Exploring the Environment:
Grasping for something that isn’t there?

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Exploring the Environment: Grasping for something that isn’t there?

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Abstract

This paper explores understandings of the environment. It explores what the environment is and isn’t. The ultimate claim of this paper is that the environment is not an objective thing as language may trick us to believe and strategy textbooks would imply. Rather the environment is a field of entanglement which is enacted and the role of the business person is to make sense of the entanglement (Ingold, 2011; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). This understanding is congruent with sustainable development that argues any consideration of the environment as being a separate thing is naive (WCED, 1987, p. xi). Thus the claim of this paper is that, if sustainable outcomes are desired then the key for individuals and corporate strategists in particular is to stop talking about the environment, trying to analyse it and or save it. Rather it is time to discuss strategy and organisations as meaning makers where the meaning is human centric and by extension humane for all of the humans on earth.

To realise the above conclusion this paper will draw on four areas. These are (1) a discussion of how language can reify that which is a process, (2) a discussion of a potential model to understand humans not as things but as processes; (3) a review of definitions of the environment drawn from best selling strategy textbooks; and (4) some interview evidence on understandings of the environment from individuals who lead environmentally orientated organisations. These four areas could be considered a relative smorgasbord of ideas. However after moving through them the paper will try and synthesise the strands and summarise the implications. The key implication being that the environment does not exist as a separate thing and attempts to save it are naive. Thus if there is a desire to be sustainable and corporate strategists are key the viable position is to put humanity at the centre of considerations and in so doing rewrite strategy textbooks and theories therein. Prior to exploring the four areas, as a base to this paper, a vignette and a brief discussion of sustainable development and organisations are offered.

A Vignette

On my university campus, a leafy yet 1970s concrete styled affair, I was walking with a colleague. We were walking from one non-descript concrete slab of a building to another in order to attend a meeting. During the walk across the campus, the colleague asked me what my area of research was. I replied that my area of research in the broadest sense was business and sustainability. My colleague replied by asking "oh is that to do with the environment?" When he asked me this question we were walking across a square that was a testament to the ordering powers of concrete and cement. However, there was one patch of trees and shrubbery which was in the middle of a roundabout.

In answer to my colleague’s question I said "yes, kind of, but I am never sure where the environment is. Is that the environment over there?" I asked, rhetorically, as I pointed to the last bastion of green in the concrete paradise which can be a university campus. My colleague smiled and looked quizzically at me.
Background – Sustainable Development, Organisations and Fractured Epistemology

This paper is informed by the notion that organisations and similarly “corporate strategists” (UNSGHLPS, 2012, p. 22) are key enablers of sustainable outcomes (for example see; Bakan, 2004; Deegan & Shelly, 2006; Devereaux Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995; Gray, et al., 1993; Gladwin, et al., 1995; Sethi, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995 a, b & c). To enable sustainable development the 1987 Brundtland report argues that what is required is a change to dualistic understandings of humanity’s relationship with the planet which splits the world into separate concerns humans and nature. For example, the Brundtland report outlines that humans have understood the planet as “a large world in which human activities and their effects were neatly compartmentalised within nations, within sectors (energy, agriculture, trade) and within broad areas of concern (environmental, economic, social)” (WCED, 1987, p.4); a conceptualisation that relies ultimately on a dualism that splits the world into two large categories (1) humans and (2) nature. However, the Brundtland report argues that enabling sustainable development requires the embrace of a new understanding. An understanding that “compartments have begun to dissolve” (WCED, 1987, p.4) and that “the environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions” (WCED, 1987, p. ix); further “attempts to defend it [the environment] in isolation from human concerns [has] given the very word environment a connotation of naivety” (WCED, 1987, p. xi). In sum the Brundtland report is arguing that to enable sustainable development a challenge to understandings of the world where humans consider themselves as separate from the environment is required. In alternative terms this is a challenge to dualistic understandings and a call for the embrace of monistic (i.e. singular, not split), non-compartmentalised understandings of humans and our relationship to all that surrounds us. This call within the Brundtland report is, at its core, asking humans to embrace a different epistemology which is in effect the embrace of a new series of assumptions (for example see; Bakan, 2004; Deegan & Shelly, 2006; Devereaux Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995; Gray, et al., 1993; Gladwin, et al., 1995; Sethi, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995 a, b & c).

