WORDS NOT ACTIONS! THEIDEOLOGICAL ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORTING

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Abstract

Purpose - This paper aims to examine language use and (re)presentations within the business context around the concept of sustainable development. In doing this we consider how a representation of a phenomena constructs our understanding of that phenomena and how context, in terms of a business association for sustainable development, is important in this construction process. We argue that such representations are constitutive of the way that business has come to ‘know’ and ‘do’ sustainable development and these constrain and enable particular actions and developments.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a New Zealand-based study, this study draws on two main sources of materials: a corpus of written and presentational materials produced by a business association and eight of its members’ first publicly available triple bottom line reports. The coding and analytic process involved a close interpretive examination of the documents to uncover meanings rather than document the volume of disclosure. The content of the reports and pronouncements is framed and analysed within a wider paradigmatic debate on sustainable development.

Findings - The business association and its members’ reports are shown to present a pragmatic and middle-way discourse on business and the environment. Through the use of rhetorical claims to pragmatism and action, the discourse suggests businesses are “doing sustainability”. The association and it members are shown to present a narrow, largely economic and instrumental approach to the natural environment. Such a discourse we argue runs contrary to claims of reform and transformation, and instead reinforces the status quo of traditional interests of business-as-usual over the natural environment.

Originality/value - This paper will be of value to researchers interested in business and sustainable development. By taking an interpretive approach and extending the analysis to a business association, we illustrate the ideological role communication plays in the organised construction of a dominant and potentially unassailable approach to the natural environment.

Key words Sustainable Development, Corporate Reporting, Business Association, Discourse Analysis; New Zealand.

Paper type Research paper
Our view is that the middle path is the best choice for business because sustainability is not just nice to have, it’s a business imperative.


INTRODUCTION

Demonstrating corporate behaviours consistent with sustainable development, sustainability and, in its latest manifestation, climate change, is increasingly demanded by the public, consumers, and politicians (Hart, 1995; Elkington, 1997; Hawken et al., 1999). And business, both individually and through organised initiatives (e.g., WBCSD, GRI), is responding. ‘Business-as-usual’ is eschewed in favour of more enlightened forms of corporate behaviour that are good for stakeholders and the environment as well as shareholders (e.g., Schmidheiny, 1992; IISD/DT, 1993; WICE, 1994, NZBCSD, 2001; WBCSD, 2000a, 2002a, 2002b). Gone are concerns about business or the environment, and in are claims for business and the environment (Porter & van der Linde, 1995). Association pronouncements and stand-alone “sustainability” or “triple bottom line” (TBL) reports (see, GRI, 2000, 2002; KPMG, 2002, 2005; SustainAbility, 2000, 2002, 2004) stress ‘eco-efficiencies’ and ‘win-win’ solutions. A ‘business case’ for sustainable development to ‘create more value with less impact’ is advocated by many organisations (Gray & Bebbington, 2000; WBCSD, 1998, 2000b; Hukkinen, 2003).

Such developments are arguably part of the wider reformist environmental discourse (Shrivastava, 1994; Egri & Pinfield, 1996; Hopwood et al., 2005) termed ‘ecological modernisation’ (Hajer, 1997). Technology, science, and economic progress remain largely unquestioned and, indeed, are arguably given a pre-eminent place in generating solutions to environmental and social crises (Dryzek, 1997; Rossi et al., 2000). As Hajer (1997, pp. 31-32) notes, “ecological modernisation uses the language of business and conceptualises environmental pollution as a matter of inefficiency…the ecological crisis actually constitutes a challenge for business…[and] becomes a vehicle for its very innovation.”

Informed by a broader and stronger ecological discourse, however, critics doubt the reformist eco-modern agenda can deliver sufficient change, and soon enough.¹ They note the eco-modern discourse stands distinct from ‘business-as-usual’, but doubt that deep down it is actually a rejection of it. Welford (1997, p.28), for example, suggests:

It adds an environmental [and now stakeholder] dimension to the development path but does not allow that dimension to radically change the path. In some ways it is a conjuring trick or a juggling act where industry espouses the need for environmental [and now stakeholder] action but never really tells the audience what it is hiding back stage.

