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Sustainability Perspectives

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Various stakeholders approach sustainability in their own way. How they do this is reflected in their discursive behaviour. The stakeholder groups explored here include Traditional Shareholders, Incentive-Coerced Management, Pro-Sustainability Corporate, and Activists. Each of these stakeholder groups is shown to engage in a unique discourse, which provides insight into how each approach sustainability. This paper draws on Foucault's ideas to help understand these discourses in terms of a framework based on Harré's positioning theory. A new level of understanding is derived about the different points of view about sustainability. Business leaders can harness this to improve how they approach sustainability.

In commonplace conversation about sustainability one may encounter the question, 'just what do you mean when you say "sustainability".' Even when there is agreement that sustainability refers to a balance between social, ecological and economic factors, different people will hold different images of what it means. This paper explores some of the different ways that people perceive sustainability and how it affects their behaviour.

As a by-product, an exploration into how CEOs deal with sustainability issues has has shed light on different sustainability perspectives. This paper introduces four modes of sustainability thought that are made by four identifiable stakeholder groups as they relate to contemporary sustainability issues. These modes of thought are explored in terms of the discourse produced by each stakeholder group and referred to as types of sustainability discourses. Sustainability is understood here to be a balance between ecological, social and economic indicators that ensures the maintenance of the environment and society over time, while financial gain is achieved. In this sustainability sense, production and consumption of resources need to be planned and managed in a way that produces not only an economic gain, but also contribute to social and environmental wellbeing. For example, when production occurs the social fabric is considered and steps are taken to contribute to, rather than, undermine the way people live and work. Similarly, the consumption of resources and the production process need to reflect environmental concerns.

As the initial research on which this paper is based had been concerned with the way people think and relate to others, a discursive approach was selected. Interviews with those who deal with sustainability issues were tape-recorded and verbatim narratives prepared. A positioning theory framework has been harnessed to analyse narrative data. Positioning theory suggests that each time conversations occur, the participants reinforce or change themselves and the self of others involved in the encounter. Collectively and in aggregate, people create themselves and others through discourse.[1] It is in this framework that sustainability is here understood from the perspective of several stakeholder groups. Each group engages in, or is confronted by, certain discursive practices that are either sustainable or unsustainable by nature.

Foucault provides a variety of ideas that help us understand discursive action and which have been harnessed by various social scientists and observers of radical change.[2] The work of Davies and Harré was influenced by many of these authors, whose synthesis of Foucauldian concepts appears to provide a basis for positioning theory.[3] For example, these authors refer to the subjugation of

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[1] Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves' *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1) Jan 1990 pp 44-63

[2] Examples of those to have made use of Foucauldian ideas in this way include Clare Burton *Subordination: feminism and social theory* Sydney, George Allen and Unwin 1985, Wendy Hollway 'Gender differences and the production of subjectivity', in: J Henriques, W Hollway, C Urwin, L Venn and V Walkerdine (eds) *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* London, Methuen 1984 pp 227-263, Claire Murphy *An Introduction to Christian Feminism* Dublin, Dominican Publications 1994, Chris Weedon *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1987, and Judith Butler *The Psychic Life of Power: theories in subjection* Stanford, California, Stanford University Press 1997.

[3] Lionel Boxer '*Using Positioning Theory to Understand How Senior Managers Deal with Sustainability*', A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Business Melbourne 2003c

women in terms of Foucault's subject positions and suggest a Suffragette-like repositioning. This led to further interpretation of Foucault's ideas and subsequent development of a positioning theory framework for culture analysis and development as well as all figures in this paper.[4]

Discourses of sustainability will be explored using the positioning theory framework referred to above. It will be suggested that various stakeholders engage in unique discourses about sustainability and that these discourses are representative of each stakeholder group and the perceptions of individuals in those stakeholder groups.

The next section briefly explore Harré's positioning theory and introduce the analytical framework. Following that, stakeholder groups in the sustainability debate will be introduced. Then data representing the discourse of the various stakeholder groups will be discussed.

1 Positioning Theory Primer

Positioning theory concerns the way individuals are defined by themselves and others through conversation. This section follows the development of positioning theory from Foucault, the Foucauldian feminists, and Harré to the author's own framework of analysis.

