals in organisations in affecting environmental change in organisations has been under-researched" (11), a theme I will return to look at in more depth shortly.

Corporate Sustainability Research Themes

According to a review by Sharma & Rudd (2003), corporate sustainability research has historically focused mainly on three areas:

1. *Descriptive* and *normative* research – especially developing typologies of sustainability strategies that describe (or prescribe) the evolution of corporate sustainability practices, e.g. Green and Hunton-Clarke (2003);
2. *Exploratory* research – especially explaining external and internal drivers of why organisations adopt sustainability practices, e.g. Prakash (2001); and
3. *Instrumental* research – especially examining the link between sustainability practices and profitability, e.g. Funk (2003).

Corporate Sustainability and the Individual

The role of the individual manager in corporate sustainability practice is embedded in the broader literature on agency theory in general (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976) and moral agency in particular (French, 1979; Moore, 1999). Wood refers to managers as "moral actors" (1991) and Swanson (1995) finds that managers' individual discretion is an important component of corporate social performance. Fontrodona and Sison go further to challenge agency theory from a humanistic perspective and argue that "personalist and common good postulates create a framework that accommodates business ethics better" (2006: 33).

Prakash (2001) notes that the "beyond compliance" environmental policy literature is weak on recognising internal dynamics (as opposed to external factors) and the role of individual managers (as opposed to treating firms predominantly as unitary actors). He argues ontologically for methodological individualism, i.e. individuals as the ultimate (not the only) unit of analysis: "Thus, firms should not be reified and their policies should eventually be traced back to the preferences, power and strategies of individual managers" (296).

This echoes Agle and Caldwell (1999a), who argue for specifying the precise level of analysis (individual, organizational, institutional, societal and global) so as to ensure the validity of values research. Hence, focusing on corporate sustainability at the level of the individual addresses both a practical problem (understanding the role of individual agency in corporate sustainability) and a theoretical problem - ensuring that research is not guilty of using "individual-level data ... to represent organizational constructs" (Agle et al., 1999a: 365).

In line with this proposal, several authors have stressed the importance of studying corporate sustainability at the level of the individual, which I review in this section. There are five discernable themes in this research.

Research Themes on Corporate Sustainability and the Individual

1. The importance of *values congruence* of managers and employees with organisational values (Fryxell & Lo, 2003; Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2002);

2. The *instrumental association* between individual concern, knowledge and commitment and corporate social and environmental responsiveness (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Keogh & Polonsky, 1998);
3. *Narrative accounts* by sustainability managers of corporate "greening" (Fineman, 1997; Georg & Fussel, 2000; Starkey & Crane, 2003);
4. The role of sustainability managers as *champions*, entrepreneurs or agents of change in their organisations (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Prakash, 2001; Walley & Stubbs, 1999); and
5. The application of *psychology* to understand individual responses to sustainability issues (Stern, 1992).

Values Congruence

Bansal and Roth (2000) find that individual concern, which they define as "the degree to which organisational members value the environment and the degree of discretion they possess to act on their environmental values" (731), is one of three contextual conditions which influence corporate ecological responsiveness (the other two are issue salience and field cohesion).

Values and Ecological Responsiveness

Bansal and Roth (2000) also suggest that personal values influence a firm's ecological responsiveness in three ways:

1. By helping decision makers discriminate between more and less important signals;
2. By inducing some organisational members to champion ecological responses; and
3. By greater receptivity among top management to changes which are aligned to their personal values.

Van Marrewijk and Were (2002) suggest a multilevel framework of corporate sustainability, derived from the values systems model of psychologist Clare Graves. "Given different contexts and values systems," they conclude, "a one-solution-fits-all concept of corporate sustainability is not reasonable" (107). Posner and Schmidt (1993) emphasise the importance of values alignment between the personal and organisation level and Fineman (1997) likewise compares environmental managers' private moral positions with the morality of the corporation. Fryxell and Lo (2003) also consider the influence of values – specifically environmental values – on the behaviour of Chinese managers who claim to act on behalf of the environment. And Hemingway and Maclagan (2004) propose that managers' personal values, expressed through managerial discretion, act as one of the drivers of corporate social responsibility.

