

The greening of organizational culture: revisited fifteen years later

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Abstract

Purpose – Organizations have viewed sustainability as a societal problem and unrelated to business. To recognize sustainability as an organizational issue requires companies to deal with the challenge of transforming into environmentally sustainable enterprises. This requires institutions to align mission statements with values. The purpose of this paper is to replicate previous research in sustainability and the cultural facets which impact the process.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative case study method was used to analyze 25 organizations within the US Midwest with various contexts to determine how their respective cultures impacted their change initiatives. Specifically, the authors spoke to sustainability change agents with regard to their leadership and culture, and the factors that are conducive to (or barriers to) implementing sustainability initiatives.

Findings – The original study demonstrated the presence of seven contextual conditions which are important in the process of imbedding sustainability within the institution. This research found the same dimensions to be present; however, they manifested differently 15 years later.

Practical implications – The original research offered a somewhat dark picture of the sustainability change initiatives within organizations. The current study however, offers a much more positive perspective which demonstrates organizations appear to have progressed with regard to sustainability.

Originality/value – This is a replication study whereby we discovered similar themes as to the nature of contextual factors that can hinder or advance sustainability initiatives; however, the findings 15 years later show a marked difference in the current state of affairs and the ability to implement sustainability initiatives.

Keywords Sustainability, Leadership, Values, Culture, Change agents, Organizational greening

Paper type Research paper

The very concept of sustainability has intrigued academic researches and organizations leaders for a number of decades. This intrigue has translated to an emerging stream of research within the management literature (Cruz and Pedrozo, 2009). Numerous studies have been published offering support to the concept of sustainability and the need for organizations to pursue sustainable business practices (Dasgupta and Vaghela, 2015), with approximately 93 percent of CEOs reporting that sustainability is important to their company's success (Lacy *et al.*, 2010). Organizations understanding the need for such strategies have developed subsequent policies, process, and developed protocols in an effort to address a preponderance of environmental challenges which subsequently impact organizations (Cruz and Pedrozo, 2009; Crane, 2000). Several authors have stated organizations must respond to the ecological and social challenges through a planned and structured culture change and ultimately an organizational transformation (Stead and Stead, 1992; Post and Altman, 1994; Welford, 1995). Yet, despite management's



desire, societal pressures, and financial rewards, many companies still struggle to integrate sustainability within their existing organizational cultures and climates (Epstein and Buhovac, 2010; Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2014).

Our working definition is that of the Dow Jones Sustainability Group Index, “Sustainability-driven companies achieve their business goals by integrating economic, environmental, and social growth opportunities into their business strategies” (Keating, 2001, p. 9). Traditionally, for-profit organizations have viewed sustainability as a purely societal problem (Post and Altman, 1994), separate from their business practices. Yet a number of internal and external forces for change have provided an impetus for institutions to take sustainability more seriously (Epstein and Buhovac, 2009). Stakeholders such as clients, vendors, customers, suppliers, and employees have begun to influence organizations, encouraging if not pressuring institutions to change (Epstein and Buhovac, 2009; Keating, 2001). Even without the benefit of senior management support, community, and other social pressures challenged organizations to be good corporate citizens (Epstein and Buhovac, 2009). To recognize sustainability as an organizational issue requires companies to deal with the enormous practical challenge of transforming today’s organizations. This is most effectively accomplished when institutions align their mission statements with embedded sustainable values (Post and Altman, 1994). Furthermore, this is most effective when a dedicated sustainability change agent is leading initiatives and rallying their teams.

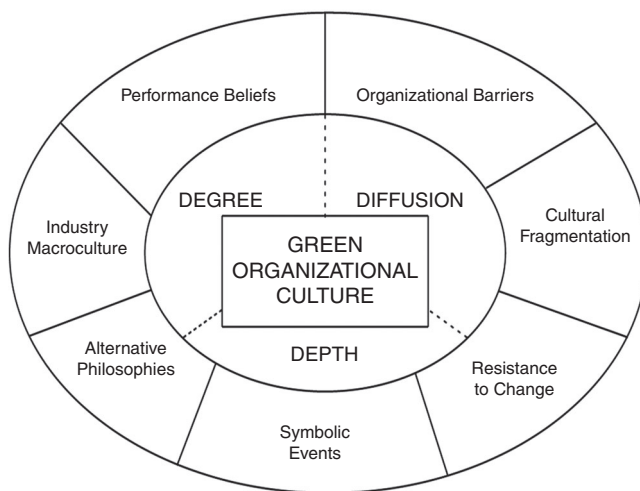
Specifically, research has shown that the emergence of sustainable organizations is contingent on the institutionalization of environmental beliefs and processes into the very fabric of those organizations (Dasgupta and Vaghela, 2015; Jackson, 2012; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995; Purser, 1994). For many organizations this requires an extreme change in their current management philosophy, and an evaluation of the actions required to truly instill the new values, beliefs, and behaviors within their culture (Davis, 1994; Pfeffer, 2010; Bond *et al.*, 2012; Shrivastava, 1995; Stead and Stead, 1992). Similarly, research shows that embedding sustainability is largely dependent on a cultural change (Bond *et al.*, 2012; Pfeffer, 2010; Post and Altman, 1994; Welford, 1995). The impetus is clear, given that companies which utilize and demonstrate sustainability initiatives are seen as having good character and strong values (Biloslavo and Trnavcevic, 2009; Miles and Covin, 2000; Pfeffer, 2010), which can lead to other positive organizational outcomes. Organizational context is an important driver toward sustainability implementation (Epstein and Buhovac, 2010; Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2010). As such, our research will explore the nature of such contextual drivers in the process of internalization of sustainability into an organization. Our research aims to empirically test and inform the model of Harris and Crane (2002) and the factors of a green organizational culture (as highlighted in Figure 1) which are most conducive to sustainability initiatives.