Foucault[5] argues that society actively constructs individuals as docile and useable subjects in the various systems of production and control and that it is possible for individuals to challenge these conventions and define themselves in more appropriate ways. As he put it: selves are 'constituted in real practices - historically analysable practices'.[6] Hollway was the first to harness these ideas to show how people have been subjugated by dominant discourses in society and suggest that it is possible to alter this imposed positioning by introducing an alternate discourse.[7] It was from these ideas in part that Davies and Harré developed their seminal work, *Positioning: the discursive production of selves.*[8] Butler refers to this process as a 'subject's becoming'.[9] From this foundation, pp 66-81

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[4] Over several years this framework has evolved as described in Lionel Boxer *The Sustainable Way* Melbourne, Brolga 2005, Lionel Boxer 'Being able to do What You Aspire to do' in: S Charlesworth and M Fasteanu (eds) *Women and Work* pp 75-84 Melbourne, RMIT Publishing 2004 pp 75-84, Lionel Boxer 'A Positioning Theory Method for Culture Analysis and Development', in: L Boxer (Ed.) 4th International Proceedings 2003a Multinational Alliance for the Advancement of Organisational Excellence (MAAOE) (20-22 Oct 2003a) Melbourne, Intergon, Lionel Boxer 'Using Positioning Theory to Assess Quality Systems', in: R. Harré and F.M. Moghaddam (eds) *The Self and Others* Westport, Conn., Quorum Books 2003b pp 251-277, Lionel Boxer '*Using Positioning Theory to Understand How Senior Managers Deal with Sustainability*', A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Business Melbourne 2003c, Lionel Boxer 'Improving Education Quality with Positioning Theory' in: W Staples (ed) 12th International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education (28-30 June 2002) Melbourne, RMIT, Lionel Boxer 'Improving Information Flow with Positioning Theory', in: P Coleshill (ed) *Organisational Excellence: Managing Information*, 3rd International Proceedings, Multinational Alliance for the Advancement of Organisational Excellence (MAAOE) (11-13 Sep 2002) Ayr, University of Paisley pp 106-117, Lionel Boxer 'Assessing QMS with Positioning Theory' in: S Ho and J Dalrymple (eds) *Change Management: 7th International Conference on ISO 9000 & TQM* (2-4 April 2002) Melbourne, Australia, RMIT University pp 781-787, and Lionel Boxer 'Using Positioning Theory to Make Change Happen', in: M Terziovski (ed.) *Proceedings of the 5th International and 8th National Conference on Quality and Innovation Management* (12-14 Feb 2001) Melbourne, University of Melbourne pp 66-81.
[5] Michel Foucault *The Birth of the Clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*, (trans.) AM Sheridan Smith New York, Pantheon Books 1973, Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (trans.) A. Sheridan, New York: Pantheon Books 1977, Michel Foucault *History of Sexuality Vol 1* New York, Random House 1978, and Michel Foucault 'Governmentality' *Ideology and Consciousness* 6(3) July 1979 pp 5-21.
[6] This is referred to on p 369 in Michel Foucault 'On the genealogy of ethics: an overview of work in progress' in: P Rabinow (ed) *The Foucault Reader* New York, Pantheon 1984 pp 340-372
[7] Wendy Hollway 'Gender differences and the production of subjectivity', in: J Henriques, W Hollway, C Urwin, L Venn and V Walkerdine (eds) *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* London, Methuen 1984 pp 227-263
[8] Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves' *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1) Jan 1990 pp 44-63
[9] Judith Butler *The Psychic Life of Power: theories in subjection* Stanford, California, Stanford University Press 1997

and Harré's previous work,[10] Harré has assembled a variety of interpretations and applications of positioning theory.[11]

Harré's various works led the author to conceive Figure 1, which shows that when people encounter one another, they engage in discursive action that has a tri-polar nature.
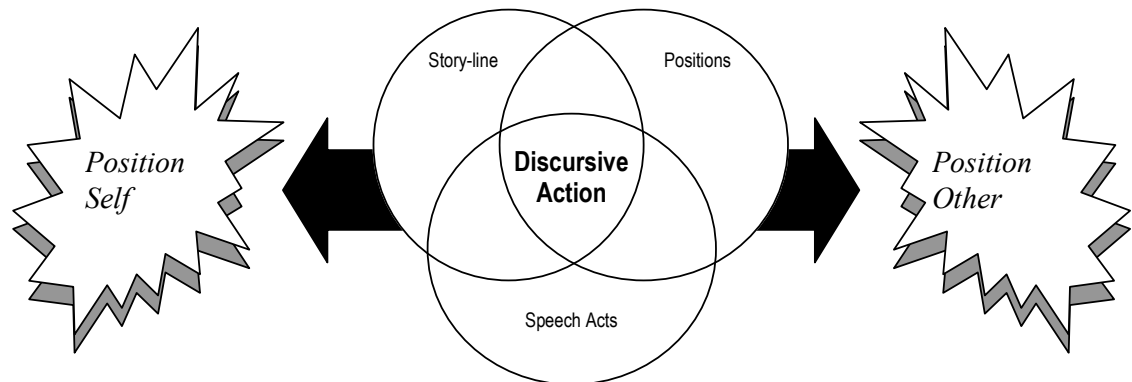