Organisations and in turn “corporate strategists” (UNSGHLPS, 2012, p. 22) are considered as key enablers of sustainable outcomes. However it is argued that the ability of organisations to alleviate degradation is hampered by organisational theories that are “constricted by a fractured epistemology” (Gladwin, et al., 1995, p. 874 in support also see; Egri & Pinfield, 1999; Purser, et al., 1995; Shrivastava, 1995a) which splits the world into two – organisations and the environment. As such an issue is that while organisations and in turn corporate strategists maybe considered as enablers of sustainable outcomes. A challenge to the enablement of sustainable outcomes is how these and other organisational participants think and the theories that are propagated to them. Further whether the theories propagated promote a dualistic or non-dualistic (monistic) understanding of organisations and the environment and by extension humans and the environment.

1. Language and Reification

An understanding of the world that does not separate out humans as a special separate bounded category, as indicated above, can be referred to as understanding the world as a monism or alternatively embracing a relational view (Castree 2002; Ivakhiv, 2002; McLean & Hassard, 2004). Where within a monistic understanding, the logical extension is that everything is in a relationship with everything else, there are no breaks or boundaries, all is connected in a seamless web; there are no things, just processes. This type of understanding can be grasped at a conceptual level, particularly when individuals are piqued by images such as the Earthrise picture. The Earthrise image is used at the start of the Brundtland report to highlight and lead towards the challenge required to humanity’s understandings. However a difficulty of theorising this conceptual understanding may be because of a constraint of the English language (Ingold, 2011). For example, Ingold (2011) argues that a peculiarity of the subject–verb structure of the English language is that it can reinforce notions of separation and reification. Thus the English language implies that that which is a process is actually a separate bounded thing that has a separate essence to its action. As opposed to what the
thing is, which is a process with no separate essence. To explain Ingold (2011) outlines how an individual might typically say “the wind blows” (Ingold, 2011, p.17). The structure of the phrase reinforces notions of there being a wind (subject) that is separate to the action of blowing. As if the blowing is a separate act upon the body that is the wind. Thus language structure and its semiotic underpinnings are implying compartmentalisation and separation. Thus language perpetuates a kind of fracture between subject and action (wind and blowing), a fracture that is odds with the understandings facilitated by the Earthrise image. To counter the fracturing implication, Ingold (2011) argues, perhaps self-evidently, that the “wind is its blowing” (Ingold, 2011, p.17). The wind is the result of the blowing and thus there is no separation between subject and action. Rather the wind is the process, the action. Similarly a stream is the running water, light is something we see in, not something we see and ultimately to be alive is not to be a body sprinkled with agency, but rather to be alive is to be in life (Ingold, 2011).

What Ingold (2011) is highlighting is how the English language can imply fractures, separation and reification of that which is actually a process (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Thus language itself can reinforce an understanding of the world being split into separate categories of things and action. By extension when discussing the environment and or nature, convention might dictate that the environment is discussed as a thing upon which action is to be taken or alternatively as a thing which is acting upon an organisation. No matter which, through this type of discussion the environment is reified and a fracture is inserted, a fracture that considers the environment as a separate entity. However the environment is not a separate reified entity that is acted on, rather it is acted in. The environment surrounds and constitutes humanity (Ingold, 2001). Thus the environment is a process, a process that humanity is caught up in and acts in. As such the environment could be “envisaged as a domain of entanglement” (Ingold, 2011 p.71) where the subject (be that human, environment or any other thing) is not a bounded separate entity that acts or is acted upon, but rather is radically indeterminate and a process.