Literature review and theoretical development

Corporate culture

The importance of organizational culture has been noted frequently within the literature and specifically the sustainability business literature (Newton and Harte, 1997). However, at the time of their writing, Harris and Crane (2002) argued that theories of organizational greening had been researched on a somewhat superficial basis. Nevertheless, those who conduct research within the green genre have argued organizations need to enact a dramatic culture change in order to respond appropriately to environmental challenges (Stead and Stead, 1992). Such a dramatic change requires an understanding of the various mechanisms which might be utilized.

Figure 1.
Depth, degree, and
diffusion of
organizational
greening



Source: Harris and Crane (2002)

In any sustainability change initiative, the leadership has a unique responsibility in moving things forward and creating a culture conducive to change. Our qualitative research aims to inform the literature by analyzing the mechanisms and contextual factors organizations use to instill sustainable values into their organizational culture.

Corporate culture is an important construct and a strong positive corporate culture can lead to numerous positive employee outcomes. Specifically, research has demonstrated that corporate culture is an important variable during the implementation of sustainable practices. Collier and Esteban (2007) demonstrated through qualitative research the key to effective implementation of environmental and sustainable initiatives is the direct result of appropriate ethics, values, and attitudes. Most environmental movements have found success in companies which have a participative open culture, a learning environment, transformational leadership, and altruistic values alignment (Collier and Esteban, 2007; Egri and Herman, 2000; Zsoka, 2007). From a theoretical design standpoint, Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) argue that the “ideal” culture profile should be low on internal process values and high on open systems values.

Learning environments allow information sharing and awareness building (Cruz and Pedrozo, 2009). Similarly, corporate cultures need to be open to change in order for opportunities (such as sustainability initiatives) to be embraced. Initiatives often give rise to new job duties or changes in roles which may be met with resistance if institutions (and individuals) are not open to change. Environmental issues can be pro-active or reactive. Therefore, it is important that the culture aligns well with the type of environmental and sustainable strategy (Rouse and Daellenbach, 1999). Culture is a tremendous sustainable competitive advantage (Rouse and Daellenbach, 1999). The most consistent finding regarding currently accepted views of corporate culture is that extant cultures tend to shape the greening process with the presence of specific culture values either supporting or constraining the institutionalization of green values (Fineman, 1996; Post and Altman, 1994).

Furthermore, Hartman *et al.* (2009) highlight that alignment of values between employees and employer is related to organizational green orientation, positive feelings

about the employer, and performance. Similarly, Hoffman (1993) argued that congruent fit between an employee's values and the organization's culture is important. Based on the above review of the literature, we revisit the work of Harris and Crane (2002) to assess how corporate culture and the alignment of values might lead to sustainable practices 15 years after the initial research.

Sustainable culture dimensions

Creating a corporate culture based on sustainability is certainly not a simple process and the creation of such a culture is contingent upon a number of key dimensions (Harris and Crane, 2002). Through empirical research, Harris and Crane (2002) illustrated the mechanisms by which a sustainable culture is achieved. This provided an insightful framework highlighting the depth, degree, and diffusion, of sustainability values throughout organization. The depth of cultural sustainability describes how deeply managers value such initiatives. The degree of cultural greening refers to the extent to which managers felt that green values and sensibilities were manifested in organizational creations and artifacts. The diffusion of cultural greening applies to how widely managers believed these feelings and behaviors to be exhibited throughout the organization (Harris and Crane, 2002, p. 222). These three dimensions were further delineated into the factors which noted the observable facets in a sustainable culture change. These dimensions include performance beliefs, organizational barriers, cultural fragmentation, resistance to change, symbolic events, alternative philosophies, and industry macroculture.

The three dimensions of degree, diffusion, and depth are not equally impactful on the seven dimensions (as noted in Figure 1). Performance beliefs and industry macroculture are primarily associated with the degree of green organizational culture. Organizational barriers and cultural fragmentation are listed as being primarily associated with diffusion. Symbolic events, alternative business philosophies, and individual's resistance to change are shown to be primarily associated with depth. Harris and Crane (2002) also found in their analysis some dimensions have a strong secondary effect and are linked to more than one of the three primary dimensions. Within Figure 1 the dotted lines demonstrate where a secondary effect was evident. For example, resistance to change was shown to be impacted by both depth and diffusion. Based on the Harris and Crane (2002) article each is described in turn.

Performance beliefs refers to the relationship between embedded sustainable values and how the managers believe this will impact traditional performance measures (sales, profits, or market share) (Harris and Crane, 2002). If the leadership believes sustainable values will have a positive impact on traditional performance measures, clearly they are more inclined to "get on board" and incorporate such values into their organizational culture. The impact of performance beliefs is centered on the degree to which environmentally conscious opinions were considered to be manifested in company activities. This relationship has been described as the employee's perceptions of the organizational success, market share, profitability, growth rate, and innovativeness of the organization in comparison with their competitors (Lee and Choi, 2003).

In previous research, performance beliefs were shown to be the most common factors influencing the degree of greening in organizational culture. Therefore the following proposition is offered:

- P1.* The degree to which the manager believes sustainable values will impact traditional performance measures will affect the manifestation of sustainable values into the corporate culture.

Organizational barriers refer to the behaviors, systems, and structures which limit the diffusion of green beliefs and activities within an organizational culture (Harris and Crane, 2002). Examples of organizational barriers might include behavioral barriers (blocking), systems and structures that are inflexible (such as bureaucracy), inter-functional coordination challenges (such as divisions), centralized decision making (which can limit innovation or autonomy), structural diversity (limiting consensus), the focus of information systems, internal politics (stepping on toes), or general resistance to change due to the nature of human behavior.