Figure 1 The tri-polar nature of discursive action

Discourse follows a story-line that is conducted by oneself (person) and other selves (other people), through speech acts. Harré developed positioning theory in part from being a student of the founder of speech act philosophy, JL Austin, himself a student of Wittgenstein. In an organisational context, a person's self is understood in the position they take up in the conversation and that position may or may not change during the conversation.

Self and other are relative discursive constructs based on a core of knowledge, which forms the basis of each individual's perception of the truth. Through this they develop a sense of ethics and become a moral agent with a unique perspective from others. As shown in Figure 2, discursive action - composed of the positions individuals bring to each conversation, the story line of the conversation and various speech acts - contributes to the redefinition of self and other during each encounter. The perspective of one person affects the perspective on another. It is in this sense that each person's self evolves when in contact with others. As positioning occurs and positions are established, a social field of power or underlying mood is created and that mood influences subsequent encounters.
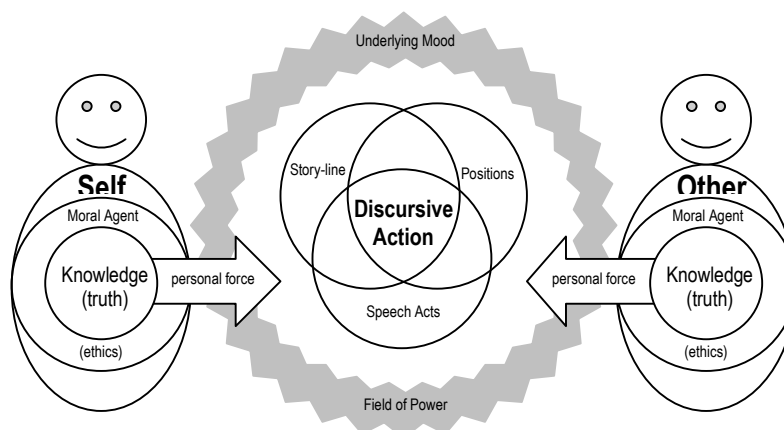
Figure 2 Discursive action and the redefinition of self and other

[10] Rom Harré *Social Being* Oxford, Blackwell 1979, and Rom Harré *Personal Being* Oxford, Blackwell 1983
[11] Refer to these two research monographs focusing on positioning theory Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove (ed) *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* Oxford, Blackwell Publishers 1999; and Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam *The Self and Others* Westport, Conn., Quorum Books 2003

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The social constructionist model in Figure 3 sets out the components of the underlying mood of a group of people. Heidegger describes the whole of being as 'stimmung' or 'mood'[12] and it is in this sense that mood is here understood to be an indicator of culture. This is especially interesting if culture is defined in Schneider's terms:[13]

> Culture refers to: (a) the values that lie beneath what the organisation rewards, supports and expects; (b) the norms that surround and/or underpin the policies, practices and procedures of the organisations; (c) the meaning incumbents share about what the norms and values of the organisation are.

In these terms, culture can be described in terms of this Heideggerian 'mood' of values, norms and meanings if there are some measurable parameters to define mood. It is here that discursive action (and the resulting positioning taking place within the underlying mood) becomes important. Whereas Harré refers to this as a 'local moral order', which is composed of 'rights', 'obligations' and 'acts',[14] the framework in Figure 3 treats the moral order, rights, obligations and acts as four mutually interdependent components that define a larger social order or culture. Such a concept of culture could provide a discursive way of defining, measuring and thinking about the culture of an organisation.
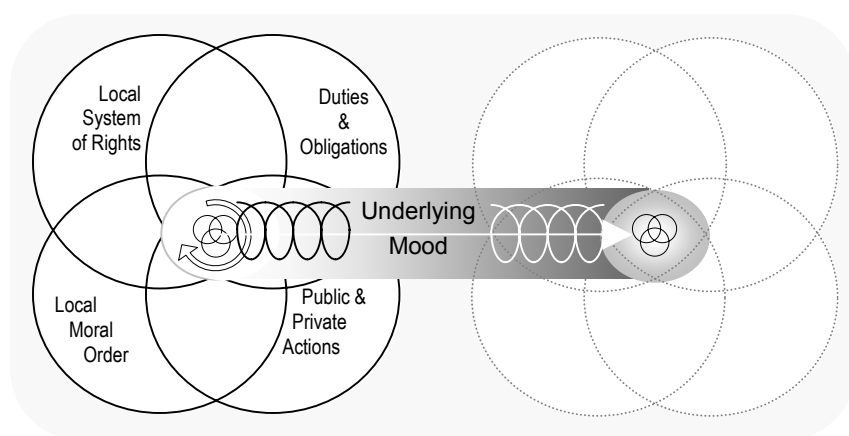

