

Stream 15 Sustainable and Social Issues in Management  
Refereed Interactive Session

**Navigating Sustainability: Morphing the Role of the Sustainability Officer**

**ABSTRACT:** Various ‘developmental’ models outline how organisations can transition toward adoption of sustainable business models. A premise is that organisations will progress to an ‘ideal’ business model generating net positive impact on the economy, society and the environment. If and how Australian based companies are transitioning in this way is not understood. Even less is known about sustainability officers (SO) who lead and enable such transition. We take one model, the sustainability phase model (Benn et al. 2014), to critically analyse organisations that are leading transitions and explore the practices undertaken by SOs. We find the role of the SOs is vastly different across organisations and that the nature of SO practice is unexpected, with much time consumed by ‘legitimising’ sustainability.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, strategy as practice, transition, sustainability officers.

Sustainability is considered as necessary for being competitive (Kiron et. al., 2012), for influencing investment decisions (Unruh et.al., 2016), and is becoming a strategic priority for organisations.

Corporate Sustainability (CS) is more than taking responsibility for business activities, but means understanding how business operates within the human and ecospheric systems from which it is enabled (Bansal and Song, 2016). Enabling sustainability within an organisation then is dependent upon the interconnections and interdependencies between an organisations and these systems suggesting an extended role and remit for those within the organisations specifically engaged in facilitating and encouraging sustainability.

Those tasked with enabling sustainability within organisations have variously been characterized as leading cross-cutting and multi-dimensional agendas (Galbreath, 2009) and establishing a longer-term strategic focus (Slawinski & Bansal, 2012). They are challenged by selecting or developing multi-purpose objectives and measures (Schaltegger et al., 2012) and negotiating the inherent trade-offs between these (Neugebauer et al., 2014) such that they need to coordinate highly pluralised stakeholder interests within and outside the organisation (Denis, 2007). Often those undertaking sustainability agendas within the organisations do not have a specified sustainability role. They have variously been described as change agents (Visser and Crane, 2007), leaders, champions (Walley and Stubbs, 1999) or institutional entrepreneurs. Such roles cannot be generalised as it has been recognised that CS varies widely and as such frameworks for staged (Lubin and Etsy, 2010) or phase models

(Benn et al., 2014) have been developed. Within such models the role of the change leadership has been signified (Lueneburger and Goleman, 2010) albeit for different purposes and means within different stages (Miller and Serafeim, 2014; Benn et al., 2014; Russell and Griffiths, 2009).

Corporate sustainability itself is an ambiguous concept and best understood as a sensemaking phenomenon, constructed and enacted by multiple individuals (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Guthey & Morsing, 2014). Some have claimed such ambiguity creates incoherence such that executives are often 'flailing around, launching a hodgepodge of initiatives' (Lubin and Etsy, 2010). Zollo et al. (2013) claim that sustainability is underachieved in organizing because the 'how' of enabling sustainability processes is under examined in academic studies. More recently it has been claimed that the 'how' is complex and extends beyond a strategic or change management agenda to enable sustainable value across value networks and embedding sustainability within the core purpose of the organisation (Bhattacharya and Polman, 2017). Such integration of sustainability across the organisational functions, and potentially through the value chain, is challenging, and is further complicated when coordinated action is required through a strategic approach.

Our research sought to understand how sustainability is enabled within organisations that are seeking to further their sustainability agendas. In particular, we explored if and how an organisation progresses towards obtaining the 'idealised' sustainable business. We focussed on the emerging role of those leading the sustainability practices or the Sustainability Officer (SO) and how they made sense of their sustainability work. In doing so, we challenged both the normative conceptions of SOs and the assumptions of a simple managerial agency (Lenssen et al., 2009; Quinn & Dalton, 2009). We sought to go beyond observations on the potential activities and significance of the SO (Strand, 2014), to instead examine their activity and agency in fine-grained detail. We found that the role of the SO was chaotic and vast variation in the practices operationalised by the SOs was evident. Practices of SOs span a wide range of functions, and in addition to these, SOs are consumed by on-going practice of legitimising their own practice.

### **Interpreting the ‘Strategy Work’ of Sustainability Practice**

Previous studies have variously defined the role of the SO with at least three different organisational approaches to CS, being compliance, efficiency and innovation (Miller and Serafei, 2014). Another model categorises organizational sustainability according to various ‘phases of sustainability’ (Benn et. al., 2014). These studies can be summarised as follows. Compliance or efficiency based approaches, are regulatory-driven, whereby efficiency gains are the ultimate outcome. Sustainability work is often dissipated or concentrated in certain departments often within operational specialisations. Those leading change are characterized as ‘change agents’ or ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ leading across or within departmental functions. A well-known study established that individual concerns are significant and these must also be aligned with organisational value to enable change (Bansal, 2003). In a strategic approach, SOs serve a cross functional role and/or governance function within the organization, whereby sustainability advantage is leveraged for market positioning. Finally, an ‘idealised’ approach entails implementing an overarching sustainability business model. According to Bhattacharya and Polman (2017) this is beyond a change management agenda and/or requiring strategic priority in organizational governance. Instead, implementing a sustainable business model requires creating sustainable value across the entire value chain, achieving ‘buy-in’ from ‘undecideds’, making sustainability part of all job functions and partnering with other businesses and NGOs to enable social and environmental impact across the entire production and consumption system. Within these different approaches, the strategies that are enacted to enable sustainability vary and so too the work undertaken the SO.