The existence of political maneuvering as a mechanism toward change implementation is well documented within the literature (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Whittington and Whipp, 1992). Such maneuvering is supported by a number of theories which promote political tactics as mechanisms of issue selling and change implementation (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Whittington and Whipp, 1992). Micro-cultures which were thought to be unsympathetic or conservative proved to be especially challenging environments for sustainability change-agents in the original study (Harris and Crane, 2002). These individuals were often marginalized by their organizational leaders and it was considered to be professional suicide (Harris and Crane, 2002):

Especially within companies that were viewed as informally unsupportive of sustainability issues, evidence emerged of limited pro-sustainable political maneuvering apparently designed to instigate or promote a greater environmental focus (Harris and Crane, 2002, p. 225).

Also of interest in the original research, even when organizations were informally not supportive of sustainability initiatives smaller pro-green sub-groups were shown to utilize political maneuvering in order to promote a green focus (Harris and Crane, 2002). Further, centralized institutions make it difficult for diverse markets to respond to their own stakeholder needs (Harris and Crane, 2002). Hence, we propose a relationship between organizational barriers and the inability to imbed sustainability into the culture:

P2. The existence of organizational barriers will inhibit the level of sustainable values within an organizational culture.

Symbolic events refer to the symbols and symbolic actions and events which have a pervasive effect on the process of embedding sustainable values within a corporate culture. The symbolic events will in turn shape the behavior of the organizational members with respect to a sustainable culture and impact the cultural depth of the green change. The events may be negative in nature and impede the embedding of values or positive and therefore act as a catalyst to a change initiative. Negative examples of symbolic events might include negative press such as an oil spill or an organizational leader complaining about green initiatives to coworkers. Positive examples might include an organization financing the cleanup of a local waterway or publically instituting a process change to create more sustainable packaging for its products. Previous research demonstrated specific symbols and symbolic actions and events can have a powerful and pervasive impact on the cultural depth of a sustainability change initiative. In previous research the impact of such symbolic events tended to be toward positive change (Harris and Crane, 2002):

P3. The symbols or symbolic events will have an effect on the process of embedding sustainable values within an organization.

Alternative Philosophies refers to the extent to which a cultural emphasis is perceived to be placed on alternative or conflicting business philosophies (Harris and Crane, 2002).

This might mean shifting from their traditional focus (i.e. sales) to a broader definition of their organizational mission, which might now include sustainability. Traditionally the dominant philosophy within organizations was the generation of sales or profits and the exclusion of other considerations. Previous research demonstrated the importance of the perceived cultural dominance (Harris and Crane, 2002). It is important to recognize the dominant culture when striving to adapt in response to sustainability initiatives. In doing so, the addition of the sustainability culture will be filtered through the dominant culture. For example, an organization might be built on a market-oriented culture and sustainability initiatives will only be embraced if the market demands they do so. Therefore we propose the following relationship:

- P4.* The dominant organizational culture will impact the cultural adaptation process toward sustainable values.

Cultural fragmentation refers to the extent to which managers believe the cultural landscape of the organization (Morgan, 1986) is characterized by the presence of subcultures (Siehl and Martin, 1984). More specifically, the number, size and power of organizational subcultures can have a direct impact (positive or negative) on the diffusion of sustainability values. Subcultures can be based on geography, professional groups, or function (Harris and Crane, 2002). Each of these subcultures can have both positive and negative implications. For example, geographical isolation could impede the progression of a sustainability change initiative as the participants might not have the ability to share beliefs on a regular basis. Alternately, geographic proximity could assist the change process as employees could interact, model behavior, and encourage participation. Therefore we propose the following:

- P5.* The number, size, and power of the organizational subcultures will have a negative impact on the adoption of sustainable values.

Resistance to change refers to an unwarranted challenge to an accepted status quo or a traditionally accepted method or process. Within the original work of Harris and Crane (2002) participants related this resistance to a type of “management fad” and examples of such fads included strategic human resource management, total quality management, business process re-engineering, strategic alliances, and activity-based accounting methods. Hannan and Freeman (1977) argue adaptation of the organizational structures to environmental initiatives happens at the population level, with various forms of organization sequentially replacing one another throughout the change process. They further argue organizations have strong internal forces which inhibit change initiatives. These forces are the reason change in strategy and structure are rarely successful (Hannan and Freeman, 1977). Therefore, employees who noted green change initiatives to be “unwarranted” also stated they did not personally believe in social responsibility (Harris and Crane, 2002). Hence we propose:

- P6.* The degree of perception that the adoption of sustainable values is a “fad” will have a negative impact on the adoption of those values.

Industry macroculture is built on the term “macroculture” as coined by Abrahamson and Fombrun (1994). Their research demonstrated that organizational failure could be related to failures of the macro (industrial culture) as well as the micro (organizational cultures). When these two facets of culture are in contrast to one another the green change initiative might be in jeopardy. Freeman (1982) stated that, “older larger organizations reach a point where they can dominate their environments rather than

adjust to them" (p. 149). This phenomenon is referred to as isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and is described as the constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. Noted in the original research were themes and trends regarding environmental assumptions often related to a specific organizational context. These assumptions might be related to legal regulations (i.e. regulations which define how green an organizational must be to remain legally compliant) or stakeholder influences (i.e. customers or other stakeholders who give priority to green values). The degree to which such green values were seen to be a priority within the organization influenced the success of the initiative. Therefore, we propose:

- P7.* The degree to which the macroculture of the organization sees the adoption of sustainability values as being important will impact the adoption of such values.

Method

Study design

In order to extend and inform previous research we conducted in-depth interviews with six sustainability managers in a US Midwestern city. Furthermore, we solicited in-depth open-ended findings through online surveys with 19 organizations and their sustainability managers. These organizations ranged in context and specifically were identified by the following areas: building products, engineering, consulting, hospitals, banking, energy, environmental, public services, mining, architecture, legal, printing, education, and manufacturing. These organizations ranged in size and are categorized according to the US Census Bureau: five of the organizations are small (less than 500 employees), eight are medium in size (501-3,000), and 12 are large in size. Each organization was chosen from a sustainability interest group membership list, and each had a dedicated sustainability manager or sustainability team leader. Although we recognize this exploratory research does not include the full array of possible industries, we contend that given the nature of the research (culture and context), we would not expect significant differences across industries. Of course, future research should consider these suppositions.

