The greening of organizational culture

Management views on the depth, degree and diffusion of change

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Abstract *The green management literature repeatedly argues that in order to behave in a sustainable manner, organizational actions will need to go beyond technical fixes and embrace new environmentally responsible values, beliefs and behaviors. In this context, developing sustainability is frequently viewed as largely dependent on the extent of green culture change in organizations. However, empirical evidence for such a change in culture is not apparent, although much anecdotal support has been cited. Seeks to address some of the shortcomings in extant literature and supplies contemporary evidence of managers' perceptions of the extent to which the green culture change is occurring and of factors acting as barriers or facilitators to such change. Begins with a review of the literature pertaining to organizational culture and greening. Following this, details the research design and methodology. Thereafter, lays out the findings of the interviews in detail. Finally, discusses these findings and suggests a number of implications, conclusions and directions for further research.*

Introduction

During the past decade, environmental concerns have increasingly pervaded the popular and academic management literature (see Elkington and Burke, 1989; Purser, 1994; Prothero and McDonagh, 1997). Deteriorating environmental quality, along with the widespread acknowledgement that business can play a significant role in advancing us towards a more sustainable society, have led management scholars increasingly to question how organizations might be "greened". Prescriptions for such organizational greening have been many and diverse, ranging from changes in functional activities associated with production (see Irwin and Hooper, 1992), marketing (Charter and Polonsky, 1999) or accounting (Gray *et al.*, 1993) to more fundamental strategic re-orientation (e.g. Welford, 1995; Menon and Menon, 1997).

The emergence of ecologically sustainable organizations however has been argued to be dependent upon the institutionalization of environmental beliefs and processes into the very fabric of modern organizations (Purser, 1994; Jennings and Zandgergen, 1995). This calls for an extreme change in management philosophy, whereby organizational actions will need to go

beyond technical fixes and embrace new environmentally responsible values, beliefs and behaviors (Stead and Stead, 1992; Davis, 1994; Shrivastava, 1995). Thus, the movement towards sustainability can be seen as largely dependent on green culture change (Post and Altman, 1994; Welford, 1995).

Notwithstanding the validity of such claims, hard empirical evidence for such culture change is not apparent. Certainly, there are a growing number of studies suggesting that organizations have begun tentatively to focus greater attention on environmental issues (e.g. Post and Altman, 1994; Menon and Menon, 1997). However, the degree to which this has, or will, represent a significant change in culture for these organizations is debatable. Indeed, evidence suggests that, to date, cultural change has been largely limited to modest behavioral change and, at best, the incorporation of environmental responsibility into existing cultural certainties (Fineman, 1996; 1997; Crane, 2000). This begs the question as to why change has been so limited. Whilst Post and Altman (1994) generated a range of insights into the barriers to green change, to date, no study has extended their work into the intricacies of green organizational culture change. Nevertheless, the examination of factors underlying the development of organizational culture has been a key element in understanding the emergence of various forms of cultural orientation, such as market orientation (see Harris, 1996; Harris and Ogbonna, 1999), total quality management (e.g. Zeitz et al., 1997; Tata and Prasad, 1998) and innovation (e.g. Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995; Hiam, 1998). Similar explanations for the development or otherwise of a "green" cultural orientation have not as yet been afforded equivalent attention. This paper therefore has two main aims. First, it seeks to supply qualitative evidence of the extent to which managers perceive there to have been a greening of organizational culture. Second, the paper identifies, explores and discusses those factors which managers viewed as acting as barriers or facilitators to green change.

Organizational culture and greening

The organizational culture concept has been enlisted frequently within the green business literature (Newton and Harte, 1997). However, whilst being the subject of some considerable debate in the management (see Kanter, 1983) and the organization theory literature (see Willmott, 1993), the concept of organizational culture has been applied somewhat superficially in models and theories of organizational greening. Many green writers argue that organizations will have to engage in a dramatic culture change in order to respond to environmental challenges (see Stead and Stead, 1992).

However, the cultural fix model advocated by these writers generally centers on a top-down cascade of values from management to the shop floor. Thus, many such writers assume that management espoused values will be widely shared and strongly held by all organizational members (see Hoffman, 1993; Welford, 1995). For example, Hoffman (1993) argues that where the green values are incongruent with those of the individual, employee satisfaction will fall, leading to problematic human resource management, and organizational

inefficiency. Whilst this view is somewhat optimistic in assuming that managers can manage "the" culture of the organization (Newton and Harte, 1997), gaining insights into culture from managers is worthwhile. In particular, it is managers who have generally been enlisted to further firms' environmental programs (Post and Altman, 1994), and it is (other) managers who may often provide the most formidable obstacles (Fineman, 1997; Crane, 2000).