A burgeoning theoretical and methodological literature on ‘strategy as practice’ informs the micro-sociological perspective on the strategic practices of the SO. This is focused on the process, practices and activities of strategy-making as a complex and consequential social process (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). It is part of the ‘practice turn’ in social sciences and management research (Gherardi, 2009), where individual behaviour is understood to be both constrained and enabled by organisational and societal-level practices (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The strategy as practice literature seeks to distinguish between ‘praxis’ (what people do) in contrast with the ‘practices’ employed (Whittington,

2007), even though they are tightly interlinked. Practices are variously defined, for example as the “accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinised over time” (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 287). Researchers have identified a wide range of practices within three broad categories: 1) administrative or analytical practices like approval processes and objective setting (Jarzabkowski, 2005); 2) discursive practices like issue-selling (Kaplan, 2008) or sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007); and 3) the socio-material aspects of strategy-making including workshops and meetings (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008) and the ubiquity of PowerPoint (Kaplan, 2011).

The strategy as practice literature provides a starting point because the role of the SO in enabling a strategic sustainability approach will not be limited to this making and doing of strategy. Our response is to draw on the broader perspective of the ‘turn to work’ (Okhuysen et al., 2015) in organisation and management theory, where work is defined as “individuals and organisations purposefully and strategically expending effort to affect their social-symbolic context” (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012: 223). Through this lens, ‘strategy work’ means the “the purposeful activities carried out by actors in the production of strategies” (Whittington, 2006). However, the work lens problematises the role of the SO in that they will seek to manipulate *multiple* aspects of their social-symbolic context. The work involved may include, inter alia, emotion (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), identity (Ghadiri et al., 2015), values (Gehman et al., 2013) and idea (Carlsen et al., 2012) work.

## METHOD

### Data Collection

The SOs in this sample were recruited through the Sustainability Advantage (SA) program, a business support service from the NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) that is designed to assist organisations across New South Wales to “achieve increased competitiveness and improved bottom lines through better environmental practices”. The SA program has over 500 participant organisations who subscribe to their programs and achieve certification according to the different sustainability phases. Selection criteria and draft interview questions were provided to OEH

so that potential participant organisations could be identified. We sought to identify organisations that had recently transitioned from one phase to the next, or those experiencing difficulties in transition, because we were probing how the SO made sense of their work as they sought to enable transition. Fifteen organisations were identified and a shortlist database was created. All shortlisted organisations were invited to participate in the study. Of these, seven organisations participated by agreeing to be interviewed by our research team. Each organisation was given a pseudonym and have been summarised in Table 1 below according to their phase categorisation. We interviewed those people working in the seven participant organisations who were the main point of contact for the SA program and hence were actively leading sustainability strategies. Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration. Interview questions were designed to allow the participants to describe their role within the organisations, their current practices in relation to social and environmental sustainability, their main barriers and drivers and future initiatives.

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

The SOs differ in terms of length of time with the company and background. Hotel (engineering background), ClubC (gaming manager background), ClubT (science education) and Bank (ex board member, change management background) have each been with their respective companies for around 7 years and have moved into their sustainability role in recent years from these diverse backgrounds. Shipping, Bricks and Care have specialist environmental sustainability backgrounds and were employed for their expertise 3-7 years ago. SOs identify themselves as part time (ClubC, ClubT, Bank and Hotel) or full time sustainability officers (Bricks, Shipping and Care). Their image of themselves in relation to sustainability extends from “a diehard sustainability person” (Shipping); “a bit of a tree hugger” (ClubT); “the subject matter expert” (Care) to “I have had very little exposure to this kind of thing” (ClubC).

### **Data analysis**

We adopt a narrative lens for this interpretivist, interview-based study. Our starting point is to understand language as not just representative of the social world but constitutive and performative (Fairclough, 1992), with organisations regarded as discursive spaces (Brown & Thompson, 2013).

Narratives are both discursive processes and draw from broader discourses in which they are located. Narrative is a particular type of discourse with the specific structure of temporal chains of events or actions which are undertaken by actors (Gabriel, 2004). People use narratives to make sense of the action of themselves and others linked to events and consequences over time (Chase, 2011). In this way narratives both construct and share meaning (De la Ville & Mounoud, 2010) and are interchangeable with or at least closely related to sensemaking and sensegiving (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gabriel, 2004). Narratives bring to the surface the processes of sensemaking (Humphreys & Brown, 2008) and sensemaking is largely, but not exclusively, accomplished through narrative (Gabriel, 2004; Rhodes & Brown, 2005).