Procedure

Prior to conducting interviews, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained and consent was given by all participants. In person interviews ($n = 6$) were held on-site at the participants' offices, and each lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Each of the two lead authors conducted two of the interviews independently from one another (and a third professor conducted two more interviews and shared their notes and audio recordings). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also kept noting body language and additional insight when appropriate.

The semi-structured interview questions were developed based on a careful analysis of the literature. This list of questions included potential probes based on the answers given by the participants. A list of interview questions were developed, because of the nature of exploratory research, there was deviation from the questions to allow the participants to expand on their experiences. After the first few interviews, the research team discussed the questions and data, and modified the interview slightly to add probes and additional questions. All of the direct quotes below are derived from these transcripts, while additional insights are integrated into this analysis based on handwritten notes.

Finally, after the in-depth interviews were conducted, a qualitative open-ended survey was developed in order to solicit more data from our sample of organizations involved in sustainability. The remaining 19 in our sample were analyzed based on the comments they wrote in their responses to the online survey.

The intent of these qualitative interviews is to help to provide insights into the manner in which existing theory applies to these critical roles. As such, our use of quotations to populate the findings of the paper are intended to inform existing theory (e.g. theory driven) rather than an inductive approach to create theory (Boyatzis, 1998).

Analysis method

Data were analyzed using a thematic framework analysis (Green and Thorogood, 2004). Framework analysis is particularly suited for identifying policy- and practice-related findings. In this approach, participant stories remain intact during analysis, as opposed to breaking apart the data in order to identify new theoretical elements (Green and Thorogood, 2004). Framework analysis generally proceeds through five steps: familiarization with the data, analyzing major themes for coding purposes, systematic application of codes (indexing), the systematic comparison of data within and across cases (charting), and examining relationships among the thematic codes, or mapping and interpretation. The authors proceeded through each of these steps independently, and following each independent analysis, the authors came together to discuss any disagreements and come to consensus on the analysis.

Reliability and validity of data

To ensure the reliability and validity of qualitative data, Morse *et al.* (2002) provide verification strategies that assist researchers in ensuring the rigor of a study. First, the authors practiced responsiveness by pausing after the first few interviews to review the data and the initial interview questions, which led to a revision of the interview questions to optimize the collection of qualitative data. Second, there was methodological coherence as research in the area of sustainability is not clearly defined; therefore, qualitative interviews are appropriate for exploring new phenomena. Third, the chosen sample of sustainability change agents is appropriate in understanding how sustainability change initiatives may have change since the original research was conducted. Fourth, the authors approached data collection and analysis iteratively, using the analysis to inform data collection and vice-versa. Taken together, these verification strategies contributed to the reliability and validity of this study.

Findings

The interpretive findings associated with this study are organized into seven subsections: performance beliefs, organizational barriers, cultural fragmentation, resistance to change, symbolic events, alternative philosophies, and industry macroculture. (Note: although Harris and Crane (2002) discuss the depth, degree, and diffusion of organizational greening we do not attempt to address these dimensions which are difficult to measure with qualitative research).

Performance beliefs

Respondents in our research sample often highlighted the importance of performance. Performance beliefs refers to the relationship between embedded sustainable values and how the managers believe this will impact traditional performance measures (sales, profits,

or market share) (Harris and Crane, 2002). Several of the managers found this to be important in order to sell the value of sustainability. That is, respondents serve as champions of the initiatives and must not only sell the concept of the new sustainability initiative (e.g. waste reduction), but they must justify the cost savings. Furthermore, this dimension was shown to be the most prominent within the transcripts.

There were a number of themes noted from our interviews, which could be categorized as performance beliefs when internalizing sustainable values. This was one of the most telling categories presented in the data as respondents noted the bottom line effect of a culture built on sustainable values. Representative comments are as follows:

Since we began it (sustainable cultural values) has saved us quite a bit of money. We have diverted about 5,000 lbs. of recycling away from the landfill (Powerplant Inc.).

So we bought a machine that is saving 4,000 gallons of water each year. It's not a lot but, it does show use that we are doing something (Manufacturing Methods).

The person in charge of sustainability has strict requirements for cost reduction so if it is green and saves money you have their attention (University).

These statements demonstrate the importance of quantifying the embedding of sustainable values within an organization. The importance of this is summed up with the following statements:

I am a big believer in measuring outcomes and that is based on my background (Powerplant Inc.).

I have never found implementing sustainability initiatives hard once the collaborators understand that the process produces a stronger balance sheet (Port System).

Another important component of performance belief noted in the interviews was that of showing an entrepreneurial spirit toward performance maximization. Other organizations noted the value of environmentalism and the way it which it acted as a catalyst toward innovation and ultimately performance improvement:

The idea being that these environmental responsibility initiatives are oftentimes a catalyst for innovation. When people are so laser focused on getting that dollar out of their operations – the positive thing is it promotes an entrepreneurial spirit, it promotes growth (Tree Services).

Much of the progress and ownership which has driven past progress and will drive future progress, comes from a grassroots sustainability “performance engine,” pursuing high-return, low-investment sustainability initiatives (Engineering and Sustainability).

At least we could point out the positives, like look at how much energy we saved this month or look at all this material that is no longer going in a landfill. It's a way to make more money (Printing Partners).

As the above quotes highlight, the financial benefits are intricately intertwined with long-term sustainability and performance.