Another stream of literature has sought to show how the greening of organizational culture can have economic as well as environmental benefits. These advantages are posited to accrue from two main perspectives. First, through adopting a resource-based perspective on competitive advantage, it has been argued that the incorporation of environmental concerns into the culture of the firm may deliver environmental capabilities that competitors would find hard to imitate (Russo and Fouts, 1997). Such imperfectly imitable resources should facilitate a sustainable competitive advantage (see Barney, 1991). Second, researchers utilizing the strategic-fit perspective have contended that in order to deliver the level of environmental performance demanded by green stakeholders (such as customers, regulators and pressure groups), key decision-making individuals must "genuinely" embrace environmentalism (Peattie, 1995). This view leads to the suggestion that lack of accountability in the face of escalating green demands could lead to undesirable performance outcomes (Gray, 1992).

This emphasis on the importance of green culture change has provided the impetus for a series of attempts to conceptualize green organizational culture values (e.g. Stead and Stead, 1992; Welford, 1995). A full analysis of the precise similarities and contrasts between these attempts is beyond the scope of this review. However, briefly, the key values which are commonly positioned are that:

- organizations should incorporate environmental considerations throughout the entire organization;
- such concerns should be considered throughout the value chain (see Shrivastava, 1995);
- economic goals should be tempered (e.g. Stead and Stead, 1992);
- a short term perspective should be substituted with an intergenerational time frame (e.g. Welford, 1995);
- spirituality, morality, smallness and futurity should be embraced (see Stead and Stead, 1992); and
- the environment should be afforded intrinsic valuation and respect (e.g. Shrivastava, 1994).

Despite a degree of consensus regarding the characteristics of an "ideal" green organizational culture, there is considerable disagreement amongst green organizational culture theorists in terms of their level of analysis. Whilst some, such as Welford (1995), focus primarily on culture at the

organizational level, others, such as Shrivastava (1994), focus primarily on culture at the institutional level. The former view analyses the microculture of organizations, whilst the latter examines the macroculture of organizational systems. This latter view has tended therefore to refer to shifts in paradigms as a precursor to systems-level action by organizations (Jennings and Zandgergen, 1995).

Unsurprisingly, extant models of green organizational culture have not been without their critics. Crane (1995) identifies an impoverished conception of culture in the green business literature, with non-unitary views and non-instrumental conceptions of culture being ignored. Newton and Harte (1997) highlight the over-reliance on oversimplified formulae for green change, the overselling of voluntary change as a solution to environmental problems, and the lack of insights into how and why culture change might occur. Hence, not only is much of the conceptual and prescriptive work on green organizational culture insufficiently based on extensive empirical data, but it has also, to date, failed to trigger supporting empirical research.

Possibly the most consistent finding is that extant cultures tend to shape the greening process, with the presence of certain cultural values either supporting or constraining the institutionalization of green values (Post and Altman, 1994; Fineman, 1996). Indeed, the incisive studies of Fineman (1996; 1997) in the supermarket and automotive industries provide something of an antidote to the non-empirical and largely uncritical literature on green organizational culture. This examination of the response to environmental issues in these industries suggests that green cultural change has, to date, been fairly limited in business organizations. Indeed, Fineman (1996; 1997) demonstrates that even in the most progressive firms in these industries, environmental sensibilities tend to be absorbed into existing cultural assumptions and beliefs rather than eliciting any kind of cultural transformation.

Research methods
The research design employed was akin to the grounded approach towards theory development of Glaser and Strauss (1967). However, in contrast to "pure" ground theory that requires the inductive generation of theory without preconceived concepts, the approach adopted in this study was based on the "pragmatic" approach of Turner (1981) which involves the tentative deduction of central concepts and constructs as guides for subsequent inductive theory development. Consequently, concepts such as "organizational culture" and "green culture" were broadly outlined before the data collection phase.

A research strategy was adopted that focused on gathering of data about both past and current organizational changes. Miller *et al.* (1997) claim that when conducted carefully, such a retrospective data collection design is a valid and reliable means of gaining insights into organizational change. In order to explore and describe informants' views, 44 semi-structured interviews were conducted with executives and managers of separate organizations. Interview

methods were employed to allow the discussion of complex topics and thus provide data-grounded insights into concepts and processes centered on organizational greening (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991). Managers and executives were targeted since their hierarchical position makes them knowledgeable of company-wide changes, processes and policies. Each interview was conducted individually and lasted up to one hour.

In total seven directors, 17 senior managers, 12 middle-ranking managers and eight junior managers were interviewed. Ages ranged from 29 to 68 with length of tenure ranging from two months to over 34 years. Primary functional responsibilities were not focused on environmental issues but varied from strategic development to maximizing operational efficiency. The sample includes a balance of industrial, not-for-profit and consumer companies, as well as both product and service organizations. The size of informants' companies ranged from a very small three-accountant partnership to international manufacturers with world-wide operations. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed except where permission was not granted for audio recording. In this case, care was taken to ensure that extensive notes were made and, where appropriate, particularly illustrative quotations were written verbatim.