By hiding tensions and masking contradictions, critics argue sustainability discourse is placed in the shadow of development (Sachs, 1995), and simply seeks to extend human-centred utilitarianism (e.g., Bebbington & Gray, 1993; Bebbington, 2001; Beder, 1997; Dobson, 1998; Everett & Neu, 2000; Gladwin, 1993; Gray, 1992; Gray & Milne, 2002, 2004; Welford, 1997, 1998). McDonough & Braungart (1998, p.4; 2002), for example, argue eco-efficiency “…works within the same system that caused the problem in the first place…It presents little more than an illusion of change.” And for Fineman (1994, p.2, quoted in Mayhew, 1997):

Corporate environmentalism as an ethically-green, cultural response, is largely a myth. It fits uneasily into the current realities of trading and corporate governance. ‘Business and the environment’ is often a gloss which disguises practices which are more like ‘business or the environment’

¹ Critiques of corporate environmentalism (and its reporting) have come from both academics (e.g., Banerjee, 2003; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Eden, 1994; Gray, 1992; Gray & Bebbington, 2000; Livesey, 2001, 2002; Newton & Harte, 1997; Welford, 1997) and activists alike (e.g., Bruno & Karlner, 2002; Christian Aid, 2004; Greer & Bruno, 1996; TRAC, 1999).
More generally, Hajer (1997, p. 34) asks whether ecological modernisation is “the first step on a bridge that leads towards a new sort of sustainable modern society” or whether it is a “rhetorical ploy that tries to reconcile the irreconcilable [environment and development] only to take the wind out of the sails of ‘real’ environmentalists.”

Between the so-called extremes of frontier economics and deep ecology (Prasad & Elmes, 2005), however, lie a multitude of positions on environment and development (see, for example, Colby, 1991; Ekersley, 1992; Dryzek, 1997; Hopwood et al. 2005; Newton, 2005) necessitating careful examination of what business claims in the name of sustainable development. As Sachs (1999, pp. 77-78) observes:

Environmental action and environmental discourse, when carried on in the name of “sustainable development,” implicitly or explicitly position themselves with respect to the crisis of justice and the crisis of nature. Different actors produce different types of knowledge: they highlight certain issues and underplay others. How attention is focused, what implicit assumptions are cultivated, what hopes are entertained, and what agents are privileged depends on the way the debate on sustainability is framed.

How organisational members frame the debate on sustainability, how they talk and write about the natural environment is “both integral to environmental management itself and a critical aspect of business sustainability” (Livesey, 2002, p. 83). Such talk and texts can be viewed as organisational attempts “to shape and manage the institutional field of which they are a part” (Hardy & Phillips 1999, p. 1). Representation, then, is central to the process of the production of meaning, and we argue that such representations are constitutive of the way that business has come to ‘know’ sustainable development, which will in turn constrain and enable particular actions and developments.

Livesey (2001, 2002), Prasad & Elmes (2005) and Newton (2005), for example, not only show how the natural environment is being increasingly drawn into the discourses of management, but how pragmatic considerations are given emphasis thereby leading to a legitimacy and hegemony of corporate and reform environmentalism.

By positioning itself in some kind of middle ground, environmental management presents itself as being a far more reasonable and practical approach for solving industrially-generated environmental problems (Prasad & Elmes, 2005, p. 849).

From her critical reading of Shell’s 1998 social report Profits and Principles, Livesey (2002) illustrates how Shell recontextualises (Fairclough, 2005) a discourse of the middle ground in committing to sustainable development. The report, she illustrates, is used to convey a myth of business and society compatibility. And a particularly seductive means by which corporate environmentalism might do this is by appeal to the practical (Prasad & Elmes, 2005, p854):

…corporations and managers are preached at in the language of green business, reform environmentalism, and sustainable development because at a fundamental level these options are considered to be extremely practical for organizational success and survival.

In this study we draw on insights from conceptual schema or paradigms of “environment-development” (e.g., Milbrath, 1984; Colby, 1991; Hopwood et al., 2005), as well as critiques from Livesey (2001, 2002), Prasad & Elmes (2005) and Newton (2005), to examine the ideological role of corporate communication in businesses approach to sustainable development. By drawing on materials from the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD), and its members’ first publicly available “sustainable development” reports, we critically examine the use of language and images to construct a position for business that seeks to reconcile the irreconcilable.
In a press release, for example, the NZBCSD’s Chief Executive claimed that (NZBCSD, 2005):

…those who maintain that the fundamentalist free-market route is the best and only way and that the only role of business is to make profits are missing a real opportunity. Similarly, those on the green left who believe that the business model is inherently selfish and that business is “doing sustainability” for the wrong reasons, fail to recognise the real contributions which companies can and are making.