Organizational barriers

Organizational barriers proved to be an important facet to the internalization of sustainability values. Organizational barriers refer to the behaviors, systems, and structures which limit the diffusion of green beliefs and activities within an organizational culture (Harris and Crane, 2002). Examples include inter-functional coordination, centralized decision making, and structural diversity, and the focus of information systems.

There were a number of quotes made, which could be categorized as organizational barriers. This category was demonstrated through various ways; however, all could be categorized as barriers. The first sets of barriers were very general statements regarding organizational structure and systems. Several respondents stated the following:

I've always been critical about how long it takes to get anything done corporately and I am still frustrated. The big boat turns slow and it frustrates me (Tree Services).

Part of the problem with any sustainability initiative is that we all have day jobs. Our priority is to put the lights on and maintaining our focus first operationally (Tree Services).

It's much divisionalized! (Manufacturing Methods).

Siloed and scared. These all bring challenges to change in a way of moving to better operational performance (Asset Management).

Within the literature, political maneuvering was shown to be both a positive and a negative aspect of behavioral barriers. Several of the respondents noted the presence of political maneuvering within their organizations as factors in sustainability. For example:

If you look at this politically you get people purposefully. You put people out there who really want to make thing work or other people who think it's (sustainability) crap (Tree Services).

When problems with implementation occurred they were openly discussed and everyone had a voice in coming up with a solution (Organizational Consulting).

An interesting outcome associated with this theme was the ways in which the barriers were dealt with. Several of the respondents first experienced barriers and then in time the barriers presented an opportunity to instill sustainability values. For example, Powerplant Inc. noted the importance of hearing the "no" word when instilling sustainable values into the culture:

I asked if we could have a recycling program and was told no. Often I hear "no" in the first phase of any sustainability initiative. I guess my approach to situations like that is to never hear "no" but, to hear "not yet" (Powerplant Inc.).

Engineering Firm also noted the importance of hearing the right words in the embedding process and more specifically who to hear the right words from:

It's cliché, but unless sustainability and the change required to enhance the sustainability of a business is clearly championed by top leadership, engagement of the organization will be spotty and typically just sufficient enough to achieve the goals set (Engineering Firm).

Manufacturing Methods also gained a greater understanding of how to overcome behavioral barriers and stated:

For people, it comes down to what's in it for them [...] if you can get people to like this [...] make them think it's going to help the, help the company [...] then it's a lot easier [...] they have to convince themselves [...] they've got to decide [...] but, that's the hard part (Manufacturing Methods).

Cultural fragmentation

The data analysis process demonstrated a number of examples of cultural fragmentation. Culture fragmentation refers to the extent to which managers believe the cultural landscape of the organization (Morgan, 1986) is characterized by the presence of subcultures (Siehl and Martin, 1984). This can manifest in the number, size

and power of the organizational subcultures and may have either a positive or negative impact of the process. There were a number of comments noted, which could be categorized as cultural fragmentation.

Several respondents noted the importance of subcultures within their organization in the process of embedding sustainability values:

I spend a lot of time talking things up and I find that is very helpful to focus on. I have learned the more time I spend talking and not implementing the easier it will be for me to actually start a new initiative. I get buy in from the people that way (Powerplant Inc.).

Employees are often the ones coming up with the sustainability targets. They get no incentive for doing this and many of the best sustainability ideas came directly from the employees (Building Solutions).

Sustainability is led via both a corporate and divisional council. Within each division, sustainability is a distributed, matrixed accountability implemented via project teams (Engineering Firm).

Organizational Consulting notes the importance of their Green Team Initiative to minimize cultural fragmentation and build cohesion:

We form teams within the company to address green practices. The objective is to raise awareness and motivate participation and spark new ideas (Organizational Consulting).

Sustainability as a change initiative is different because it is systemic. All the pieces are connected which makes it more difficult to gain momentum and maintain momentum unless multiple areas are all being simultaneously changed (University).

As the above comments highlight, the systemic nature of sustainability is hindered by typical fragmentation that is simply the byproduct of organizational design and divisional structures.

Resistance to change

Resistance to change or the presence of an unreasonable challenge to an accepted status quo or a traditionally accepted way of conducting business was also demonstrated within the data. Employees may see sustainability as a “management fad” and therefore dismiss sustainability initiatives without even considering their viability. Contrary to the behavioral aspect of organizational barriers noted earlier which acknowledged the process an individual might follow toward acceptance, this dimension notes a lack of process on the part of the employee. Within this dimension employees refuse to even consider such initiatives and are convinced they are not viable without question. There were a number of comments noted below, which could be categorized as resistance to change:

When there is resistance to change (we want that to be rare but it happens). I would say some of the most challenging people are those who have been doing the same thing for several years as it is difficult for them to change (First Line Medical).

At (Industry) this isn’t really a change initiative as much as it is a reframing initiative (Power Industry).

Also noted was the importance of dealing appropriately with resistance:

The idea is to have top management share your values. Everyone is then talking the same language and is on board, and that is the best way to achieve change quickly (First Line Medical).

People that performed the same job for years immediately resisted the change, but you must keep pushing them forward to change. Some of the people didn't document the changes appropriately so there were problems evaluating our success (Printing Partners).

(You) must have internal respected individuals as champions at the mid and senior management level (to get things done) (Global Mining).

Building Solutions noted the importance of "management fads" and the impact these perceptions had on their own readiness to adopt sustainability values:

So I've been trying to call it practical sustainability I just heard that news that people are bad mouthing electric cars because they associate them with these people who are running around climbing into trees so that the trees won't be cut down (Building Solutions).

Building Solutions and Organizational Consulting continued with the following solutions:

You keep it business and then share what might be a more tree hugger side with someone who may have the same feelings (Building Solutions).

If you measure success of a project not just based on the initial investment but, also on operating expenses moving forward, they would start thinking about sustainable improvement and measures differently (Organizational Consulting).