2. A Model of a Human and a Challenge to Organisations

If the environment is considered as a domain of entanglement and things are not properly things as opposed to processes, a view of humans as being processes is necessitated (Ingold, 2011; DeLanda, 2000). Thus to be human is to be a negotiator, a process that interacts with all that constitutes and surrounds one as an individual. As such a person can be considered as a phenotype that arises from the interactions of its genotype (genetic heritage) and its environment (Ingold, 2001). Where the environment surrounds the individual, is pervasive and a key actor that is not separate to, but a constituter of the individual. Importantly with this perspective the environment is not an object, it is a process that is bound up with the individual. Considering humans as processes rather than bounded things implies that humans are neither prescribed by environment nor genetic code. Rather boundaries are dissolved, notions of reified things are dissolved and the individual is considered an articulation – a process of processes that operates within other processes: a domain of entanglement. Thus the environment and the human are a conflation. A perspective that reinforces how humans are not acting upon anything as opposed to acting in an enacted world (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). As such humans are producing “themselves and one another by establishing through their actions, the conditions for their ongoing growth and development” (Ingold, 2011 p.8). The acceptance of a lack of separation and boundaries unfurls a logical conclusion that humans are ultimately playing a “part in the world’s transformation of itself” (Ingold, 2011; p.6). Thus as humans our effects keep adding to one another with the “result that the situation for later subjects and their choices of action will be progressively different from that of the initial agent and ever more the fated product of what was done before” (Jonas 1984, p.7).

The role of humans as key actors in the shaping of the world is now an accepted concept, as the current ‘geological’ age is termed the anthropocene (Crutzen and Steffen, 2003). Humans as key actors shaping the world also leads to a potential conclusion that through human actions it may be that the land and oceans continue to teem with life. However that life may be “a peculiarly homogenised assemblage of
organisms... selected for their compatibility with one fundamental force: us” (Myer, 2006 p.4). Thus in the future, key species may be only those that can thrive alongside humanity. Consequently if humans are considered as processes, processes negotiating a negotiating within a context (their genotype and environment), a context that is changing; a future time will necessarily bring forward different norms and in turn different understandings of what it means to be a human being. Thus as humans we

As indicated previously, organisations are considered key enablers of sustainable development and in turn much of humanity’s impact upon the planet is facilitated through organisations (for example see; Bakan, 2004; Deegan & Shelly, 2006; Devereaux Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995; Gray, et al., 1993; Gladwin, et al., 1995; Sethi, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995 a, b & c). Organisations can be considered humanity’s tools for collective effort, the coalitions we use to shape our future (for example see; Katz & Gartner, 1988; McAuley et al., 2007; Sarasvasthy, 2001, 2004). Thus through organisations we shape our future and in turn impact our future norms, environment and in turn our future understanding of what it might mean to be human. Consequently if organisational participants consider the environment as something the organisation is acting upon as a separate bounded thing, a fundamental is being missed. That fundamental is that organisations are in fact negotiating with the environment and the impact of that negotiation is an impact on what it means to be human. Consequently the challenge for organisational participants and humanity more generally is whether organisations and organisational participants are shaping a future from an organisation (orgocentric) perspective or a human centric perspective; where an orgocentric perspective is in actuality the perspective of a small group of people – “corporate strategists” (UNSGHLPs, 2012, p. 22).

3. Definitions of the Environment in Strategy Textbooks

Textbooks deal in theory and thus, as will all books and theories they are dealing in abstraction relative to a lived reality. If corporate strategists are key actors in the enabling of a sustainable future, consideration has to be given to what they may be taught. In particular the definitions of the environment that are often offered in strategy textbooks would offer particular insight. During the last quarter of 2011 a list of the top twenty selling strategy textbooks on strategy in the UK and Australia was gathered from publisher lists. From the list of textbooks, each book’s definition of the environment was recorded. For the sake of brevity the definitions from the top ten selling textbooks are shown in the table below (Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 1, the definitions of the environment in the textbooks are similar and a form of cognitive oligopoly (Porac, et al., 1989) is apparent whereby orgocentrism and a range of associated narratives are apparent. Those narratives are (1) an organisation has an external environment, (2) the external environment can be categorised into various components, (3) one of those components is the natural environment and (4) an organisation has an internal environment (which is invariably not defined or poorly defined). The textbooks are perpetuating a compartmentalised, bounded perspective of an organisation and its environment. Where the environment is a separate thing to the organisation and the organisation needs to work on the environment because it impacts the strategy of the organisation.