To understand representations such as these and their effects is also to understand the context in which they occur (van Dijk 1997; Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak 1997). It is through the process of analysing text and context that we attempt to bring insight to how business understands and thus deals with the challenge of sustainable development. In this respect we seek to add to the studies of Bebbington & Thomson (1996), Livesey (2001, 2002), Livesey & Kearins (2002), Springett (2003), Laine (2005), and Tregidga & Milne (2006).

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we review and outline a conceptual literature on environment and development. We then turn to our approach and methods of analysis of the reports and other NZBCSD communications. Following a thematic and critical analysis of the constructions of sustainable development by the NZBCSD and its member organisations, we then reflect on the implications of such (re)presentations for organisational transformation.

ENVIRONMENT-DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Social Paradigms, Paradigm Synthesis and Sustainable Development

We locate this study in a wider literature of environment-development discourse, and more particularly worldviews or social paradigms. Milbrath (1984, p. 7, see also Olsen et al, 1992, p. xv) argues that “Every organised society has a dominant social paradigm…which consists of the values, metaphysical beliefs, institutions, habits etc, that collectively provide social lenses through which individuals and groups interpret their social world.” Paradigms provide the framework of meaning within which ‘facts’ and experiences acquire significance and can be interpreted (Cotgrove, 1982, p.26). Unlike worldviews, however, social paradigms are defined to pertain to only certain aspects of life rather than the totality of social existence, and to be held by only a limited set of people, referred to as a “communicative community”, rather than being necessarily accepted by all members of society (Olsen et al., 1992, p. 18).

Paradigmatic research into environmentalism, development, and human-nature relationships has produced sociological analyses of environmental movements (e.g., Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978, 1984; Dunlap et al., 2000; Dunlap, 2002; Olsen et al., 1992; see also Cotgrove, 1982 and Milbrath, 1984), analyses of green political discourse (e.g., Dobson, 1998; Eckersley, 1990, 1992; Dryzek, 1997), as well as analyses of development and organisations (e.g., Colby, 1991; Pearce, 1993; Lewis, 1992; Benton & Short, 1999; Jamison, 2001; McGregor, 2004; Hopwood et al., 2005; Gladwin et al, 1995; Purser et al., 1995). Different authors identify a range of interests and labels for their paradigms, and often collapse them into binary or three categories (e.g., catastrophists and cornucopians; vanguards and rearguards; technocentrics, ecocentrics, and biocentrics; status quo, reformists, and radicals). Eckersley (1990), however, identifies the main ‘eco-philosophical cleavage’ as the anthropocentric-ecocentric divide. “The essential difference between these two approaches is that the former values the non-human world only for its instrumental or use value to humankind (whether material or otherwise) whereas the latter also values the non-human world for its own sake, irrespective of its use-value to humans” (Eckersley, 1990, p. 70).

Early on, Milbrath (1984) identified a middle position of “environmental sympathisers” between what he termed the dominant social paradigm (DSP) with its emphasis on high material wealth
and strong resistance to change, and the new environmental paradigm (NEP) with its emphasis on valuing the environment for its own sake, and the need for a radically different form of society. Milbrath does not detail the values or beliefs of these sympathisers or how they might differ from the stringent ideals of the two opposing paradigms, but Olsen et al. (1992) Colby (1991) and Hopwood et al. (2005) are helpful in this respect. First, and echoing Eckersley (1990), Olsen et al. (1992) argue that while “Industrial” and “Post-Industrial” worldviews might be distinguished on the basis of environmental, technological, work, economic, political, and organisational components (as do Cotgrove 1982 and Milbrath, 1984, for example), core differences can be reduced to a set of ecological beliefs and values, which may be contrasted with a set of technological beliefs and values. Table 1 provides a summary of these core values and beliefs. Table 1 also shows that while the two traditional paradigms share common value components (i.e., what “should be”) as either-or opposites, different sets of beliefs (i.e., what we believe “is” or “can be”) distinguish the technological and ecological paradigms. Dominating the ecological paradigm are beliefs about nature, ecological limits, human damage to the environment, and humans being another species. In contrast, the technological paradigm is dominated by beliefs about the success of science and technology.

