

Ecological Imaginaries: Organising Sustainability

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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Abstract

This thesis investigates organisational enactment of sustainability. The problematic addressed is that despite strong evidence supporting human induced global ecological damage, organisational practices remain unchanged and continue to degrade ecological systems. The question addressed is what factors contribute to the inertia that inhibits change for ecological sustainability in organisations? The question is addressed from the perspectives of individuals who are stakeholders in organisations.

The modern concept of sustainability arose during the 1970s and selected aspects of sustainability discourses, for example the concept of the triple bottom line (TBL), have since been integrated into the organising narratives of organisation and society. Despite such success, indicators such as human induced climate change, biodiversity loss and growing inequalities between rich and poor, suggest that mainstream institutions have not taken up change for sustainability. The proposition of this thesis is that alteration to our social imaginary (ies) is a necessary precursor to enactment of sustainability.

The thesis presents findings from three case studies: Landcare, Corcon and Carepoint. These organisations were selected because they represented different sectors and each had initiated a formal sustainability change project: Corcon is an engineering organisation, Carepoint a community services not-for-profit organisation and Landcare an agricultural organisation. Landcare highlights the dialogue that nature has with individuals and organisations and how recognising this dialogue can lead to ecological solutions for sustainability. The Corcon case contributes the importance of boundaries defining inclusion and exclusion as moral constraints and enablers to developing sustainability solutions and the Carepoint case demonstrates that the multiplicity of competing sustainability discourses are understood by individuals who then make decisions based on the context of the dominant imaginary within which they are situated. These findings from the research highlight barriers concerned with meaning construction that view nature as an excluded other. I argue that the adoption of ecological sustainability by organisations and society needs new narratives to facilitate the emergence of meanings of ecological sustainability conducive to the inclusion of nature.

The synthesis of these findings presents two possibilities for stimulating the creation of meaning construction that would facilitate an inclusive approach to nature. The first possibility is the Australian Aboriginal concept of Country, which offers a new source of logics upon which the development of a new socio-political sustainability imaginary may draw. The second possibility argues for the need to create a new social imaginary to support ecological sustainability. A contribution of this thesis is to provide the alternative frame of metabolic organisation to extant models of weak and strong sustainability to stimulate the creation of new ecological imaginaries.

Metabolic organisation is defined as a systemic framework comprising three interdependent concepts: metabolism, values and enmeshment, and brings together three distinct strands of theory: social and biological metabolism, value theory and ecological theories.

List of Abbreviations

ANT	Actor Network Theory
CAP	Complex Adaptive Processes
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COP	Conference of Parties
COPs	Communities of Practice
CR	Corporate Responsibility
CS	Corporate Sustainability
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EM	Environmental Management
G8	Group of Eight
G20	Group of Twenty
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PDW	Professional Development Workshop
SSM	Soft Systems Methodology
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development