Finally, Building Solutions experienced tremendous resistance initially and then gained greater buy-in on the part of the cultural change over time:

There have been a few instances when employees did complain a bit about sustainability initiatives. I would hear things like, "it won't work" or "it would be too time consuming" but, I find they come around in time (Building Solutions).

Symbolic events

Symbolic events which are described as events which have a pervasive effect on embedding sustainable values were also demonstrated within the data. These symbolic events were shown to be important to these respondents as these events were turning points with the organizational culture and were used to shape the behavior either positively or negatively with respect to internalization of sustainable values.

There were a number of themes noted, which could be categorized as symbolic events when internalizing sustainable values. First Line Medical noted the importance of organizational recognition programs within the organization:

We have this award called Green Health Heroes. People are nominated via their peer for an award. Winner's names are announced, we put them on our website, and we make sure their managers are aware of their efforts (First Line Medical).

Manufacturing Methods and Port Systems and also noted great benefits to programs oriented toward sustainability:

So this week we are doing something because of Earth Week. We are doing an event called e-scrap where we have employees bring in their PCs and we donate them to a company (Manufacturing Methods).

We are simply overwhelming them with solutions developed by outside experts (Port Systems).

Other respondents noted the importance of public recognition programs as symbolic events that can help to embed sustainable values:

Business Week has ranked "us" 50 out of 51 on sustainability (Banking Systems).

We are working on a video which will feature top executives talking about our commitments to sustainability (Banking Systems).

As the above examples illustrate, symbolic events are important in helping to recognize sustainability efforts, provide credibility to the efforts by highlighting industry case studies and the like.

Alternative philosophies

Alternative philosophies or the extent to which a cultural emphasis is perceived to be placed on alternative or conflicting business philosophies was also apparent within the data (Harris and Crane, 2002). This might mean shifting from their traditional business focus to a broader definition of their organizational mission, which now includes sustainability. This does not ask the organization to drop their original focus but, to add to or enhance their original organizational mission.

There were a number of comments, which could be categorized as alternative philosophies when internalizing sustainable values, articulated by respondents as the expansion of the mission statement and the subsequent challenges associated with this shift. Several of the respondents found the expansion of alternative philosophies to be an essential aspect to the internalization of sustainable values. However, it was interesting to note that organizations were not always looking to include this alternative philosophy in their message unless this was being demanded of their constituents (i.e. employees or customers). For example, Manufacturing Methods found the integration of a sustainability philosophy to be integral to their recruitment strategy:

Younger employees especially are expecting companies to do that (sustainability). It's an incentive. New employees are looking for companies that are more active in sustainability and doing more things (Manufacturing Methods).

Both Banking Systems and Building Solutions found the integration of a sustainability philosophy to be important to their customers:

Our customers are demanding it (sustainability). We have a strong brand in helping the communities we serve. I would argue then that sustainability was already a part of our social responsibility but, we just never said it clearly. A deliberate decision was made to take a new approach and focus on sustainability also (Banking Systems).

It is a tool we use to get and keep our customers. It is very beneficial to be able to walk customers around the building, point out our products being used in the building and then not how they relate to sustainability (Building Solutions).

Still other organizations, Recycling Specialists, found alternative philosophies within their own organizations which needed to be challenged in the greening process:

I have limited power of what we can do, I can only make suggestions. When the Administrative person bought a Keurig coffee maker there was pushback from some. I didn't wish to make waves. Some of us don't use the Keurig to state our position. Those of us who do, scrape out the coffee grounds and compost them (Recycling Specialists).

Building Solutions summed up the integration of sustainability and a traditional organizational philosophy with the following:

Let's be honest it (sustainability) is all about marketing and business (Building Systems).

Industry macroculture

The data analysis process offered a number of examples of macroculture barriers in the form of industry macroculture or corporate culture. An industry macroculture barrier noted by Harris and Crane (2002) was manufacturing is affected differently than not-for-profits. This might include assumptions regarding sustainability, legal regulations, or stakeholder influences. There were a number of themes noted, which could be categorized as macroculture influences in the process of internalizing sustainable values.

The first theme dealt with the organizational-level assumptions regarding sustainability. Building Solutions stated some stakeholder influences:

We are very involved in the local community and sustainability is just an addition to an already philanthropic organization (Building Solutions).

She continues to note the importance of their macroculture with the following statement:

Philanthropy has always been an important component of Building Solutions and we have been involved in our community for many, many years. We see sustainability as being another facet of philanthropic system which are already in place. It is just one more way we can be involved in the community and make a positive contribution to the world we all live in (Building Solutions).

The beliefs held by various stakeholders (internal and external) were also evident within the transcriptions as being important to the process of embedding values. From the internal perspective the following was noted:

We've got some executives with the program but, it's a lot easier if you can show them how much money can be saved (Manufacturing Methods).

This gives us an opportunity to connect with our employees, through something they care about. Especially our younger employees (Tree Services).

While the solutions (to sustainability) were foreign to The Corps of Engineers they were embraced by (Port System). Our CEO understood both the technology and the benefits (Port System).

From the external stakeholder perspective, the following comments illustrate this theme:

It's not a lot but, it shows us that we are doing something and that's kind of incremental stuff we need to do to justify when the customer is asking for it (Manufacturing Methods).

All stakeholders are now engaged (boards, clients, employees and the community) (Banking Systems).

It is not a compliance issue. We know to succeed, we have to adopt changing practices and take a shared responsibility with our communities and employees in addition to our shareholders (Asset Management).

Other Respondents noted the importance of being legally compliant:

When we think about our brand, it is also participation in the Carbon Disclosure Project ensuring we are GRI compliant (Banking Systems).

It's compliance driven, we see that to some degree especially if they are afraid or vulnerable to law suits (Organizational Consulting).