Instrumental Value

Keogh and Polonsky (1998) focus their research on trying to find links between the attributes of individuals and corporate sustainability performance. In particular, they examine personal environmental commitment – defined as "both a process and a resultant through which organisational members display environmental concern" (38) – as a basis for environmental entrepreneurship. According to their research, environmental commitment has three dimensions: 1) *affective commitment*, involving the individual's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in supporting environmental concerns; 2) *continuance commitment*, involving commitment based on the economic and social costs that the individual associates with disregarding environmental concerns; and 3) *normative commitment*, involving the individual's sense of obligation to continue supporting environmental concerns. They go on to develop a model of entrepreneurship and environmental commitment where each commitment dimension is associated with particular intrinsic and extrinsic forces and results in a typological entrepreneurial orientation (collaborative, policy, debtor and defensive).

Conceptual links made with the entrepreneurship literature are perhaps unsurprising. For example, Hostager, Neil et al. (1998) develop a model for environmental intrapreneurship by individuals that

illustrates how ability, efficacy (perceived ability), motivation and desirability (perceived motivation) affect the successful identification of opportunities. Starik and Rands (1995) similarly claim that individuals bring critical ideas and energy to the greening of their organisations and stress individuals' innovative resources in terms of ideas that can help increase ecological sustainability. Some have gone so far as to label this phenomenon "enviropreneurship" (Keogh et al., 1998; Menon & Menon, 1997).

Narrative Accounts

Fineman (1996) is interested in the emotional aspects of individual commitment to the environment, suggesting that pro-environmental organisational changes depend on the emotional meanings that managers attribute to greening. Hence, he not only confirms the importance of the individual as an actor in bringing about organisational change on environmental issues, but also the importance of psychological factors in informing opinions and actions. His research finds that some emotional subtexts are encased in organisational-cultural expectations of enthusiasm or commitment about social care. Some are instrumentally linked to customer desires and some are direct fears and embarrassments associated with external pressures. He also finds that conflict between an actor's private moral belief and corporate green expectations is unusual, and readily resolved in favour of the corporation.

Georg and Fussel (2000) take a similar approach, exploring how personal and social meanings of "the environment" arise in the context of organisational greening. They view greening as "a sense-making process, in which organisational members' individual and collective identity is gradually transformed" (175). Their research seeks to show not only how management commitment informs organisational greening but also how these activities inform management commitment. As an illustrative case, they demonstrate how a greening project allowed for a reconstruction of identity among the middle managers, i.e. from being invisible and taken-for-granted service people into being central actors in an emerging strategic field. Starkey and Crane (2003) similarly view "greening" as a narrative that can be adopted by management.

Sustainability Champions

A good deal of the research on corporate sustainability and the individual engages with the agency debate by introducing the notion of "environmental champions". Fineman and Clarke (1996) define an environmental champion as "someone who can attractively express a personal vision about environmental protection that is in tune with both industry's needs and wider public concern" (726).

Stubbs and Walley (1999) compare the environmental champion to prior conceptions of the Human Resources champion. Based on a comparative analysis of three case studies of environmental champions, they show that environmental champions imbue a combination of characteristics, including catalyst, champion, sponsor, facilitator and demonstrator.

Andersson and Bateman (2000) define environmental champions as "individuals [who] convince and enable organisation members to turn environmental issues into successful corporate programs and innovations" (548) and suggest that identifying, packaging and selling environmental issues are critical to successful championing.

Post and Altman (1994) identify the role of environmental champions as one of six key themes in successful environmental change. They determine that the effectiveness of the champion in engaging others rests heavily on expertise, top management support and a strong appreciation for the problems that every business unit or operations manager faces.

Research on individuals' influence is not confined purely to the environmental dimension of sustainability. For instance, Wood (1991) and Swanson (1995) refer to managers' individual discretion as a component of corporate social performance and Drumwright (1994) concludes that middle managers are often the socially responsible change-agents. Similarly, Hemingway and Maclagan (2004) show that CSR can be the result of championing by a few managers, based on their the personal values and beliefs, despite personal and professional risks this may entail.

Buchholtz et al. (1999) confirm the importance of individual managers as mediators in corporate philanthropy and Fineman and Clarke (1996) find that managers are crucial mediators of stakeholder influence. Finally, linking back to the first theme of values, Sharfman, Pinkston et al. (2000) suggest that managerial values play an important role in the social issues evaluation process.

Applied Psychology

Stern (1992) finds that, in order to study environmentally relevant attitudes, beliefs and actions, the literature draws on concepts from basic psychological research, including the theories of attitude, social dilemmas, applied behaviour analysis, altruistic behaviour and cognitive judgement and choice.