Our approach was to directly solicit from SOs their ‘accounts’ – i.e. their own narrative description (Vaara et al., 2016) – of their organisation’s sustainability change process and their role within that broader narrative. We regard interviews as a technique to directly access the “internal life of people” (Bizzi & Langley, 2012:29) and a way to travel both in space and time (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). We followed a story-telling approach to elicit each account, that is to let the interviewees describe their views on their organisation’s journey and their role as sustainability manager within that. We also asked questions based on our a priori phase model and themes of enablers, blockers and critical incidents in the transition between phases. We allowed interviewees to interpret our questions freely and pursue those themes that they regarded as central.

We adopt Boje’s (2001; Vaara et al., 2016) conception of the nature of storytelling in organisations in that individual narratives (i.e. of self or the organisation) are rarely presented full-formed. Instead they typically comprise “fragmented, ambiguous and unresolved” (Dawson, 2013: 260) ‘antenarratives’. As in classic interpretive studies (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), our analysis is therefore presented in first-order then second-order steps. We started by developing first-order narratives for each SO. These stay close to our interview data but they are our own narrative interpretations (and our own ‘sensemaking’ strategy) (Langley et al., 2013), constructed through the research process, as well as a data reduction technique. Each narrative was two to three pages in length and described the main

features of their current and future sustainability work. While a research product in their own right, we used these narratives as the basis for a second-order and cross-case analysis of the narrative themes and patterns. This second phase consisted of the development of a meta-comparative table which was generated from the identification of key themes in the SO narratives. Furthermore, we analysed how these themes were relevant according to the different phases of corporate sustainability. The findings section outlines these second-order findings with a particular focus on the role of the SO and practices that enable their work of progressing sustainability or creating sustainable transitions within their organisations.

### **FINDINGS**

Seven themes were identified in the data: rationale for sustainability, role of sustainability officer, barriers to sustainable transition, enablers of sustainable transition, critical incidents and ideal future. Directly related to our central research question are the three interrelated themes of the role of the sustainability officer and the enabler and barriers of sustainable transition themes and as such the following section summarises findings in relation to these themes.

The role of the sustainability officer within the organisation featured heavily in the interviews. All but “Hotel” SOs demonstrated roles as change agents. There are two outliers in the data, Hotel and Club C. Hotel largely does not understand their role and ClubC is candidly lost in their role. For the other SOs, they clearly identified aspects of their sustainability work as current priorities and barriers and enablers to achievement of these priorities. Across the SOs, six aspects of their roles emerged as common narratives being account of the features of their sustainability work. These all relate to helping the company to transition to being a more sustainable organisation. We termed these six bundles of practices ‘transition devices’. Table 2 provides a description of the device and a condensed version of the comparative narrative analysis in relation to each device.

---

Insert Table 2 about here

---

A key insight from this analysis is central role the SO undertakes in the implementation of practices to enable these devices. While sensegiving was a stand-alone device, the work associated with the other devices combines sensemaking and sensegiving to enable coherent ways of identifying or creating sustainability work, and communicating the outcomes of this work as significant to overall company performance. Sensemaking and sensegiving as both essential functions of legitimising sustainability strategies or agendas. Despite the devices being common bundles of practices undertaken by the SOs, how these were used to enable sustainability strategies varied significantly between the organisations. In some cases, the SOs were aware of the device, but were ‘rudderless’ as they lacked intentional direction or purpose to implement the device or could not understand how the device was relevant to their sustainability work. In these cases, the SOs were unable to active sensemaking to direct and legitimise their own sustainability work, but instead were looking for leadership from elsewhere.

Further analysis of the use of the devices revealed a patchwork of approaches inconsistent with the phase or level of accreditation. Table 3 provides a visual overview of this analysis which examines the use of the device according to the phase. In this table, usage of the device is categorised according to the expected usage for the phases where ‘blue’ is typical of compliance work, ‘orange’ of efficiency, and ‘green’ of strategic.

---

Insert Table 3 about here

---

What we see is a patchwork of approaches across the various organisations. For example, ‘Bricks’ which is considered to be in the strategic phase, relies on informal and ad hoc reporting which would typically be considered a practice of a pre-compliance organisation. On the other end of the spectrum, ‘shipping’ which has yet to achieve accreditation, has very sophisticated reporting typical of an organisation in the ‘strategic’ phase.

### **Barriers and Enablers**



All SOs identified barriers and enablers to their sustainability transition work. Overall, the ‘barriers’ theme was more heavily populated and empathetic in comparison to the enablers. That is SOs were more likely to discuss how the perceived barriers were significant in relation to their sustainability work. The two dominant sub-themes identified across the work of all SOs were ‘sustainable supply chain’ (all expect ‘bank’) and ‘promoting sustainability externally’. Bank’s biggest barrier was staff commitment, and they cite the example that it has taken about 8 years for the environmental team ”to do away with bins under desks”.