Figure 3 Four mutually interdependent components of culture

With this framework in mind, discursive activity can be understood as attempts to establish selves and others in an effort to alter the underlying mood about issues. In the case of sustainability, various stakeholders engage with one another to express their views of issues in terms of an alternating discourse and attempt to modify that of other stakeholders or sustain their own entrenched point of view.

Because positioning is the discursive creation of selves, discursive data indicate how people create themselves and others. Vignettes couched in terms of an individual relating their experience provide a rich source of understanding when analysed in this way. It is in this sense that the framework shows just what perspective has been assumed by an individual on a certain topic.

While it is not suggested that Foucault was the first person to use the term, positioning - the process of creating selves through discursive action - he did allude to it.[15] Weedon draws on Foucault to provide a feminist foundation of positioning theory by using terms such as precarious, contradictory and in-process to articulate the subjectivity that is required for the sort of change she has in mind.[16] Later, Weedon takes from Foucault the idea that:

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[12] Martin Heidegger *Essence and Being*, London, Vision Press 1956
[13] Benjamin Schneider 'Notes on climate and culture', in: *Managing Services* Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall 1988 p 353
[14] Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove (ed) *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* Oxford, Blackwell Publishers 1999 p 3
[15] Foucault explores subjectivities and subjective positioning in Michel Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (trans.) AM Sheridan Smith London, Routledge pp: 50-55
[16] Chris Weedon *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1987 pp 32-35

> To speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become *subjected* to the power and regulation of the discourse.[17]

In offering 'position' as a dynamic alternative to the static concept of 'role',[18] Davies and Harré imply that one's role is reconstructed when one is positioned in conversation. It is this work that draws on Foucauldian ideas - without directly citing Foucault's work - to create positioning theory. This is not to suggest that Foucault is the key to understanding all human interaction. But his ideas do provide some hints of where to look as Bové[19] reports, that those who take Foucault seriously appreciate his insights as opposed to his specific conclusions. Sheridan concludes that Foucault's influence is as a 'slayer of dragons, a breaker of systems'.[20] Cheney urges that Foucault is a good starting point to understand the origins of a way of thinking that has begun to change the larger society.[21] Weedon explains that Foucault's discursive concepts can be used 'to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power'.[22] And Foucault himself said 'I write for users, not for readers'.[23]

In the stories related by participants, we can determine how individuals have positioned themselves and others. From that positioning, it is possible to determine the underlying mood with respect to an issue - such as sustainability - and describe that mood in terms of rights, duties, moral order and actions.

2 Modes of Sustainability Thought

Sustainability positions (in the Positioning Theory sense) are here categorised into four modes in terms of the underlying mood framework. Dalrymple *et al* provide a background to the development of these categories:

> In the business enterprise, the pursuit of profit is fundamental to the reason for existence. This has been tempered more recently by the introduction of such concepts as the 'triple bottom line' that acknowledges that there may be environmental and social imperatives which must be taken into account in the pursuit of profit. However, the fundamental role of the business enterprise is to maximize value for shareholders.[24]

Discursive data used to describe these modes of discourse, was collected during an inquiry into how CEOs deal with sustainability issues and subsequently analysed in terms of the underlying mood framework.[25] Representative extracts from these data are included here, in indented paragraphs. Further data is extracted from public interviews as reported in the press.

With that in mind, four modes of thought have been identified and located on Figure 4, where they are represented on the sustainability framework to show their relationship to *preference for sustainability* and *preference for economic profit*. Some modes are concerned primarily with profit and some are more inclined to be primarily concerned with sustainability, with a few in between.