The textbooks perpetuation of the organisation and the environment as existing as separate things perpetuates an understanding that the environment is independently given to an organisation. Thus the job of the strategist is to be a super charged analyst (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) who navigates this independent environment in search of opportunities and threats. An environment that is independently given absolves some responsibility for strategist. As he or she is not negotiating to shape the world and in so doing shape humanity, rather he or she is purely seeking out opportunities for the organisation as it works on this separate, independently given thing that is the environment. This absolution of responsibility might be appropriate if the boundary between the organisation and the environment could ever be identified. However the existence of the boundary is purely an abstract concept that has been developed to enable process of organising (for example see; Dolfsma & Dannreuther, 2003; Hernes, 2004).
### Table 1: Definitions of the Environment from bestselling strategy textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>The Environment (Defined/Discussed) External/Internal</th>
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| 1. Hanson, D, Hitt, MA, Ireland, RD, Hoskisson, RE (2011) Strategic management: Competitiveness and Globalisation, Asia-Pacific 4th edition, Cengage Learning Australia, Melbourne | “An integrated understanding of the external and internal environments is essential for firms to understand the present and predict the future.” (p.36)  
“A firm’s external environment is divided into three main areas: the general, industry and competitor environment.” (p.36)  
“The general environment is composed of dimensions in broader society that influence an industry and indirectly, the firms within it.” (p.37)  
The general environment splits into demographic, economic, political/legal, socio-cultural, technological and global. Concerns about the natural environment are a subset of socio-cultural.  
Natural environment also indicated as a stakeholder (p.20)  
Internal Environment is not defined  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
| 2. Hubbard, G Beamish, P (2011) Strategic Management: Thinking, Analysis, Action, 4th edition, Pearson Australia, Frenchs Forest NSW | “The environment represents all those aspects outside the organisation that affect the business strategy of an organisation” (p.21)  
The environment can be split into two the macro-environment (those environmental forces that are outside the industry in which the business competes, but of relevance and the industry environment (p.21) This macro-environment is divided into sections (economic, political, technological, legal, social/cultural, demographic and green environment).  
Green environment trends are how “industries are facing the unsustainability of existing commercial practices in terms of their effects on the natural environment” (p.70)  
Internal environment not defined.  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
| 3. Hill, CWL, Jones, G R (2010) Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach, 9th edition, South Western Cengage Learning: Mason USA | The external environment consists of the “industry environment in which the company operates; the country or national environment; and the wider socioeconomic or macroenvironment” (p.17)  
Natural environment or resource concerns are not mentioned.  
Internal environment not defined.  
Internal analysis is “concerned with identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a company” (p.74)  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
Natural environment is offered as a component of the macro-environment (p. 65) The natural environment is not defined.  
With regard to the external environment “the emphasis of the book has been on the identification of profit opportunities in the external environment of the firm” (p. 122)  
Internal environment of the firm is “more specifically, with the resources and capabilities of the firm” (p.122)  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index, other than within a discussion of avoiding boundaries as created in bureaucratic organisations. |