For most SOs, the big challenge in making the supply chain sustainable is perceived resistance from employees, from customers and from suppliers. The default response from SOs to resistance is to prioritise suppliers whose products do not compromise employee or customer experience, or profitability. For example, ClubT wonders whether more sustainable offerings to customers would “compromise on quality or patron comfort”, something he says, “we can never” do “because that’s obviously where the dollars flow”. He is hesitant to even move away from plastic bottles, saying: “Things as basic as not providing plastic bottles would be a big step, but that no doubt would be a hindrance for our customer service, because our patrons don’t want post mix, they want a bottle of coke”. Shipping and Bricks have met resistance to sustainable supply chain from employees. Shipping says the company’s “procurement team, are too focussed on their own specific issues in terms of their job. Day to day, getting their job done sufficiently. they’re not there to think about ethical sourcing, warehousing, where things are coming from”. Bricks gives an example of moving away from using organic matter in bricks (collected from garbage bins) because “a lot of our employees don’t want to go near the stuff” but also because “It also doesn’t fit with our branding message of style and fashion”.

All SOs appear ambivalent about promoting their organisation’s sustainability externally.

Surprisingly, even the companies who have achieved higher levels of SA accreditation are not doing much to promote their sustainability. This is predominantly due to a perception that customers, suppliers and the general public generally do not care about sustainability. Bricks says, “We’re...doing so much from a sustainability perspective but you wouldn’t know it” and laments that

their “biggest customers...there’s no sustainability push from them at all”. The Clubs feel their customers and community are uninterested in sustainability. ClubT says the public “either don’t care or they don’t understand it”. And finally, Hotel says ‘*we have not seen an overabundance of customer demand for sustainability improvements from our customers*’. Another reason for the lack of external promotion was due to fear of raised expectations or back lash. For example ‘Bricks’ says that the company is fearful of “doing a song and dance about their sustainability achievements and getting a fine from ACCC for misleading anyone”.

While, SOs were less emphatic about enablers of sustainable transition than they were about barriers, the enablers they spoke about serve as a summary of how each SO thinks about sustainable transition. ClubT, Care, Bricks, Bank and Shipping see the key to transition as senior management support. For example, ClubT says “now we’re in a really good space where I have the full support of the rest of the senior management, the CEO and the board”. Bricks says “I think (we will get more buy-in) once we get more visible and the boss can start reporting more on some of these”, indicating that management support comes from being able to measure progress and report on it. Shipping says whilst she struggles to get management support for a sustainability strategy that is more than environmental, she sees it as enabling that “for the first year this year we aligned with GRI, I’m stoked”. These SOs, are adept at sensemaking and sensegiving to legitimise their sustainability work as processing organisational performance.

In contrast, ClubC suggests the club’s transition to sustainability is mostly enabled through the club’s relationship with SA. Similarly, Hotel indicates that the main progress in sustainability comes from work with SA, but he suggests a cynical view of the purpose of working with SA. They are working with SA on a food waste trial, to determine how much food waste they have and whether they need to purchase equipment to deal with food waste in the future, but they “don’t necessarily have a budget for it”. In these cases, the SOs are looking outside of their own practice to legitimise and enable their sustainability work.

### PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Given the patchwork of work practices, SOs in this study had an expansive span of control across many different functions and departments within the organisation. However, their roles were not strategically placed within the organisational hierarchy, suggesting there may be a need to elevate the role of the SO. The role of a Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) has strategic oversight for the integration of sustainability into the core strategy and operations of an organisation (Woods and Cartland, 2013). Yet, very few organisations sampled in this study have the predisposition, readiness or capacity for such a role. SOs are consumed with orchestrating and making sense of a broad and diverse set of responsibilities within the organisation. Often the legitimisation and sensegiving of sustainability itself absorbs much of the SO's productive capacity. In contrast with the assumptions that SOs are predominantly occupied prosecuting and coordinating a complex functional agenda, we identified that much of the job of the SO is precisely this discursive work.

Such a strategic capacity limitation in the role of the SO is even more critical if organisations are to progress to the 'idealised' phase of sustainability. A premise of many of these developmental models is that organizations will eventually progress to an 'ideal' sustainable business model where the organization and the products and services it generates, and the entire supply network that enables it to do so will be 'restorative' (Benn et. al., 2014). If and how organizations achieve this idealized business case for sustainability has become the focus of increasing debate wherein scholars claim various forms of innovation are required (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund & Hansen, 2012; Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Bocken, Short, Rana & Evans, 2014). Others have concluded that attaining an idealized sustainable business model requires changes beyond the organization itself (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008), with a recent literature review concluding that sustainability-oriented innovation requires a 'systems building' approach, such as that proposed in the 'circular economy' (Adams, Jeanrenaud, Bessant, Denyer & Overy, 2015). Within this study sample, capturing such innovation was often frugal or opportunistic rather than strategic. Furthermore, SOs indicated that their work implementing sustainability across their supply and consumption channels was the greatest barrier experienced in their work. SOs may play a significant role in enabling progress towards an ideal

sustainable business approach, but if their continuous practice is that of legitimising sustainability, then moving beyond maintaining sustainability at an operational level may never be realised