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[17] *ibid* p 119
[18] Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves' *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1) Jan 1990 p 45
[19] Pierre Bové, Intellectuals at war: Michael Foucault and the analytics of power in: (ed.) B Smart, *Michael Foucault: Critical assessments* Vol. III, London, Routledge 1995 p 239
[20] Allan Sheridan Michel Foucault: *The will to truth* London, Routledge 1980 p 225
[21] Lynn V Cheney *Telling the Truth: Why our culture and our country have stopped making sense, and what we can do about it* New York, Simon and Schuster 1995 p 92
[22] Chris Weedon *op cit* 1987 p 35
[23] Foucault Michel, Dits et Ecrits: 1954-1988 Paris, Gallimard 1994 p 524
[24] Dalrymple, J, Hilmer, S, Karney, D, Edgeman, RL, Geroy, G *'Knowledge Creation and Advancement of Organizational Excellence'* 1999 http://www.cmqr.rmit.edu.au/publications/mkc.html, accessed 13 June 2004
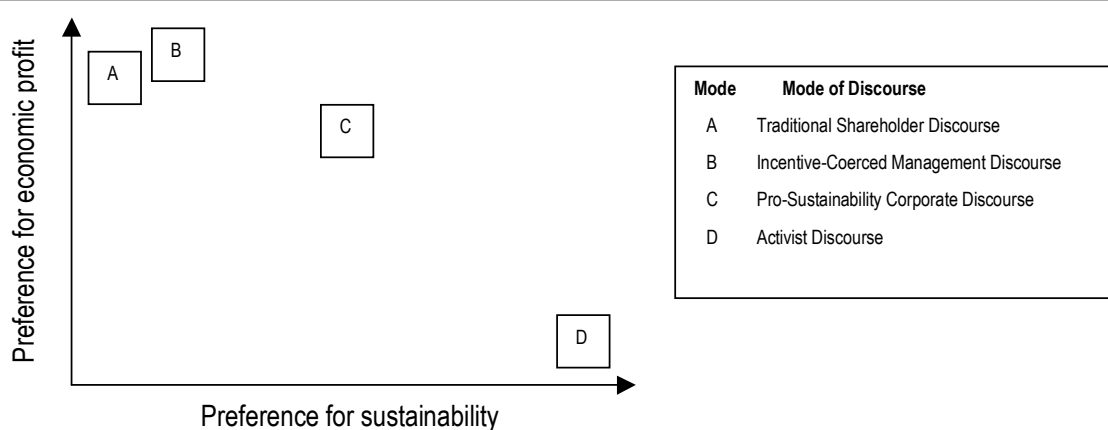[25] Lionel Boxer *op cit* 2003c

Figure 4 Four modes of sustainability thought

2.1 *Mode A: Traditional Shareholder Discourse*

Traditionally, shareholders - whether individuals or corporations - expect a good short-term economic return on their investment. This expectation can interfere with the way decisions with longer-term or philanthropic implications are made. In terms of the positioning theory framework, they perceive it is their *right* to receive maximum return on their personal investment or remuneration.

The traditional shareholder discourse involves a focus on the *right* of shareholders to receive maximum financial return on investment. This translates into a *duty* of managers to maximise shareholder wealth above all other objectives Having produced sufficient shareholder returns a CEO can then pursue other objectives. One CEO of a petrochemical business explained:

> If you do not create shareholder value then you cannot do the other things.

The CEO of a Research and Development (R&D) corporation funded by, and performing work for, various utility businesses also reflected a similar sentiment. This comment highlights the limitations created by the perceived *right* to override other concerns for short-term financial gain. He explained:

> The problem for organisations like mine, is that chief executives of businesses are meant to get the share price up and do everything in the short term, very very little long-term thinking. So, the dilemma I am faced with quite often is of convincing these people that they have to plan out ten or fifteen years.

One chairman of a manufacturing business pursuing sustainability faced opposition from the stock market. An Australian CEO explained how shareholders expected *achieving* maximum economic growth to take precedence over other concerns.

> There was enormous pressure brought on the chairman in terms of 'is this the right direction that we are pursuing - this sustainability agenda' and 'were we betting the business or is it delivering a return that is out of line with what we could get if we pursued a different agenda'. Our share price went down from about $20 a share to $4 at the bottom and at that point it undervalued the company so dramatically it was just amazing.