Discussion

Through this research we sought to examine the facets and contextual dimensions of organizational culture which might be of importance in the internalization of

sustainability values. We expanded upon the existing work of Harris and Crane (2002) and helped provide additional rich insights into how these dimensions of drivers and barriers are implemented and overcome. This research offers contributions to the literature on ways in which sustainability values possibly are realized within an organizational culture. The change agent (a key informant of our research) highlighted that performance metrics must be realigned, barriers must be overcome through persistence, successes must be celebrated, and the new values must be woven into the existing mission and values. We close with implications and future research directions.

The factors associated with the internalization of sustainability values

Our findings help to inform existing theory and highlight that the facilitators and barriers to a green organizational culture (advocated over a decade ago) remain relatively unchanged. Specifically, our findings mapped well with the work of Harris and Crane (2002) and highlight the role performance beliefs, organizational barriers, alternative philosophies, symbolic events, cultural fragmentation, resistance to change, and macroculture on the internalization of a culture with embedded sustainable values. However, we are still struggling with these same aspects over a decade later. This is particularly troubling given that our participants were not only key leaders in their institution, but, that these intuitions are considered to be at the forefront of sustainability.

Performance beliefs and specifically the belief held by the manager's regarding the impact of sustainable initiatives was the most often reported by the respondents. Many of the respondents noted the importance of this dimension and how the manager's belief (either positive or negative) can impact the inclusion of sustainability initiatives within the culture. The manager's perspective (likely a byproduct of the institution's values) was centered on the bottom line. Several respondents noted the importance of this dimension and how their sustainability initiatives directly impacted the profits. From a manager's perspective, the bottom line was critical, and, unless the sustainability initiative acted as a catalyst to traditional performance metrics, senior management would not embrace them. Some managers also saw the inclusion of sustainable initiatives as a catalyst for innovation and creativity. Several respondents saw their sustainable initiatives as such a catalyst, encouraging an entrepreneurial perspective, learning and innovation, each of great importance in contemporary organizations.

Organizational barriers were also shown to be well-documented dimension within the transcripts. These were shown on either a very general organizational level where respondents stated frustration with implementation of sustainability initiatives or the frustration with bringing a new or additional set of expectations into their jobs. Other respondents spoke of structural challenges and the difficulty with implementation.

In a number of transcripts alternative philosophies were shown as the sustainability-oriented culture was filtered through the dominant (traditional) culture. Traditionally oriented organizational cultures are predicated on the bottom line. Businesses are often primarily focused on making profits and other perspective might be ignored. Many of the respondents noted the importance of working to expand the alternative philosophies of sustainability within their organizations but, each also noted they could not forget the importance of the dominant (profit oriented) culture in the process. Sustainability needed to be part of the profit-oriented culture and not a separate entity.

Symbolic events were a bit less prevalent within the transcripts; however, this theme was still shown to be quite powerful in the internalization of sustainability values. Several of the respondents noted the importance of a catalyst moment in moving the sustainability culture forward. These events could be internal or external to the organization.

Cultural fragmentation was also demonstrated by several respondents throughout the transcripts. The importance of subcultures and the development of sustainability-oriented subcultures were evident. Therefore, respondents discussed the importance of discussion, gaining buy in from sub groups, and having sustainability initiatives driven from the sub group members.

Resistance to change was one of the most easily recognized components of the transcripts. This resistance was rooted either in the need to remain “status quo” and not adopt a new way of conducting business or a belief that sustainability was simply a “management fad” and not worth spending time to adopt. Also noted was the importance of the stakeholders in understanding the rationale of the change and gaining their buy in at the onset of the sustainability initiative.

Macroculture was also shown to be an important facet of the process of embedding sustainability values. This was further delineated into the subtopics of organizational macro assumptions regarding sustainability, the influence of legal regulations and compliance, and the influence of stakeholder desires. Though each of the subtopics was shown to have an impact on the adoption of green initiatives it is important to first understand how they impact the dominant macroculture of the organization.

Each of the dimensions was important in the internalization of sustainable values; however, the most telling appeared to be the development and successful integration of alternative philosophies. Each respondent noted the importance of adding to their current organizational mission and demonstrating to their constituents how the expanded philosophy would be beneficial. It was interesting to note the vast array of benefits associated when incorporating a sustainable philosophy. For example, some noted the benefits to their recruitment strategy. As contemporary organizations are striving to brand their human resource strategies this sustainable approach might be a beneficial approach. In particular, with the millennial population which is looking to find the greater linkage between their work life and their personal belief system? Other respondents noted the importance of sustainability and the values associated with this philosophy to their customers. This was the driver to make the change and something their customers were searching for when making decisions on whom to do business with and therefore this was a critical marking component of their organizational mission. Future research in the area of internalization of sustainability values should explore the potential linkages between the facets and how industries differ.

Implications

The original study offered a number of important implications and findings which are relevant to this study. Harris and Crane (2002) noted a number of clear examples of formal corporate policies in response to environmental concerns. However, they also noted a great deal of variance in the level of formality for each of these policies. Some organizations noted rigid organizational policies which mandated their participation and others felt less formal mechanisms were keys to compliance. “Managers were aware of green pressures, few organizations had responded with the level of enthusiasm hoped for by green activists and managers indicated a somewhat apathetic attitude to such concerns” (Harris and Crane, 2002, p. 228). Their findings demonstrated it might be extremely difficult to initiate and sustain the process of cultural greening.

Harris and Crane (2002) paint a somewhat dark and negative picture of the sustainability genre. An approach to the creation of a green sustainability culture which is based on government or organizations mandates. Mandates which are followed without enthusiasm or a willingness to voluntarily create a green organizational culture.

Participants in their research might comply with a sustainability polity but, generally did not believe in the importance of environmental concerns and certainly did not believe in the importance of organizations becoming involved with such initiatives. Their research was conducted 15 years ago and at that time their findings were in line with existing studies (Drumwright, 1994; Fineman, 1996). As this was a replication study we sought to determine if their findings were still apparent many years later.