Data analysis followed a systematic process of transcript-based analysis following a form of the iterative stage process outlined by Turner (1981). This approach involves seven stages of analysis supplemented by the iterative examination of the analysis at the end of each step. This process entailed the utilisation of both inductive reasoning (Lincoln and Guba, 1986) and comparative methods (Martin and Turner, 1986). In an attempt to avoid excessive quotation, this paper presents only representative quotations designed to demonstrate the consistency of informants' views and opinions. To preserve the anonymity of respondents, a number of details have been altered.

Findings

Initial discussions with informants revealed considerable confusion regarding the definition and differences between various concepts and practices typically found within the green business discourse. For instance:

> What the hell does "an environmental focus" mean anyway? If you mean "recycling" you should just say it! (Industrial service firm, senior functional manager).

While this could be attributed to a managerial preference for the concrete over the abstract, the existence of such confusion could also be a manifestation of the *mélange* of meanings that have been applied to the notion of greening in both the popular and academic business literature (Gladwin, 1993; Miller and Szekely, 1995). Hence, based on initial discussions with informants and to guide the subsequent interviews, "green organizational culture" was broadly outlined as the extent to which the assumptions, values, symbols and artifacts of the

organization reflected a desire or need to operate in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Views on the extent of green culture change

Managers described the environmental aspects of their companies' cultures along a continuum ranging from "black as the blackest night" (industrial products firm, middle-ranking functional manager) to "pretty damn green through-and-through" (Consumer products firm, senior functional manager). Similarly, a review of interview data found considerable variation in managers' perceptions of the extent of green culture change. In describing the extent of green culture change, the views of informants varied on two important dimensions:

(1) the "greenness" of the officially advocated company line; and

(2) the extent to which this espoused position was seen to be manifested in the form of company artifacts and behaviors.

The espoused company line

Each of the managers interviewed was aware of some form of espoused company position regarding green issues either officially stated or otherwise gleaned from unofficial pronouncements. In many cases, there was an awareness of a change in the advocated company, as derived from company documentation such as mission statements, strategic plans, company reports, formal statements of policies, and internal *communiqués*. A manager discusses the documentation in the organization:

> Our position is detailed in the company bumf somewhere. I think we produced an official statement of policy about two or three years back – quite a detailed report I think (Industrial service firm, senior functional manager).

In all cases where the official position of the company was formally documented, the espoused company line was seen as generally supportive of at least some of the principles of sustainable growth. However, where the organizational position was described as "unofficial" or "not documented", perceived company positions included unsympathetic and hostile positions as well as more enlightened views. In such cases, comments such as this were common:

> I don't think we have an "official company line" but between you and me I think the company views "green issues" skeptically to say the least. I can't say that promoting environmental responsibility to our top team would be an easy job – lead balloon springs to mind (Industrial products firm, junior functional manager).

Three broad, espoused organizational positions were evident. First, a minority of organizations were perceived by informants as strongly supportive of environmental initiatives and (apparently) genuinely concerned about sustainable development:

> [Respondent's organization] is supportive of a range of "green" initiatives. The official line follows the logic of sustainable growth (Not-for-profit organization, senior functional manager).

Although managers held this view in both profit and not-for-profit organizations, such a position was disproportionally represented by managers from not-for-profit organizations, in part reflecting the success of Agenda 21 amongst government agencies[1].

The second and most common interpretation of the espoused company position presented environment concerns as increasingly important but suggested that other considerations were currently sovereign. Thus:

> Environmental issues may well be a long-term issue [skeptically]. However, at the present, we have other, more pressing concerns which take precedent (Industrial products firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

A wide range of dominant issues was forwarded, including "customer needs", "survival", "profitability", "competitors" and "internationalization".

Finally, a small minority of managers interviewed interpreted the informal position of their organization as entirely hostile to green objectives or strategies. For example, one executive argued:

> My customers want it fast and cheap. No frills. [Scornfully] No b******s about sustainability. No "environmentally friendly". The company philosophy is just focused on that and nowt else (Industrial products firm, senior functional manager).

The rationale for such views are presented and discussed later in this paper.

Manifestations of green culture change

Given such apparent variations in espoused company positions, a degree of diversity was expected in the extent of practical change. As expected, the perceived "green" behaviors, systems, structures and strategies (that is, the manifestations of culture) varied considerably. Where the informal position of the organization was unsupportive of green objectives, managers typically argued that their company remained unchanged by any green strategy:

> It's just not that important to us – I can't think of a single thing we've changed simply out of "green consciousness" (Consumer service firm, senior functional manager).