Initiatives by business to contribute to the 2004 South East Asian Tsunami appeals led to shareholder outrage that their *right* to maximum shareholder return is not respected.[26] Furthermore, Maiden shows that it is the prevailing view of academics and the Australian Shareholders Association that business has a *duty* to obtain the authorisation of shareholders prior to dispensing shareholder funds to charity. While there was outrage from the general public - who

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[26] Michael Maiden 'Tsunami: the backlash', *The Age Online*, Melbourne, 12 Feb 2005, http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2005/02/11/1108061871800.html?from=top5, accessed 1 Mar 2005

may or may not be shareholders - there is academic foundation to the apparently uncharitable *actions* of shareholders. In terms of economic theory there is Friedman's often-quoted claim that 'there is only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase profits'.[27] Such is the *moral order* in which traditional shareholders establish meaning; that economic gain takes precedence over social or environmental issues. Managers are positioned by traditional shareholder discourses to become single-minded in their pursuit of shareholder return.

2.2 Mode B: Incentive-Coerced Management Discourse

Barsky observes that incentives can lead managers to make bad ethical choices.[28] And Gellerman went further, arguing that managers can be coerced into making bad ethical choices by rewards for performance.[29] Many managers, who are coerced by incentive systems, continue to ignore contemporary moral discourses and deploy forms of power and power relations that undermine sustainability initiatives.

The reported culture within Enron led employees to manipulate situations for their personal gain despite adverse impacts on others. Enron energy traders, for instance, profited greatly by redirecting electricity capacity to markets where they could drive electricity prices to the extent that power supply disruption threatened public safety.[30]

The research and development CEO observed one of his alliance partners who appeared to be coerced by incentives to cut costs. Such incentives create a perceived *duty* for these partners to recklessly pursue financial goals.

> He can get more money in his own pocket personally if he can cut costs. He was very reluctant. His arguments were largely that they have to regain their costs - substantial costs to them - approaching $2,500,000. His remit was to reduce costs in Australia. He was brought in (with a three year incentive package) to do something about the Australian business and we were a substantial cash cost - you know, straight off the bottom line.

The alliance partner perceived he had a *right* to maximise his personal income through eliminating sustainability issues. He perceived no *duty* to be sustainable. His employer had established what he took to be the *moral order* - in terms of the rules of his incentive pay package.

A petrochemical CEO explained how an inappropriate *moral order* introduces inappropriate incentives which can leave people assuming that they have unrealistic duties to engage in unhelpful behaviour.

> They were under very severe cost pressure; our operations had been under financial difficulties for a number of years and particularly in that year. I had placed very tight cost constraints on the whole organisation, in an attempt at last to achieve our targets - financial targets, which we did, by the way. I think that that driving force from the top was part of the process, which caused people to believe that they should postpone expenditure that certainly was a part of (the cause of our sustainability problem).

A manufacturing CEO explained how competitors assumed a *right* to falsely claim their product was equally sustainable so that they won the business and achieved sales quotas:

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[27] Milton Friedman 'The Social Responsibility of business is to increase its profits', *New York Times*, 13 Sep 1970
[28] Adam Barsky '*Understanding the Ethical Cost of Assigned Performance Goals*' A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the Graduate School 2004 Tulane University New Orleans, LA
[29] Saul Gellerman 'Why "good" managers make bad ethical choices', *Harvard Business Review*, Reprint 86402 1986
[30] Bethany McLean and Peter Ekland *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The amazing rise and scandalous fall of Enron* New York, Penguin 2003

> Unfortunately a number of our competitors are not exactly fair. They are out there claiming that their product is on par with our product and theirs is environmentally friendly - a lot of those claims are absolute garbage. The people who are making the purchasing decision do not really understand carpet from a technical perspective or from a sustainability perspective and the people selling it to them are very aggressive.

Business managers appeared to think that they had a *right* to optimise their personal remuneration at all costs and that their staff had a *duty* to support them in this pursuit. Their *actions* reinforced the *moral order* that underlay these aberrations.

The world is subjected to unsustainable practices and these practices effectively dictate identities for many individuals. Gibson-Graham explains how the community is subjected to the discourse of mainstream business and how individuals are influenced by this discourse to adopt particular identities for themselves and others.[31] Individuals become people who behave in unsustainable ways because society imposes storylines and leads people to adopt speech acts that lead to and reinforce this positioning. Likewise, they impose expectations of such unsustainable behaviour on others.