The original authors noted three key explanations of why they believed the organizations they studied had substantial gaps between the company's formal position on sustainability and those practices which became embedding in the organizational culture:

- (1) apathy is an inevitable consequence of organizational dynamics;
- (2) managers believed macro-environmental pressures were insufficient to require anything more than superficial statement of policy; and
- (3) a difference between the espoused and actual company position is merely an artifact of a delay in cultural development (Harris and Crane, 2002).

With respect to the three key explanations noted above our findings were quite different and offered a much more positive perspective on the sustainable culture journey many organizations have found themselves on in recent years.

Though earlier literature notes apathy is inevitable in organizational culture (Bolon and Bolon, 1994; Jun, 1996) we encountered participants who were enthusiastic, highly driven, and quite passionate about creating a sustainable culture. Participates at various levels of management noted the importance of sustainability in their personal lives and felt incorporating such values into their professional lives was equally important (e.g. alignment and fit between the individual and organization). Therefore, these individuals worked tirelessly to gain the understanding and support for sustainability initiatives within their organizations. No other empirical studies have been conducted utilizing the Harris and Crane (2002) model as a framework to date therefore; we offer insight into the progression since that time.

The original study also stated the macro environmental pressures were not able to move beyond simple statements on the importance of creating a sustainable organizational culture. These statements were described as often superficial in the original study. However, this study did speculate the perceptions of top managers might be important in the success of the initiatives. Our research demonstrated two important responses to the original study. First, we found statement regarding sustainable initiatives to be far from superficial. We found participants were quite passionate about the sustainable movement within their organizations and used statements, policies, and procedures as roadmaps toward their goal. As one of our respondent's illustrates, it is more than just mandates: "Leadership has passion. We're far from being strictly compliance-driven" (Global Engineering Firm). Second, in support of Harris and Crane's (2002) speculation we found top management to be crucial to successful cultural change. Each of the participants noted without the support of top management their change initiatives would never have come to fruition.

Harris and Crane (2002) offered one final explanation of why they found a difference between espoused and actual company positions. They speculated this is merely an artifact of the delay in cultural development. "At the time of this fieldwork the espoused ideal had yet to be naturally translated into tangible manifestations" (Harris and Crane, 2002, p. 228). In total, 15 years after the original research, we agree with this explanation and believe our research demonstrates where organizations currently lie on the

development continuum. The level of passion toward sustainability, the demonstrated belief in such initiatives, and the success embedding sustainability into the organizational cultures offers evidence of the development.

A final important implication of this study also builds upon the work of Harris and Crane (2002). The original authors noted the importance of not over-simplifying how to conceptualize green organizational culture. Based on the organizational context a pluralistic perception of sustainable culture is important. In 2002 they noted the dangers of having one type of green organizational culture. Harris and Crane (2002) found it might be important to understand significant cultural variations between equally green organizational responses to environmental concerns. This is where depth, degree, and diffusion of cultural became important (which we did not aim to measure due to the qualitative nature of our research). Our research also found organizational context and allowing managers to decide how to operationalize a green culture to be important. There is no one right approach to sustainable culture; there is an approach which might be successful in one organizational context but, not another. This appears to be in line with the work of Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010), supporting the notion that internal processes cannot be too rigid, but rather agile and more in line with open systems thinking.

Future research

Our research contributes to the work of Harris and Crane (2002) through insights and parallels, as well as ways in which sustainability initiatives may have advanced in 15 years. Our sample consisted of change leaders in organizations likely at the forefront of sustainability (given that they were all members of an interest group). Future research should explore a larger sample across multiple industries that are not necessarily as far along in their exploration of sustainability. Our research also remains qualitative in nature. Future research should aim to quantify the prevalence of these dimensions. That is, when sustainability is successful, how strongly does success correlate with the reduction of barriers, for example? How often do successful initiatives correspond with corporate cultures that celebrate successes and small wins? Quantitative research should also measure the degree, depth, and diffusion of sustainability within the institution.

Another area of exploration is industry. Which industry macrocultures are more conducive to implementing sustainability? One insightful case study highlights how sustainability is at the core of the work by the Mayo Clinic (Berry and Seltman, 2014). This impressive institution has integrated sustainability since its inception and with the founders. Furthermore, the philosophy of putting patients first is easily aligned with the mission of healthcare. However, not all industries find such an alignment. Furthermore, sustainability may be easier to imbed within the culture when it is part of the founding value system. Future research should explore industry as well as life cycle of the institution (e.g. whether sustainability was part of the inception or integrated later).

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) argue that a monolithic culture may be difficult to obtain (i.e. one dominant culture with organizational-wide consensus), and that natural subcultures throughout the organization are barriers to diffusion. Research should quantify this notion, perhaps exploring the ability of an institution to employ sustainability initiatives despite subcultures. Finally, our paradigm, and that of Harris and Crane (2002) has been that the change agents are intentionally considering organizational culture as a mechanism or barrier to implementation of sustainability initiatives. However, Howard-Grenville *et al.* (2014) contend that the mere implementation of sustainability initiatives shapes the culture and climate within the organizations. That

is, individuals themselves create the culture which is subsequently maintained and changed by its own members (Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011). Hence, future research should explore and measure the strength of directionality or causality – do sustainability initiatives from the ground-up or top-down change the culture, or are cultural dimensions (e.g. a learning-oriented culture) the impetus for change?

Conclusion

The original research conducted by Harris and Crane (2002) made an important contribution to the sustainability literature regarding change initiatives. The purpose of this study was to replicate their study and determine what changes might have taken places over the 15-year time span. The findings of our research demonstrated a number of important changes in the sustainability change landscape for contemporary organizations.

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