| 5. Thompson, AA, Peteraf, MA, Gambale, JE, Strickland, AJ (2012) Creating & executing Strategy: The Quest for Competitive Advantage, Concepts & Cases, 18th edition, Mc-Graw Hill/Irwin: New York | “Every company operates in a larger environment that goes well beyond just the industry in which it operates. This “macro environment includes seven principal components: population demographics, societal values and lifestyles; political, legal and regulatory factors; the natural environment and ecological factors; technological factors; general economic conditions; and global forces” (p.50)  
Key questions to ask about a company's competitive environment are whether there are “attractive opportunities for growth?” (p.53)  
Internal environment not clearly defined – however the internal situation of a company is focused on “its collection of resources and capabilities and the activities it performs along its value chain” (p.91)  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Key Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
“The broad environment consists of domestic and global environmental forces such as socio cultural, technological, political and economic trends...The task environment consists of external stakeholders” (p.5)  
Internal analysis is focused on resources and capabilities.  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
| 7. Hill, CWL, Jones, GR (2012) *Essentials of Strategic Management*, 3rd edition, Southwestern Cengage Learning: Mason USA | “The essential purpose of the external analysis is to identify strategic opportunities and threats in the organisation’s operating environment that will affect how it pursues its mission” (p.9)  
The external environment can be split into industry, national and macro-environment. “Analysing the macro-environment consists of examining macroeconomic, social, government, legal, international and technological factors that may affect the company and its industry” (p.9)  
“Internal analysis...serves to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation” (p.9)  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
The general environment consists of seven segments – economic, political/legal, sociocultural, technological, global and physical.  
Physical environment concerns “energy consumption, practices used to develop energy sources, renewable energy efforts, minimising a firm’s environmental footprint, availability of water as a resource, producing environmentally friendly products” (p.38)  
“Identifying opportunities and threats is an important objective of studying the general environment” (p.39)  
Internal environment is not explicitly defined. However, “analysis of the firm’s internal organisation requires that evaluators examine the firm’s portfolio of resources and the bundles of heterogeneous resources and capabilities managers have created” (p.73)  
Organisational boundaries/boundaries terms not offered in the index. |
“The environment is what gives organisations their means of survival. It creates opportunities and it presents threats.” (p.49)  
The business environment is presented in layers from macro-environment, industry or sector to competitors.  
“The macro-environment is the highest-level layer...here, the PESTEL framework can be used to identify future issues... environmental (‘green’)” (italics in original text) (p.49)  
The internal environment is not defined, rather within chapter three there is a focus on strategic capabilities, resources and competencies.  
“Strategy therefore is also crucially concerned with an organisation’s external boundaries: in other words, questions about what to include within the organisation and how to manage important relationships with what is kept outside” (p.7)  
“The more the boundaries between the organisation and its environment are reduced, the more innovation is likely to occur” (p.35) |
“The firm’s boundaries define what the firm does” (p.6)  
The firm’s horizontal boundaries refer to how much of the product market the firm serves...The firm’s vertical boundaries refer to the set of activities that the firm performs itself and those that it purchases from market speciality firms. The firm’s corporate boundaries refer to the set of distinct businesses the firm competes in” (p.6). |
Consequently while arguments may be made that organisations persist “through the reproduction of boundaries” (Hernes, 2004, p.10), a reproduction that is built upon assumptions and narratives. The difficulty is that the perpetuation of an organisation environment split is akin to perpetuating a fracturing, dualistic epistemology. A fracturing that is not likely to enable sustainable development as the perpetuation of narrow bounded concerns and the failure to appreciate systemic interconnections is not likely to enable to sustainable development.