Sustainability and Psychology Research

Stern (1992) identifies two areas in which psychological research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of sustainability:

1. Literature on the *human causes of global environmental changes*, including broad assessments of environmental attitudes and behaviour, and research on specific human activities, such as energy use and conservation or participation in environmental movements, through which individuals can participate in causing or altering the causes of global change; and
2. Literature on *the ways in which people may perceive, respond to, or be affected by global environmental changes*, including studies of interventions to change behaviour and of the psychological aspects of environmental activism and conflict.

According to Stern (1992), the applied psychology literature also derives four theories on the nature of environmental concern, namely that it is a function of: 1) new paradigm thinking, 2) anthropocentric altruism, 3) egoism and 4) deeper causes (e.g. terminal values, religious beliefs and post-materialist cultural values).

Limitations

The research on sustainability managers reviewed in this section has several limitations.

Limitations of Research on Sustainability and Individuals

1. The focus has mainly been on the *process of bringing about change* within organisations, rather than the motives of the individuals as change agents;
2. Where personal narratives have been explored, they have still tended to focus on *organisational initiatives* (like greening) rather than the way in which working in sustainability affects the individual; and
3. The notion of *sustainability champions* – which dominates the literature on the role of individuals in corporate sustainability – only presents a partial view of sustainability managers, since not all sustainability champions are sustainability managers, and not all sustainability managers are sustainability champions.

While showing that psychology can and has been applied to aid our understanding of sustainability, Stern's (1992) review equally shows the paucity of psychology research on corporate sustainability. Perhaps this is why he concludes that "a frontier research area concerns the connections between individual behaviour and the actions of entities at higher levels of analysis ... [since] individual attitudes and beliefs may have their greatest effect by changing organisations and governments, even as they are influenced by them" (296).

Ten years later, Sharma (2002) suggests that this gap has yet to be bridged. In the conclusion to his review of corporate sustainability research, he says: "Scholars urge a shift in research focus from changing collective behaviour to changing individual behaviour – an area into which we have rich theoretical insights from the discipline of psychology" (11).

Admittedly, some of the research on the role of the individual in corporate sustainability makes implicit use of psychological concepts, such as the literature on managers' values congruence (Agle & Mitchell, 1999b; Hemingway et al., 2004) and emotional subtexts (Fineman, 1996). Similarly, the research on ethical consumption draws extensively on psychological concepts like attitudes, beliefs and morality consistent with the marketing literature (Drumwright, 1994). However, the literature applying psychology directly as an aid to understanding corporate sustainability in general and sustainability managers in particular remains extremely limited.

Conclusions

Based on the literature reviewed in the foregoing sections, I have reached several conclusions. I will end the paper with brief comments about each of these.

1. Corporate sustainability is an *integrating and contested concept*.

While it is not possible to derive a single, uncontested definition, there is a relatively wide consensus on key concepts (like the triple bottom line and business and society relations) and allied terms (like business ethics, corporate citizenship, corporate social responsibility and stakeholder theory) that are associated with corporate sustainability. My dissertation takes an inclusive approach to these concepts and terms, using corporate sustainability as an umbrella label.

2. There is an established literature on *corporate sustainability*.

Despite being a relatively young field of academic inquiry, scholars have succeeded in engaging with the mainstream management literature, as well as establishing journals that specialise in various aspects of corporate sustainability. However, research on corporate sustainability still has a bias towards an environmental association and is mainly focused at the organisational level. Scholars approach the subject in a variety of ways, performing exploratory, descriptive, normative and instrumental research, and employing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3. Corporate sustainability research focusing on the *individual level* is relatively underdeveloped.

Although there is some scholarly work that has been done on corporate sustainability managers as individuals, most of the research is focused on the organisational level. The research that has been done focuses on the importance of personal values, commitment, perceptions and agency. The application of psychology to corporate sustainability is rare, and has mainly focused on individuals' public responses to environmental issues, rather than the experience of sustainability managers.

The fascinating debates presented in this chapter are one of reasons I find myself so attracted to corporate sustainability. However, if I reflect on my experience as a sustainability manager, my motivation went far beyond intellectual stimulation. Rather, it was linked to a deeply personal quest for meaning in my life and work. This, however, is the subject of a different paper.

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Article reference

Visser, W. (2007) Corporate Sustainability and the Individual: A Literature Review, *Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership Paper Series*, No. 1.

Part of the CAMBRIDGE PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP PAPER Series
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