This is not to suggest that greening was totally absent from the cultural *milieu*. Rather, even where the company position was viewed as hostile to green issues, managers frequently referred to individuals who were campaigning for greater change. This manager explained the situation in his company thus:

> No, I'm not suggesting that the entire company is against what you'd call "green change". In fact, I know of at least one board member who's really pushing this sustainability issue (Consumer products firm, senior functional manager).

In contrast to companies identified as having few tangible manifestations of an environmental awareness, managers described an equally significant proportion of organizations that were considerably changed by a green agenda. Indeed, some informants detailed what appeared to be sustained efforts to develop a greater environmental focus:

Going back a few years ago – very little was being done, then we went through a stage of getting a lot of memos and pamphlets. Now we've got serious – for good reason. There's new policies on emission control, recycling and waste minimization. There's been a few consultants to talk about waste controls – all good stuff! (Not-for-profit organization, junior functional manager).

Managers of such companies claimed that the manifestations of "greening" could include pervasive changes to almost every aspect of company behaviors, systems, structures and strategies.

However, the majority of informants indicated that they felt the green challenge to have influenced their organization in a minor rather than a major way. Some managers claimed that decision-making behavior had been marginally affected across the whole company. For example:

Internally, I think there has been a subtle change of focus. I'm not saying that the environment is equally important as the bottom line – but it's a consideration that wasn't there ten years ago (Consumer products firm, company director).

However, other informants claimed that the changes to decision making were limited to specific departments, functions or groups. For example:

Greening has certainly changed decision-making in some areas. Ummm, for example, purchasing – the products we buy now tend to be environmentally friendly ... ummm ... friendlier. Other departments are affected too, but not all of us. It's not something that affects all departments (Consumer service firm, company director).

Other functions wherein changes were identified as commonly occurring included distribution and operations departments.

However, despite some indications of cultural greening, many informants perceived a degree of "lip-service". Evidence of such lip-service apparently emerged from all facets of the organization including, production, marketing and as is the case below, purchasing:

We are now bound to try to source from sustainable sources where economically viable. In other words – if a sustainable product is available for the same price – we can buy it – otherwise f*****g forget it (Consumer products firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

Overall, analysis of interviews revealed management perceptions of significant variations in cultural greening, possibly reflecting the diversity in the espoused company position.

The dimensions of cultural greening

It was consistently argued that cultural greening was not a simple uni-dimensional concept. This position is clearly reflected in the earlier presented diversity of views regarding the espoused company view and actual practice. One manager stated:

Change and especially green change isn't a simple issue. I mean, what does green change actually mean? I've been persuaded that green issues are important, but [skeptically] do my managers genuinely believe or is it lip service to keep the old boy happy? Probably. Does that make us green or not? Yeah, we've got some "green" strategic objectives – I wrote them myself – is that green change? (Consumer products firm, company director).

Analysis of these and other narratives led to the emergence of three data-driven dimensions of cultural greening labeled here depth, degree and diffusion. The depth of cultural greening pertains to how deeply managers perceived greening to be valued by various organizational members and factions. 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. Finally, the diffusion of cultural greening applies to how widely managers believed these feelings and behaviors to be exhibited throughout the organization. The remainder of the findings section identifies and discusses managers' views on the factors accounting for the observed variation in these dimensions of green culture change.

Factors accounting for the depth, degree and diffusion of green culture change

The final stage of data analysis was aimed at identifying and analyzing the factors that appeared to account for cultural greening. Seven main factors emerged from the data as linked to the depth, degree and diffusion of green organizational culture. In order to steer the subsequent discussion, these factors are presented in Figure 1. This figure is supplied merely as an aid to guide the reader and is not intended to suggest definitive causal links.

During data analysis it emerged that particular factors were primarily discussed by managers in relation to either the degree, diffusion or the depth of greening. This is not to suggest that individual factors were exclusively associated with single dimensions but rather that this was the main emphasis stressed by informants. As we shall discuss later further research will be required before definitive relationships can be reliably established.