The perpetuation of the organisation and the environment as being separate reified things which are ultimately in some form of adversarial relationship is perhaps the role of strategy textbooks. As strategy textbooks are in the habit of promoting an orgocentric world view where the organisation is the locus of concern and that which must continue. Thus the promotion of the organisation and environment as being separate could be dismissed as being purely the perpetuation of conceptual tools that enable corporate strategists to realise the continuation of their organisations. However, the challenge is that sustainable development is not concerned with the perpetuation of organisations; it is concerned with all humans and their survival. Further, if organisations and in turn corporate strategists as key enablers of sustainable development. The challenge for strategy textbooks is whether the perpetuation of a separate, bounded organisation centric worldview is consistent with enabling the sustainable development of all humans. It would appear, from the sustainable development literature and the construct of humans discussed earlier, that they are not.


Through March to July of 2012 some exploratory research was conducted with sustainability orientated organisations in Australia. The term sustainability orientated organisation is a terminology used to highlight how the organisations interviewed have a mission statement that is focused on enabling sustainable outcomes. For example, one of the organisations interviewed has a mission where their “focus and commitment [is] firmly placed on environmental, social, economic and cultural sustainability” (website of Organisation B).

The research involved semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the organisations. As permissions are still to be clarified, the names of the organisations and the individuals are not offered in the table below, however the positions of the individuals are shown. The rationale for interviewing the leaders of sustainability orientated organisations was because these organisations are likely, because of their organisational purpose, to offer a particular perspective on what they consider the environment to be, a perspective that may be different to the convention of textbooks. Nevertheless it should be noted that the research was not subject to a control group where leaders from non-sustainability orientated organisations were interviewed. As such the evidence provided by the interviewees and the conclusions drawn should be treated as indicative.

The semi-structured interviews were focused on exploring a number of areas such as conceptualisations of the environment, sustainability and the metaphors applied to the understanding the organisations. Table 2 below outlines the individuals’ responses to the questions of; what they consider the environment to be? And where does it start and stop? In total sixteen interviews were conducted, yet only thirteen interviewees answered the question, with their answers detailed in the table below. The missing three did not answer the question and instead discussed other concerns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation (Name/Code)</th>
<th>Organisation Broad Area of Operation</th>
<th>Individual Interviewed (Name/Position)</th>
<th>Organisation Size (Employees/ Turnover)</th>
<th>Quotes from Interviewees Regarding Understanding of the Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organisation A</td>
<td>Household cleaning products</td>
<td>• CEO/Founder</td>
<td>• 2-3 employees, c$200k pa</td>
<td>• “I don’t really think about the environment... I think about impacts... on all different levels... the soil... pollutes the atmosphere... ends up on the skin”</td>
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<td>2. Organisation B</td>
<td>Property developer</td>
<td>• CEO/Founder</td>
<td>• c30 employees, c$3-5m pa</td>
<td>• “how the environment... any environment fundamentally how it responds”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organisation C</td>
<td>Marketing communications</td>
<td>• Partner/Founder</td>
<td>• c25 employees, c$2-3m pa</td>
<td>• “This is the environment and that 10,000 kilometres into the middle of wherever is the environment too”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organisation D</td>
<td>Sustainability information</td>
<td>• Director</td>
<td>• c15 employees, c$2-3m pa</td>
<td>• “I see it as the tree and me. It breathes in, I breathe out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organisation E</td>
<td>Personal care products</td>
<td>• Director</td>
<td>• c30 employees, c$7-10m pa</td>
<td>• “The air we are breathing right now, part of my environment is what’s going on between my ears... there is no isolated environment”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “The environment, where it starts and where it stops is totally a fuzzy area. There is no line because its going on within us, around us and remotely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Organisation F</td>
<td>Eco-retailing</td>
<td>• Founder</td>
<td>• c20 employees, c$1-2m pa</td>
<td>• “it starts with the air that we breathe. It’s just everywhere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Organisation G</td>
<td>Sustainability leadership development</td>
<td>• CEO</td>
<td>• c10 employees, c$0.5-1m pa</td>
<td>• “We are the environment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Organisation H</td>
<td>Household cleaning products</td>
<td>• National Sales Manager</td>
<td>• c30 employees, $20-30m pa</td>
<td>• “our position is just around the fact that we are a key part of the environment”... “it’s all aspects... in which we live and how we can do things better that are good for everyone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Organisation I</td>
<td>Building design and architecture</td>
<td>• CEO/Founder</td>
<td>• c16 employees, $1-2m pa</td>
<td>• “the environment is everywhere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Organisation J</td>
<td>Sustainability data for organisations</td>
<td>• CEO</td>
<td>• c7 employees, c$1m</td>
<td>• “the inside is the environment... the outside is also the environment”... “the use of terminology can be restricting in the exclusion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Organisation K</td>
<td>Sustainability assurance and strategic advice</td>
<td>• CEO/Founder</td>
<td>• c17 employees, c$2m pa</td>
<td>• “something that’s all-pervasive in the sense of a workplace is an environment... I tend to talk more about people”</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Organisation L</td>
<td>Community engagement for sustainable outcomes</td>
<td>• CEO</td>
<td>• c200 employees, c$25m pa</td>
<td>• “I think depending on who you are and what you are it’s what you want it to be... [discussing others]... they didn’t do it for the environment they did it for the people in their community... That goes back to what I was saying there before about people and the communities”</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Organisation M</td>
<td>Household cleaning products</td>
<td>• CEO</td>
<td>• c170 employees, c$90m pa</td>
<td>• “the environment is our planet... we are all spawned from it and we belong to it”... “from where we source our first raw material... to the ocean”</td>
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The quotes detailed in Table 2 indicate that, broadly, the interviewees (1) do not think of the environment as a separate category, (2) consider the environment as pervasive and (3) consider that people are a key part of the environment and co-constitute each other to the point that the environment "is what's going on between [the] ears" (Director, Organisation E). In sum the leaders of these organisations appear to conceptualise the environment not as a separate thing, but rather as something that constitutes humans and something that surrounds humans. Further through their comments a narrative of humans and not the organisation as being the focus arises. Although this interview evidence is only exploratory, it would appear that the leaders of the organisations interviewed are not perpetuating a fractured epistemology. Thus it is possible that their conceptualisation may enable sustainable outcomes and as such their theories of the environment maybe more useful in enabling a cadre of corporate strategists to realise sustainable development.