While phase models suggest some form of progression through stages of sustainability, perhaps what is most striking is what's left unsaid by our SOs. This appears as an adaptive tension between the sustainability work of the SOs and the core purpose of the firm. While SOs can sensemake and sensegive sustainability initiatives, when the core organisational purpose is inherently 'unsustainable', then elevation of a strategic sustainability agenda will not enable a congruent or coherent approach. It is for such reasons that Hahn et. al. (2015) call for an ambidextrous approach to enable pursuit of both instrumental and moral purpose initiatives. Our study reveals such an approach undertaken by the SOs, yet it is this same ambidexterity that entails the consistent sensemaking for continuous legitimization, likened to the role of 'becoming' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Arguably, such ongoing becoming of the role of the SOs and undermine their capacity to elevate their sustainability work to enable strategic transition.

If sustainability is becoming mainstream, then it is timely for more attention to be focused on the professionalisation of sustainability within organisations. This will include formalising the role of the SO and legitimising a more strategic positioning of sustainability work. Our study problematizes the nature of the work of the SO in that it entails manipulating multiple aspects of the functional and social-symbolic context. Currently SOs can be characterised as an emerging type of organisational professionals, in contrast with established occupational professionals. SOs must rely on their craft-like, generalist, and tacit knowledge base (Risi and Wickert, 2017).

Higher education can enable such professionalisation through programs focusing on sustainability management competencies (Hesselbarth and Schaltegger, 2014) and more case studies to demonstrate how sustainability is coherently enabled in organisations and the transitions devices required.

