

**Sustainable Procurement: Pathways of Transition
for Australian organisations**

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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.

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List of Relevant Publications

Some of the research material reported in this thesis has been published and presented previously. Listed below are the relevant publications and conferences.

Refereed Publications

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Abstract

Organisations as discretionary customers exert a powerful influence on sustainability. Sustainable procurement, the subject of this thesis, represents an approach whereby the natural and social environments are explicitly taken into account in purchasing decisions. Guided by transdisciplinarity, this thesis explores interventions to accelerate sustainability considerations in organisational procurement by providing a range of practical and theoretical contributions to this field.

The research findings are underpinned by a framework of strategic management theories and a social-constructivist epistemology. To examine the adoption of sustainable procurement in Australian organisations, this study employs a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, complemented by an arts-based inquiry interpretation of the case studies.

The combined findings reveal that sustainable procurement in most Australian organisations is an optional activity, in its formative stages, practised as environmental purchasing and typically sustainable procurement is introduced as part of organisational sustainability. This is aside from organisations with exposure to global supply chains that also integrate social considerations. Organisations with fewer than 100 people were found to have the highest adoption rates. In alignment with other green purchasing studies internal organisational determinants, including senior management support, and existing sustainability programs and policies, were found to be highly predictive of adoption. Existing formalised purchasing arrangement including policies, contracts with suppliers and strategic partnerships also supported adoption. By contrast frequently reported barriers, including the high cost of sustainable products and the introduction of programs and also lack of staff awareness and organisational size were not found in this study.

Potential loss of reputation, as a form of competitive advantage was found to be the prime motivation for sustainable procurement adoption. In response to maintaining reputation, organisations were seen to frequently form collaborative stakeholder relationships, predominantly with NGOs and partnerships with suppliers, as the platform for innovative products. Use of a diffusion of innovations' framework indicates that sustainable procurement will be diffused as an innovation among Australian organisations surveyed by 2010. This was shown to be supplemented by institutional forces predominantly through supplier performance programs and sustainability frameworks, initially, then through mimetic and coercive forces

between suppliers and their supply chains and industry peers. Mimetic tendencies amongst procuring organisations will also contribute to the institutionalisation of sustainable procurement in Australian organisations.

Overall, this thesis contributes valuable insight to the status and future of sustainable procurement in Australia with findings that are more broadly applicable. It both strengthens the theoretical basis for examination of the sustainable procurement field, and offers practical tools, including a phase model tailored from the corporate sustainability literature to address this important area.