In Figure 1, the principal effects of factors are denoted by their proximity to each of the three facets. Performance beliefs and industry macrocultures are presented as mainly being associated with the degree of green organizational culture. Organizational barriers and cultural fragmentation are shown
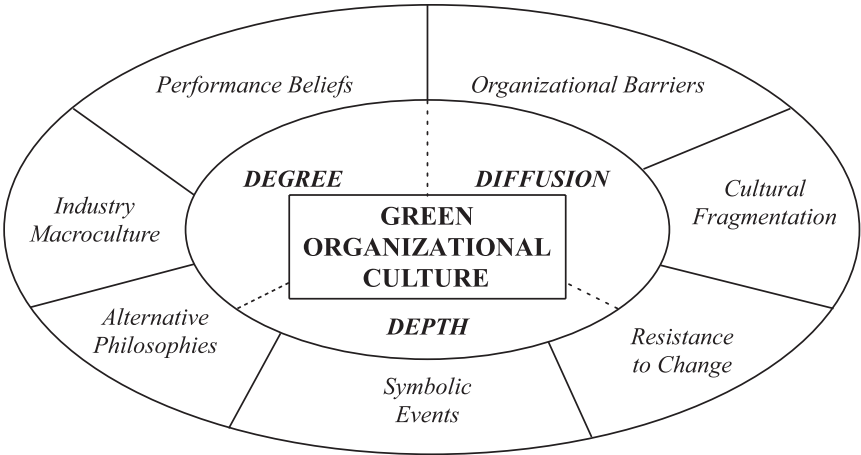

Figure 1.
Depth, degree and diffusion of organizational greening

primarily linked to diffusion, whilst symbolic events, alternative business philosophies and individuals' resistance to change are shown to be predominantly allied with depth. Where it emerged that particular factors had a strong secondary effect, the proximity of factors again suggests a link. Thus, for example, the effect of individuals' resistance to change is suggested through the proximity to cultural depth and diffusion.

Performance beliefs
The first and most common factor identified by managers as influencing the degree of greening in organizational culture centered on the nature of organizational performance beliefs. Where managers believed that attempting sustainable growth would negatively influence traditional performance measures (such as sales, profits or market share), they suggested that few tangible manifestations of green organizational culture would be present. A manager illustratively stated:

> Since environmentally friendly decisions cost money and I'm paid to generate profit, I fail to see the merits in going green. I cannot make choices that negatively affect company profits – I don't have that right (Industrial products firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

In contrast, some informants suggested that organizational performance included profit, growth and environmental performance. This appeared to provide a more sympathetic cultural context for pro-environmental change. For example:

> The way my industry is regulated, environmental issues are an important aspect of performance. Profits come first but green issues are there in background (Industrial products firm, middle-ranking manager).

This finding is clearly linked to the extent to which the stakeholders of individual organizations were seen to express a desire for greener performance, and were subsequently believed to have exerted pressure in order to achieve it. Hence, for the managers in this study, market, regulatory and other external pressures were seen as instrumental in forcing some (frequently limited) attention to developing more tangible manifestations of an environmental focus. One manager claimed:

> I'm not suggesting that we changed simply because the regulations forced us to – I'm only arguing that the regs hurried things on a little (Industrial products firm, junior functional manager).

Similarly, this factor was also linked to views of the time-scale of performance. Where performance was viewed in short-run terms, profit and growth were interpreted as dominant objectives and concerns:

> It's difficult when you and your unit and your company are gauged on a short-term basis. I can't make decisions that may work out in ten years time – I have to think about this year's bottom line (Consumer service firm, company director).

In contrast, in the small number of cases where informants considered long-run performance issues, environmental performance tended to be given a much higher priority.

Industry macrocultures

The second factor that emerged as a perceived influence on the degree of greening in organizational culture is labeled "industry macroculture". The term "macroculture" is derived from Abrahamson and Fombrun (1994) who found that organizational failure could be attributed to failures of the macro (industrial) as well as the micro (organizational) cultures of companies (also see Whipp *et al.*, 1989; Gordon, 1991; Chatman and Jehn, 1994). The findings of the research indicated that certain macrocultures could precipitate different degrees and depths of greening. That is, in relation to green issues, managers identified common themes and trends within the environmental assumptions, values and artifacts of companies within particular industries (or other organizational groupings), and these were felt to contrast with those of other industries or organizational groups. For example, a regional government manager claimed:

> I think for us the shake up has been greater than for commercial firms (Not-for-profit organization, senior functional manager).

And a manufacturing executive contended:

> Manufacturing has to be the hardest hit – there are laws on emissions control, regulations on pollution . . . a whole gamut of interventions that weren't there before (Industrial products firm, middle-ranking manager).

In particular, it would appear that the perceived "greenness" in macrocultures of tertiary industries, regional governments and consumer products firms was paralleled by perceptions of greater degrees of greening in organizational culture, as compared to industrial and professional services firms. Some of these perceived differences reflected variations in legal regulation and other stakeholder influences. However, within particular macrocultures, evidence emerged of what could be labeled "green values" (that is, beliefs that green issues ought to be given a greater priority). Indeed, tentative evidence emerged of some industry-wide or market-wide assumptions or beliefs, as this manager illustrates:

> I've only been with this company [a manufacturing company] for about two years now. Before that I was manager of a small car component manufacturing operation. In terms of green issues, the difference between the two industries is quite marked (Industrial products firm, senior functional manager).