## REFERENCES

- Angus-Leppan, T., Metcalf, L., & Benn, S. (2010). Leadership Styles and CSR Practice: An Examination of Sensemaking, Institutional Drivers and CSR Leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 93(2): 189-213.
- Bansal, P. and Song, H.C., (2016). Similar but not the same: Differentiating corporate responsibility from sustainability. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1): 105-149.
- Basu, K., & Palazzo, G. (2008). Corporate Social Responsibility: A Process Model of Sensemaking. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1): 122-136.
- Benn, S., Dunphy, D., & Griffiths, A. (2014). *Organizational change for corporate sustainability*. Routledge.
- Bizzi, L., & Langley, A. (2012). Studying processes in and around networks. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(2): 224-234.
- Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative methods for organizational and communication research*. London: SAGE.
- Brown, A. D., & Thompson, E. R. (2013). A narrative approach to strategy-as-practice. *Business History*, 55(7): 1143-1167.
- Carlsen, A., Clegg, S., & Gjersvik, R. (2012). *Idea work: lessons of the extraordinary in everyday creativity*.
- Chase, S. E. (2011). Narrative Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research/edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln*, 4th ed.: 421-434. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dawson, P. (2013). The use of time in the design, conduct and write-up of longitudinal processual case study research. In M. E. Hassett, & E. Paavilainen-Mantymäki (Eds.), *Handbook of Longitudinal Research Methods: Studying Organizations*: 249-268. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- De la Ville, V.-I., & Mounoud, E. (2010). A narrative approach to Strategy as Practice: strategy making from texts and narratives. In D. Golsorkhi, L. Rouleau, D. Deidl, & E. Vaara (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*: 183-197. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunford, R., & Jones, D. (2000). Narrative in strategic change. *Human Relations*, 53(9): 1207-1226.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK ; Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Gabriel, Y. 2004. Narratives, stories and texts. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Osrick, & L. Putnam (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*: 62-77. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Galbreath, J. (2009). Building corporate social responsibility into strategy. *European Business Review*, 21(2): 109-127.
- Gelman, J., Treviño, L. K., & Garud, R. (2013). Values Work: A Process Study of the Emergence and Performance of Organizational Values Practices. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(1): 84-112.
- Ghadiri, D. P., Gond, J.-P., & Brès, L. (2015). Identity work of corporate social responsibility consultants: Managing discursively the tensions between profit and social responsibility. *Discourse & Communication*, 9(6): 593-624.
- Gherardi, S. (2009). Introduction: The Critical Power of the 'Practice Lens'. *Management Learning*, 40(2): 115-128.
- Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12: 443-448.
- Guthey, E., & Morsing, M. (2014). CSR and the Mediated Emergence of Strategic Ambiguity. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 120(4): 555-569.
- Hahn, T., Pinkse, J., Preuss, L. and Figge, F., (2016). Ambidexterity for corporate social performance. *Organization Studies*, 37(2), pp.213-235.
- Hesselbarth, C. and Schaltegger, S., (2014). Educating change agents for sustainability—learnings from the first sustainability management master of business administration. *Journal of cleaner production*, 62, pp.24-36.
- Humphreys, M., & Brown, A. (2008). An Analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility at Credit Line: A Narrative Approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(3): 403-418.
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2005). *Strategy as practice: an activity-based approach*. London; Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations*, 60(1): 5-27.
- Jarzabkowski, P., & Seidl, D. (2008). The Role of Meetings in the Social Practice of Strategy. *Organization Studies*, 29(11): 1391-1426.
- Kaplan, S. (2008). Framing Contests: Strategy Making Under Uncertainty. *Organization Science*, 19(5): 729-752.
- Kaplan, S. (2011). Strategy and PowerPoint: An Inquiry into the Epistemic Culture and Machinery of Strategy Making. *Organization Science*, 22(2): 320-346.
- Kiron, D., Kruschwitz, N., Haanaes, K. and von Streng Velken, L. (2012). Sustainability Nears a Tipping Point, MIT Sloan Management Review 53(2), pp. 69-74.
- Langley, A., Smallman, C., Tsoukas, H., & Van De Ven, A. H. (2013). Process Studies of Change in Organization and Management: Unveiling Temporality, Activity and Flow. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(1): 1-13.
- Lenssen, G., Tyson, S., Pickard, S., & Bevan, D. (2009). Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability: Leadership and Organizational Change. *Corporate Governance*, 9(4): Guest Editorial.
- Lubin, D.A. and Esty, D.C. (2010). The sustainability imperative. *Harvard business review*, 88(5), pp.42-50.
- Lueneburger, C., and Goleman, D. (2010). The change leadership sustainability demands. MIT Sloan Management Review, 51(4), p.49.
- Maitlis, S., & Lawrence, T. B. (2007). Triggers and Enablers of Sensegiving in Organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 57-84.
- Neugebauer, F., Figge, F., & Hahn, T. 2014 (forthcoming). Planned or emergent strategy making? Exploring the formation of corporate sustainability strategies. *Business Strategy and the Environment*.
- Okhuysen, G. A., Lepak, D., Lee Ashcraft, K., Labianca, G., Smith, V., & Steensma, H. K. (2015). Theories Of Work And Working Today. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1): 6-17.
- Phillips, N., & Lawrence, T. B. (2012). The turn to work in organization and management theory: Some implications for strategic organization. *Strategic Organization*, 10(3): 223-230.
- Quinn, L., & Dalton, M. (2009). Leading for sustainability: implementing the tasks of leadership. *Corporate Governance*, 9(1): 21.
- Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1987). Expression of Emotion as Part of the Work Role. *Academy of Management Review*, 12(1): 23-37.
- Rhodes, C., & Brown, A. D. (2005). Narrative, organizations and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7(3): 167-188.
- Risi, D., & Wickert, C. (2017). Reconsidering the 'Symmetry' Between Institutionalization and Professionalization: The Case of Corporate Social Responsibility Managers. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(5): 613-646.
- Schaltegger, S., Lüdeke-Freund, F., & Hansen, E. G. (2012). Business cases for sustainability: the role of business model innovation for corporate sustainability. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 6(2): 95-119.
- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. (2012). A Matter of Time: The Temporal Perspectives of Organizational Responses to Climate Change. *Organization Studies*, 33(11): 1537-1563.
- Sonenshein, S. (2010). We're Changing - Or Are We? Untangling the Role of Progressive, Regressive, and Stability Narratives during Strategic Change Implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(3): 477-512.
- Strand, R. (2014). Strategic Leadership of Corporate Sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 123(4): 687-706.
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization science*, 13(5), 567-582.
- Unruh, G., Kiron, D., Kruschwitz, N., Reeves, M., Rubel, H. and zum Felde, A.M., (2016). Investing for a sustainable future. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 57(4), pp.1-29.
- Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations. *Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1): 495-560.
- Vaara, E., & Whittington, R. (2012). Strategy-as-Practice: Taking Social Practices Seriously. *Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1): 285-336.
- Visser, W., and Crane, A. (2007). Corporate sustainability and the individual. Cambridge

Programme for Sustainability Leadership, Paper Series.

Walley L. E., Stubbs M. (1999). "Greenjacking": A tactic for the toolbag of environmental champions? Reflections on an SME success story. *Eco-Management and Auditing*, 6, 26-33.

Whittington, R. (2006). Completing the Practice Turn in Strategy Research. *Organization Studies*, 27(5): 613-634.

Whittington, R. (2007). Strategy Practice and Strategy Process: Family Differences and the Sociological Eye. *Organization Studies*, 28(10): 1575-1586.

Woods, J. and Cartland, A., (2013). Chief Sustainability Officer. *Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility*, pp.342-345.