2.3   Mode C: Pro-Sustainability Corporate Discourse

Since the introduction of moral discourses concerning sustainability, businesses are no longer free to consume natural and social resources without regard to replenishment. Many organisations continue to ignore these contemporary moral discourses and deploy forms of power and power relations that undermine sustainability initiatives. However, CEOs have been observed acknowledging these discourses as themselves barriers to the introduction of more sustainable approaches.

Once an organisation has set out to behave in a sustainable way, a discourse supportive of sustainability is employed. It appears that this discourse needs to be modelled by the top of the organisation. The manufacturing CEO explained how he assumed a *duty* to initiate sustainability-positive discourse throughout the organisation:

> (In the face of shareholder opposition), the chairman had to show a lot of conviction and courage to maintain this was the way forward. The chairman sat down with all the people that reported to him and had this dialogue: what is sustainability? What does it mean to you? and so on. That process was replicated right the way down through the organisation.

This manufacturing chairman was inspired to change and, as explained by the CEO, took steps to implement his ideas by introducing duties based on a new *moral order*. His *actions* then led people to presume they were to follow his example.

> The chairman and founder of our company had his epiphany and took on board the fact that we needed to fundamentally change the business. We couldn't keep on doing what we were doing; pursuing the take, make and waste type processes. The only way you can become sustainable and really get the rate of improvement that you need is getting the people at the working levels right across the business connected to what it is you are trying to do and committed to it. We have seen significant improvement because the right people at the working levels are involved.

The CEO went on to explain the *duty* of leaders at all levels to involve people throughout the organisation in the sustainable way.

> That is all about raising people's consciousness and getting that sustainability ethic embedded in the business and really getting that connection. It was more of putting some more definition and flesh around (the meaning of) sustainability.

These experiences led the CEO to ask himself some serious questions. In other words, he questioned any inappropriate *rights* that he might have thought he had.

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[31] Katherine Gibson-Graham *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): a feminist critique of political economy* Cambridge, Mass, Blackwell 1997

> Why am I here? Why was I so fortunate to have been born where I was born? What gives me the right to be in this esteemed position in life?

> The point was to communicate to the people right across the world that this was the way forward and we were going to become sustainable and hopefully restorative.

Similar discourses of communication and understanding were revealed by the research and development CEO. He discussed his *duty* to promote the sustainable way.

> We have gone to a great deal of trouble to ensure that they understand the potential impacts of not continuing to support us. Basically they have got to be seen to be doing something about their environmental contribution to greenhouse gases. So, that is certainly a lever that I use both with the industry and with government, to continue to get government support for what we are doing.

He explained that when people understand and accept sustainability issues they realise their *duty* to start solving the problems. Framing the overall situation in sustainability terms creates the necessary *moral order*.

> Their investment is so large that they simply can't allow something to occur that might erode that value quite substantially. So they must be seen to be responsible in dealing with the environment.

He went on to explain that even after change had been accepted, implementation remains elusive in the shadow of other objectives. People try to retain their inappropriate *rights* and avoid the implications of a new *moral order*. In other words, they resist what is being asked of them, perhaps because they benefit under the old *moral order*.

> Yes, they understand the issue, but they wish it were not there; the cost of doing something about it is enormous. Let me give you an example, this organisation has developed a technology that is successful. It will allow for an enormous reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from existing (operations). That comes at a cost of about a billion dollars - a thousand million dollars. The issue is how to deal with it at a time when they are (a) losing money and (b) when our society puts no value on carbon abatement; lots and lots of lovely warm feelings, but not one cent of (financial) value on it. How can we really expect businesses to spend a billion dollars when it does not increase their income by one cent? It is just a nonsense having to deal with that all the time.

What has been observed suggests three steps to promoting sustainability in business: (i) Enable everyday spaces where the impact and *moral order* can be experienced by teams working in the organisation; (ii) Speak with one another in positive terms about the sustainable way and encourage this to become habitual - so that people incorporate sustainability into their *rights* and *duties;* and (iii) Involve people in task forces in *actions* to resolve sustainability issues in the sustainable way. These three approaches taken together provide the leadership to encourage change to the sustainable way.

2.3   Mode D: Activist Discourse

Having learned from the global feminist movement of the incredible influence of small discussions in localities, sustainability activists compete with global forces by engaging in telling small stories at the local level. They create varying degrees of resistance in order to express hopes for new power relations. They realise they can be autonomous subjects rather than objects of development. They are well-guided to operate their local resistance in certain global ways through an aggregate of local effort. They engage in deconstruction and practices of *resubjectivation*. They create breaches for unequal power to be introduced with the objective of destabilising the hegemony of unsustainable practices. As deconstructionists, activists see a dominant discourse that lacks concern for sustainability. Because they realise its colonising power, activists stand outside the main stream for a more transparent perspective.