Whether these differences were as significant as felt by informants, and whether stakeholder pressures were causing limited changes to opinions or vice versa, cannot be concluded. However, this issue is discussed in more depth later in the paper.

Organizational barriers

The impact of performance beliefs and industry macrocultures appeared principally to center on the degree to which environmentally conscious opinions were considered to be manifested in company activities. In contrast,

the effect of organizational barriers emerged as a factor influencing the extent of perceived intra-organizational diffusion of green beliefs and activities. The range of internal barriers was varied, including behaviors, systems and structures. Examples included the extent of inter-functional co-ordination, centralized decision making, structural diversity and the focus of information systems. Illustrative arguments included:

> I think centralizing power is a big issue. If a few at the top make all the decisions then change will always be limited to their own agendas. If regions aren't given the flexibility to react to their markets, the company is destined for trouble (Consumer products firm, junior functional manager).

However, one particularly common intra-organizational factor was the effect of internal politics. In microcultures perceived as unsympathetic or conservative, respondents felt that being identified as a pro-environmental change-agent could lead to marginalization, as this manager suggested:

> Turning into a "greenie" [a vociferous or active supporter of green issues] is a bit like public suicide. Our company is hard – a macho culture – being green is just the antithesis of what we are. I've seen it happen – people marginalised and ostracized within hours of stepping on the wrong political toes (Industrial products firm, junior functional manager).

However, as indicated earlier, especially within companies that were viewed as informally unsupportive of green issues, evidence emerged of limited pro-green political maneuvering apparently designed to instigate or promote a greater environmental focus. Indeed, one manager claimed:

> Well, as I've said the board is not keen on the whole shebang. You do get the occasional management report from the green lobby, I guess they're trying to wear us all down [laughingly] (Industrial service firm, senior functional manager).

The existence of such maneuvering supports a number of theories which forward political tactics as a mechanism of issue selling and change implementation (e.g. Whittington and Whipp, 1992; Dutton and Ashford, 1993). In particular, the existence and importance of individual protagonists in advancing the internal green agenda has been widely identified in the organizational greening literature (see Crane, 2000).

Cultural fragmentation
The second factor that was invoked to explain the perceived diffusion of green organizational culture was the impact of cultural fragmentation. In this context, the label "cultural fragmentation" is used to denote the extent to which managers believed that the cultural mosaic of the organization (Morgan, 1986) was characterized by the presence of various subcultures (see Siehl and Martin, 1984). Briefly, it emerged that the greater the number, size and power of subcultures, the lower the organizational diffusion of green consciousness. Informants described a range of subcultures. First, managers identified subcultures that were geographic in nature:

> We're a bit isolated up here [the North] and I know that our approach to the green issue is not typical of the whole company (Consumer service firm, senior functional manager).

Hence, it would appear that geographical isolation could act as an impediment to the diffusion of green values. In a similar way, professional subcultures also emerged as potential obstacles to the spread of green consciousness. For example, an accountant claimed:

> I'm really an accountant first and a manager second. I'm concerned with pounds and pence and not green politics (Industrial service firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

Thus, where professional beliefs existed which conflicted with the dominant green values and activities, cultural diffusion was apparently impeded. Finally, functional subcultures could also act as obstacles to the diffusion of green organizational culture. In particular, as we have already seen, informants frequently suggested that green issues were the province of other departments or divisions.

Symbolic events

Managers' responses suggested that particular symbols and symbolic actions and events could exert a powerful and pervasive effect on the cultural depth of green change. The impact of such symbols could be both positive and negative. An illustrative example of a negative action symbol is provided here by a middle-ranking manager:

> At the last Christmas party the Chairman told a bunch of us "what a load of b******t this green stuff is". Does that count? (Consumer service firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

In this case, the manager concerned believed that within this firm, the public and much gossiped about actions of a tipsy executive had done more to impede the development of green consciousness than any other single factor. This hints again of the importance of internal politics in shaping and (in this case at least) impeding cultural greening. However, in other cases, the impact of symbolic events was seen to be more positive. For example:

> Last year our company was picketed by a handful of local residents complaining about emissions [embarrassedly]. It was on the news – err just the local news. I mean they were talking real c**p but it was embarrassing you know? The neighbors asked the wife, it just made you feel like the local bad guy (Industrial products firm, junior functional manager).

For this small company, (the apparently genuinely unmerited) public attention constituted a significant point in company's past which the manager concerned believed was followed by a genuine commitment to the environment.

Alternative business philosophies

The fifth factor centers on the extent to which a cultural emphasis was perceived to be placed on alternative or even conflicting business philosophies. For example, many of the industrial service organizations stressed the importance of a sales orientation:

> Maintaining or even improving sales-levels is the only objective. For my industry that's what makes or breaks you. I'm sorry but b******g about caring for the ozone layer doesn't matter at all (Industrial service firm, company director).