Zollo, M., Cennamo, C. and Neumann, K., (2013). Beyond what and why: Understanding organizational evolution towards sustainable enterprise models. *Organization & Environment*, 26(3), pp.241-259.

**Table 1: Overview of Sample Organisations by Business Model Phase**

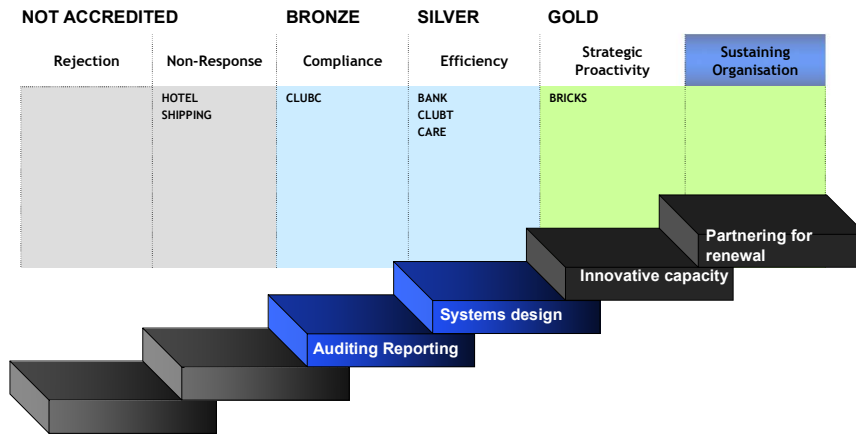




Table 2: Description and Summary of Transition Devices

<b>Overview of Transition Device</b>	<b>Summary Comparison</b>
<p><b>Benchmarking</b> is discussed by SOs in four ways: “investigating how other people did their work”, “meeting with that group (of companies in the same industry) to share ideas”, “comparing” within the industry, and comparing against their own previous performance.</p>	<p>The most enthusiastic indication of the importance of benchmarking comes from Bricks, who points to examples of progress within the company based on improvements when benchmarked against their own internal sustainability performance. By the SA definition, Bricks have also made the most progress in transitioning to a sustainable business model.</p> <p>Intra-industry comparisons across all aspects of their work were discussed as difficult because finding an equivalent company to benchmark against proved difficult.</p> <p>SOs do not appear to make a connection between the difficulty they experience with benchmarking and their lack of progress in transitioning to sustainability. For example, ClubC repeatedly talks about being “rudderless” when it comes to having sustainability goals, but does not connect benchmarking with finding direction.</p>
<p><b>Sensegiving</b> is the process through which SOs attribute coherence and meaning to their sustainability work and seek to influence the sensemaking and meaning making of others.</p>	<p>All SOs talked about sensegiving as a part of their role in transitioning the company to sustainability, albeit each with a different focus and level of detail. ClubT and Hotel discussed their sensegiving processes in terms of promoting behaviour changes. Shipping uses information about “risks and opportunities but also sustainability trends” to open sensegiving conversations. Care talks about sensegiving with practical symbols of sustainability like solar panels, and by instituting system.</p> <p>The outlier was ClubC who talked about wanting to be a recipient of sensegiving, saying, “I have had very little exposure to this kind of thing except for the Sustainable Advantage. There’s no one telling you what to do here”.</p>
<p><b>Upselling</b> is the work associated with receiving legitimacy from senior management and boards.</p>	<p>Bricks, Hotel, ClubT and Shipping see as something they do well and as important to transitioning the company to sustainable business models. For example, Bricks says, “senior management is starting to get the message” because he reports directly to the MD and proudly says, “I’ve managed to get enviro performance metrics as 5% of everyone’s bonus calculation”. In contrast, Bank, Care and ClubC do not talk about upselling. Care suggests it is not necessary, saying, “we don’t have barriers in management because we have good business support from management”. Bank suggests approval for sustainability projects come naturally from strategy and her position as a former board member of the bank.</p> <p>ClubC feels incapable of upselling. . . <i>I’m very good at following instructions, if someone could just say this is what the goal is, I’m all there. Let’s go. The CEO and the Board want progress, but they don’t know what to do next either.</i></p>
<p><b>Developing Strategy/Reporting</b> is work associated with measuring, evaluating and communicating the outcomes of sustainability work. The development of formal sustainability strategy is important for some SOs but not others.</p>	<p>Bank, says, “one of the first things we did was around vision and planning, we created a board approved document” and she has relied on the document to facilitate funding approval for sustainability projects. Shipping uses strategy development as a place to “push it as a sustainability strategy...banging heads sometimes”. In contrast, ClubC, ClubT, Bricks and Hotel do not have a formal written strategy. For Bricks and Hotel strategy is “in my head”, suggesting they do not use a strategy document or strategy development process as a transition tool. ClubT says he is “working really closely with the OEH at the moment on a five-year plan”. These SOs also do less formal reporting. Hotel does the least reporting, saying, “I might wait a couple of years to see if something takes over as far as standard reporting”. However, Bricks uses internal reporting to the board to leverage board level conversations about “other enviros”, after initially trying to do something more formal. Only Bank and Shipping produce formal reports.</p>