Activists liberate society from the non-sustainable practices by creating new discourse that enables re-positioning of individuals into a more sustainable approach and assume power in new forms. It becomes a project of *resubjectivation*; that is new institutions and practices are created for people to align with.

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A senior manager in a hospitality complex reflects on how activists converging on his site had influenced his planning. These people assumed a *right* to interfere with proceedings to make their sustainability message heard. He realised the danger presented by this activism:

> We are so big and our core business attracts a lot of media attention. It means that we have a responsibility that goes far and beyond what other organisations might.

However, he acknowledged the opposing *right* of shareholders to maximise their return:

> Everyone wants to maximise their own position including making money, status, and all the benefits, but there are those people with a sense of community who say, 'well there is a bigger thing here' and they have major life goals that are above personal gain.

Accepting the *right* of his tenant shop owners to engage in the core business, he introduced measures to ensure compliance with his rules. By doing so he avoided the wrath of activists:

> Human nature is to try to find a short cut. So why can I not push the boundaries of my service to the point where if it is something that I can solve and that I can take responsibility for and deliver them a service that frees them of that obligation, then I am in complete control. Compliance is my issue - not theirs - they can focus on the business of making money.

His *actions* reinforced the *duty* he assumed to facilitate the sustainable way for others to follow:

> I want to know who it is - not to go about accusing people - so I can find out who it is, learn what is going wrong, and then improve it.

A university CEO explained how influence leaders (in some cases activists) were helpful in understanding issues. He demonstrated the *duty* he assumed to understand issues that may lead towards the sustainable way:

> I am very assiduous at picking influence leaders, who are conducting debates in their own right or are involved in sub debates or subsets going on in the university. So, you are working with multiple levels, multiple conversations, conversation forms, both formally and informally right across the community.

The petrochemical CEO explained his reliance on younger people, who may be idealistic about sustainability issues, to drive the sustainability movement within his organisation. Perhaps their youthful enthusiasm naturally inclined them towards activism - albeit respectful and with deference. He noticed that they assumed a *duty* to live the sustainable way, whereas older employees might assume a *right* to avoid the sustainable way:

> Often you will find that this is led particularly by young people. We have a number of processes that enable young people to be very active - we have a thing called Project Better World for example which involves allowing people to go off and spend time with Earth Watch; and we have a fairly significant environmental sponsorship that we will be announcing in the not-too-distant future which will also enable people to get involved.

The CEO of a municipality has similarly harnessed the enthusiasm of activists. Staff and councillors, who assume a *right* to questions inappropriate situations and a *duty* to take *action* can create the *moral order* necessary for the sustainable way:

> I would not consider my understanding anywhere near as detailed as my staff or as some of the councillors - I mean they are very progressive. I am involved in a few (sustainability forums), but (I learn) mainly through my staff and the councillors. Two people who have been influential are (a manager) who has been a very strong advocate for sustainability for a long time and one of our councillors, who I learn a lot from just by listening to him and the passion.

Those CEOs who deal with sustainability well realise that they do not have a *right* to ignore activists. In fact they realise their *duty* to embrace and involve activists already employed in their own organisation. By establishing a *moral order* that respects the views of those passionate about sustainability, they encourage *action* that contributes to organisation-wide sustainable behaviour.

3   Conclusion

The four categories of sustainability discourse introduced in this paper provide an initial understanding of the different perspectives. However, more focused data would refine insight. For example, little was uncovered about ethical investors from the data at hand. Further discursive data could be collected from interviews that focus on ethical shareholders.

Evidence of positioning is shown to occur in sustainability discourse. That positioning contributes to the way sustainability is dealt with and how further iterations of positioning occur in subsequent discourses. Unless steps are taken to alter discourse, situations are shaped by the past so that the future continues to be a reflection of the past.

It has been shown that various stakeholders engage in unique discourses about sustainability that reflect the position of each stakeholder group and the perceptions of individuals in those stakeholder groups. Observing this discourse and the consequential positioning leads to understanding that can be used to better understand issues and how each group treats the ideas and other stakeholders. With detailed contextual data, such an analysis can provide business leaders with increased intelligence to enable more appropriate decision making.

Lionel Boxer

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