It would appear that for many such organizations, generating sales or profits was the dominant philosophy to the exclusion of other considerations (including environmental performance). Similar findings emerged for organizations characterized by product, production and marketing orientations. For organizations that were described as largely market oriented, the importance of green issues was similarly alleged to depend on market needs:

> For us the buzzwords are "customer orientation". For those customers who want green products we're green, those who want cheap products we're cheap – we try to be what our customer wants, nothing more, nothing less (Consumer products firm, company director).

What emerges from these insights is the crucial nature of perceived cultural dominance. Where the dominant existing business philosophy was viewed as strong, it was suggested that cultural adaptation in response to green issues was limited, or at least filtered through these extant cultural certainties.

Individuals' resistance to change
Across all of the industries studied, managers and executives identified some level of individual resistance to green change. In particular, respondents identified resistance to what they described as "management fads". Thus, where individual managers believed that green issues were merely fashionable, or simply an unwarranted challenge to an accepted status quo, resistance to green-oriented change was apparently strong. Thus:

> This green stuff is just hype. We had it all back in the 1970s. Good God! You'd think this was something new – every few years it becomes trendy again – after a while you learn to distinguish between genuine trends and pumped up hype! (Industrial products firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

Interestingly, such individuals frequently expressed equal disdain for other management fads and fashions including strategic human resource management, total quality management, business process re-engineering, strategic alliances and networks and activity based accounting. The extent to which individuals extolled the view that green issues were merely a management fad appeared to be highly linked to personal beliefs regarding the social responsibility of business. For example:

> Personally, I can't see want this has got to do with business. The government establishes guidelines that are fair for all concerned. *Ad hoc* reactionary moves by business people just confuses all concerned. I think we should leave the concerns of government to governments and not dabble in what we don't fully understand [increasingly loudly] (Industrial service firm, middle-ranking functional manager).

The social responsibility debate is beyond the scope of this paper. However, our evidence suggests that personal beliefs of managers influence their perceptions of the validity of such trends.

Implications and conclusions

These findings lead to a number of implications, and also indicate some potentially fruitful avenues of further research. First, managers and executives were aware of, and could articulate, considerable intricacies in their companies' positions regarding green issues. Consistent with existing studies (e.g. Drumwright, 1994; Fineman, 1996), evidence was found of established company positions developed in response to environmental concerns. However, managers suggested that there was significant variance in the formality of these positions, with some companies apparently able to refer to official documentation with others relying on less formal approaches. Whilst 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 in many of the organizations studied. To some extent, this attests to the advantages of focusing data collection on a range of general managers without specific environmental responsibilities when attempting to build up a picture of organizational greening.

This range in espoused company positions was mirrored by perceptions of substantial gaps between the company position and "actual" practices. Three main explanations can be forwarded for these differences. First, certain arguments within the culture literature indicate that this situation may well be an inevitable consequence of organizational dynamics (see Bolon and Bolon, 1994; Jun, 1996). That is, leaders commonly propound an idealized vision of the company, whereas front-line personnel are more cynical and frequently experience a more fragmented view (see Harris and Ogbonna, 1998). Second, it could be argued that managers believed that macroenvironmental pressures were presently insufficient to require anything more than superficial statements of policy. In this sense, the greening of organizations may well be contingent on the subjective perceptions of top managers (see Fineman and Clarke, 1996). A third explanation is that a difference between the espoused and actual company position is merely an artifact of a delay in cultural development. That is, at the time of fieldwork, either the espoused ideal had yet to be naturally translated into tangible manifestations, or there were significant barriers preventing change.

The findings of the study also highlight the potential dangers of utilizing over-simplified conceptualizations of organizational culture based on ideal and/or unitary green cultures. This study, consistent with much extant theory (e.g. Morgan, 1986; Sackmann, 1992), finds that managers commonly have pluralistic perceptions of culture. Similarly, whereas some green writers have merely focused on conceptualizing a single ideal-type green organizational culture (see Hoffman, 1993; Welford, 1995), this study suggests that there may be significant cultural variation between equally green organizational responses to environmental concerns. Consequently, a key implication of the study centers on the emergence of the three separate dimensions of the extent of cultural greening. Rather than assuming the

existence or otherwise of cultural characteristics, through analyzing depth, degree and diffusion a more complete (albeit more complicated) view of culture is attained. Indeed, whilst the present study has limited its attention to managers' perceptions of these facets of cultural greening, a comparable categorization of the extent of greening along three dimensions may be developed for collective or ostensibly "objective" interpretations of culture. Thus, for example, a particular organization may exhibit a wide variety of cultural forms, but genuine belief in green issues may be limited to a single department. Alternatively, another organization may be characterized by widespread but superficially held green beliefs. This more complex view of green culture change suggests that whilst there may be problems with many extant conceptions of green organization culture, this may be more a problem of how the culture concept has typically been operationalized rather than of the concept itself.