Discussion and Close

This paper has explored a number of areas. The first of these was a discussion of how intrinsic to the call for sustainable development is the embrace of understandings that does not split the world into separate compartments and narrow concerns; and how this leads to an understanding of the world consisting of processes, rather than things in and of themselves. Further how sustainable development is a story of human survival and to consider the environment as a separate entity from humans is naïve (WCED, 1987). The second area was how the English language’s subject-verb structure can imply reification and separation. A difficulty of this being that language impacts perceptions and actions and in turn how we understand the functioning of reality (for example see; Cornelissen, 2002, 2004, 2005; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner, 1987; Morgan, 2012, Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). Thus language and theories that imply a world of separate bounded things is counter to the understanding afforded by the Earthrise picture and counter to the change of understanding inherent to sustainable development. A third area explored was how in a boundary less world humans are processes which produce themselves through their actions and negotiation with all that surrounds them. Thus the environment is not separate to the individual human being and vice versa. A fourth area explored was how organisations and corporate strategists are considered as key enablers of sustainable development. However the theory propagated in strategy textbooks is organisation centric and perpetuating of the notion that the environment is a separate, bounded thing that is independent of the organisation. Thus reducing the corporate strategist to little more than being a supercharged analyst (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) who has through the separation ameliorated some responsibility for their strategies and the actions of the organisation because the environment is separately given. The fifth area explored was interview evidence from leaders of sustainability orientated organisations and how their utterances regarding their understanding of the environment. Their quotes revealing that they did not consider the environment as a separate thing. Rather the environment is something intimately entwined with and not separable from humans, where humanity is the focus of the organisational strategy, as opposed to the organisation itself.

In sum the argument being made in this paper is that "according to most strategic management literature, an organisation is an open system that exists within an independently given environment" (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985, p.724). Yet this dualistic understanding is limited as it is organisation centric and not enabling of sustainable development because it promotes a fractured epistemology (Gladwin, et al., 1995, p. 874). A fracture that facilitates organisational participants and strategists considering the environment as something that is acted on. Rather than understanding that organisational participants and organisations are implicated in their environment, there is no separate objective reality (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Further organisations are in tools which humans use to shape their future and in turn shape themselves. Thus the real challenge for strategists is to forget about the environment and not consider it as something at all, let alone something that is separate. Thus they should not ask whether they can reduce the impact of the organisation on the environment or shape the environment to serve particular organisational objectives. Rather the
challenge is the embrace of a bigger question. Corporate strategists are in fact meaning makers (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) and thus the question they need to explore, if sustainability is desired, is how is the strategy that is being developed for this collective effort (this organisation) enabling of human survival and evolution?

"we have to recognise that our humanity is neither something that comes with the territory, with our species-specific nature, nor an imagined condition that places the territory outside ourselves, but rather the ongoing historical process of our mutual and collective self-creation" (Ingold 2011, p.114)

References