<i>Overview of Transition Device</i>	<i>Summary Comparison</i>
<p><b>Accreditation</b> is work associated with achieving accreditation of sustainability performance by the SA program.</p>	<p>Most SOs point to the usefulness of the SA program in providing guidance for the transition to sustainability. All but one of the SOs (Bricks) say they are the main driver for gaining accreditation with SA. Bricks says his company was one of the first to earn the gold standard. Some SOs with silver recognition feel that in the early days of sustainability transition the SA program is very helpful but once the SO graduates to trying to earn gold accreditation, they take their time as it is “quite daunting” (ClubT) and “a big deal” (Bank). In contrast, Care is very keen to be the first company in their industry to earn gold accreditation and is pushing ahead despite the conditions for their gold accreditation, developing sustainable supply chain management, being “hard to work on. Not all SOs are enthusiastic about earning accreditation. Shipping, sees gaining SA accreditation as “more a recognition and networking program, and less about actual tangible outcomes”. Hotel says, “We don’t yet have accreditation with Sustainability Advantage. I have looked at it and I’m debating”.</p>
<p><b>Capturing Innovation</b> is work identifying, enabling and creating new sustainability-oriented practices, processes and/or products.</p>	<p>The work of innovating and implementing innovation in their organisation falls to them and it is a continuous process driving the organisation’s transition to sustainability. SOs sometimes grapple with innovation, notably ClubC who says he is always looking for advice on “what to do next” and Hotel who says he faces questions like, “If we start to do well with our waste streams in the kitchens, how do we get customers to separate their trash in the rooms...without overstepping their luxurious experience?”. ClubC is delighted with a breakthrough in innovation that comes from his work with SA as “the idea of influencing suppliers is new to us... With the help of SA we are putting conditions on our suppliers to make sure it is in the best interest of sustainability”.</p> <p>Other SOs grapple with innovating on a tight budget. For example, Shipping has found a company that “take your sludge oil and turn it into a petrol product or rubber for the roads...it’s just a matter of (me) finding what is affordable” and Care is looking at “how can we engage with local suppliers...ensure that sense of shared responsibility among our suppliers...get some wins doing that that won’t cost us a whole lot more”. Finally, more experienced SOs are able to discover innovation within existing operations. For example, Bricks happened upon an innovation that one of the plants had implemented on their own initiative. In another example, ClubT discovered the expertise for the development of an employee wellbeing program within the club, “one of the staff, just finished her PT qualification, she wanted a go at running this sort of thing, so we handed over the reins to her, and she has taken it to a next level, to the point where it is now a full-blown well-being program”.</p>

Table 3: Summary of ‘Transition Devices’ by Organisation and Business Model Phase

	Beginning/Risk Avoidance			Intermediate/Efficiency			Advanced
	Shipping	Hotel	ClubC	Care	ClubT	Bank	Bricks
<b>Capturing Innovation</b>	Continuous process for transition. Frugal innovation.	Continuous process for transition. Grapples with consequences.	Continuous process for transition. Enabled through partnership with SA.	Continuous process for transition. Frugal innovation.	Continuous process for transition. Seeding existing strengths.	Continuous process for transition	Continuous process for transition. Discover in existing programs and disseminate.
<b>Accreditation and awards</b>	Less enthusiastic – sees as networking	Uncertain about the advantages.		Challenged by Gold – supply chain.	Challenged by Gold. Awards important for internal buy-in/ recognition	Challenged by Gold	Highly significant. Awards important for internal buy-in/ recognition
<b>Strategy and Reporting</b>	Developing. Environmental separated, pushing for integration into a sustainability report. GRI reporting.	Informal strategy. No reporting.	No formal strategy.	Highly significant. Clearly and simply communicated	No formal strategy – in development.	Highly significant. Board approved strategy document. Standalone sustainability report.	Informal strategy. Some internal reporting included in annual report (regulation driven – CDP).
<b>Upselling</b>	Legitimising. Alignment with GRI and progressive comms with senior management	Not actioned.	Not required. Uncertain about direction.	Not required. No barriers to senior management.	Legitimate – pay back. Full support of CEO, board and senior management	Not required. Align with strategy and good connections to board.	Legitimate – environmental pay bonus. Direct report to MD.
<b>Benchmarking</b>	‘Comparing’ within the industry	None	‘Comparing’ within the industry	How other people do their work	‘Comparing’ within the industry	Sharing ideas within the industry	Comparison against own previous performance
<b>Sensegiving</b>	Risks and opportunities	Promoting behaviour change - principles	Wants to receive sensegiving		Promoting behaviour change - measures	Alignment with global principles (SDGs)	Sampling best practice and fertilising cross-silo programs