The next implication focuses on the diversity of factors identified from managers' responses as accounting for the perceived depth, degree and diffusion of green culture change. Whereas some green business authors have underplayed the problems in developing a green organizational culture (Newton and Harte, 1997), this study clearly identifies and discusses a raft of potential impediments to cultural greening. Evidence emerged of important factors in each of the four categories of organizational culture discussed by Hatch (1993). For example, symbols emerged as a particularly important influence on perceived cultural depth whilst artifacts such as organizational barriers apparently exerted a profound effect on diffusion. This gives further support for the claim of Fineman (1996) that existing cultural forms (or at least individuals' impressions of cultural rigidity) tend to act as obstacles to green change. The findings also suggest that the factors affecting the extent of green organizational culture are manifested on a variety of different levels. For example, at the individual level, managers' pre-existing resistance to change was seen as influencing depth of greening; at the organizational level, alternative business philosophies also appeared to be an impediment to depth; whilst at the industry level, industry macrocultures were viewed as impacting on degree.

The identification of this array of factors has further, arguably more profound, implications for prescriptions for green-oriented organizational change. Specifically, the evidence presented here leads to the inevitable conclusion that it is likely to be extremely difficult to initiate and sustain the process of cultural greening. Indeed, when these factors are primarily unfavorable, their overall breadth would appear to constitute a significant obstacle to even the most proficient and committed managements. Change, even should it be possible, could thus only occur over a considerable period of time which saw the dismantling of existing frames of reference. Moreover, factors such as organizational barriers, cultural fragmentation and resistance to change have been widely identified as prevalent and typical organizational dynamics (Kunda, 1992; Harris, 1998). Hence, the

organization-wide diffusion of "new" environmental values and beliefs sought by many of the green business writers might be seen as overly-optimistic given the extant workplace realities experienced by many contemporary managers.

Notwithstanding these very important limitations to green change raised by the study, it is possible to identify at least some positive implications for managers and green change agents. In particular, whilst culture management may not be entirely feasible, the astute manipulation of certain cultural attributes may well provide a more fruitful context for pro-environmental organizational change to occur. This is not to suggest that such manipulation will be without unintended consequences, but rather acknowledges that certain factors, at certain times, might provide managers with change opportunities. Therefore the recommendations for green change agents presented by this study are that those operating in apparently apathetic cultures may benefit from engaging in political maneuvering in order to advance the green cause (e.g. Whittington and Whipp, 1992). However, the positive benefits of such actions are likely to be moderated by the power resources available to such actors, particularly when green issues appear to be the source of prevalent antipathy amongst managers (see Crane, 2000).

A second issue is that the perceived macroculture in which the organization is situated will also impact significantly on the potential for individuals to effect green culture change. Industrial or institutional paradigms reflect deep-seated, widely accepted beliefs and ways of thinking and behaving which are highly resistant to change. Thus, many managers, especially those in industrial services and professional firms, but also in private sector firms generally, are likely to see their change possibilities constrained by the values underlying the system in which they operate. The different picture which emerges from managers of state authorities (where specific policies often explicitly bind them to sustainability targets) suggests the possibilities for inducing certain facets of green culture change through regulation. This context is not however permanently fixed. Indeed, for organizational stakeholders, the findings of the study offer some potential routes by which it may be possible to shape green organization culture change. The actions of stakeholders such as consumers, pressure groups and regulators clearly have a role to play in molding managers' performance beliefs, and in informing industry macrocultures. Moreover, the symbolic power of stakeholder actions may exert a powerful and pervasive effect on micro and macrocultures.

The findings of this study raise a number of additional research questions, three of which appear to be particularly of note. First, whilst this paper focuses on the perceptions of general management, future research could gain valuable insights through the study of green culture change from a variety of diverse perspectives, such as front-line operatives and customers. Moreover, rather than focus on individual managers' views of green culture change, further research could usefully approach culture by addressing far larger

samples of organizational members. Second, an especially interesting avenue for further research is the investigation of the potentially differentiated relationships between the three facets of depth, degree and diffusion of green organizational culture and a variety of performance dimensions (including economic and environmental indicators). Finally, in order definitively to justify the rationale for studying green management, more causal research designs are needed to establish the existence of the green-performance link (e.g. Porter and van der Linde, 1995). Indeed, until such links are established, even the motivation to pursue the greening of organizational culture is likely to remain elusive.

Note

1. Agenda 21 builds on the United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989 and emerged during the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Details of Agenda 21 are available at: www.un.org/esa/sustdev/agenda21.htm

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