Olsen et al. (1992, see also Gladwin et al, 1995) set out to assess the extent to which the prevailing technological social paradigm is gradually being replaced by the newer ecological social paradigm. On analysis and further reflection, however, they propose a “socioenvironmental dialectic” (Schnaiberg, 1980, p. 424) where societies seek to resolve by way of synthesis continuing tensions between the production-expansion thesis and its ecological limits antithesis. Sociocultural change, they suggest (Olsen et al., 1992, p. 150), results from continuous efforts to resolve fundamental contradictions in society through creative imagination. The possible emergence of a synthesis “Sustainable Development” social paradigm is traced by Olsen et al. (1992) to the early works of Ophuls (1977), Daly (1973, 1977), Pirages (1977) and Schnaiberg (1980) who all outline various forms of “steady-state” or “sustainable” societies.

Olsen et al. (1992, p.154) suggest under the sustainable development paradigm (see Table 1) belief in the capacity of technology to always solve our problems or to be virtually risk free is no longer held. Likewise, there is increased acceptance that the earth is limited, and industrialisation is seriously disturbing the environment. They suggest the values associated with sustainable development have moved away from oppositions over human-nature relationships, economic growth, and future generations to values associated with population control, long-term risk-aversion (the precautionary principle), product quality & durability, and economic stability (not growth).

Additional insights into middle or emergent paradigms can also be found in Colby (1991). He offers a model of emergent paradigm development based on a synthesis of between what he calls the frontier economic and deep ecology paradigms. Shown in Figure 1, Colby (1991) captures the overlapping evolution of three synthesis paradigms. The position and size of the elliptical shapes are intended to represent the degree of integration of social, ecological and economic systems in the definition of development. Their size and position, however, are approximate. The environmental protection and resource management paradigms are argued to have emerged, while eco-development remains for Colby a (hypothesised) future synthesis.

Consistent with the DSP, frontier economics represents an “unbridled faith in the ‘progress’ of human ingenuity, in the benevolence of technological advancement, and their combined capacity
to reckon with any problems that might arise, usually through substitution when scarcity causes prices to rise" (Colby, 1991, p. 198). In stark contrast, Colby’s “deep ecology” draws on various schools of thought such as wilderness preservationism, religious notions of ethics, justice and equity, eco-feminism, participatory democracy, and social equality aspects of socialism, in addition to systems ecology. Calls from these positions advocate an anti- or non-growth economy in harmony with nature. Such ‘eco-topian ideals’, however, have met with criticism concerning their likely self-defeating aims of returning to a pre-industrial age of low impact rural lifestyles (Lewis, 1992; Newton, 2005).

Colby sees environmental protection as the first move to overcome the excesses of frontier economics, and as a first questioning of the basic values and beliefs that underlie it. Environmental protection seeks to “legalize the environment as an economic externality” (Colby, 1991, p. 201, emphasis in original). The position arose in the late 1960s in recognition of industrial pollution, and attempts to limit damage through end-of-the-pipe command and control regulations and environmental impact assessment. Resource management, in contrast, depends less on state bureaucracies and legal enforcements, and more on economics and markets. It is where “ecology is being economized” (Colby, 1991, p. 204, emphasis in original) through the extension of economic theory (markets, trading, pricing) into all types of capital and resources, including those on a global scale (e.g., climate). Colby associates this paradigm with sustainable development and the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987). Both environmental protection and resource management retain a dominant anthropocentric/utilitarian sense of the environment as resources for human use, albeit their wise use.

In contrast, eco-development, a future synthesis according to Colby, is seen as ‘ecologizing the economy, or whole social systems ’ (Colby, 1991, p. 207, emphasis in original). Eco-development seeks to synthesise the fundamental conflict between anthropocentric and biocentric values by restructuring and reorganising human activities to become synergistic with ecosystem services and processes (Colby, 1991, p. 204). This position is distinguished from the “back-to-nature” symbiosis advocated by deep ecology, and involves redesigning the economy according to ecological principles in a way that decouples economic growth from energy and material throughputs such that the scale of economic development attained is within sustainable levels.

Figure 2 further elaborates on the middle ground of the sustainable development debate by drawing on Hopwood et al’s (2005) analysis of recent contributions to such a debate. While Hopwood et al’s axes are based on (more or less) concerns for well-being and equality, and (more or less) concerns for environmental quality and eco-centrism, they map well into the axes used in

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2 This is a “growth forever” or Promethean position (often associated with Maddox, 1972; Beckerman, 1974, 1995; Simon, 1981; Simon & Khan, 1984; Bailey, 1993, 1995, 2002; Peron, 1995; and Lomburg, 1998 - see also Dryzek, 1997) that advocates unrestrained exploitation based on assumptions of an unlimited and abundant nature, that things only attain value after transformation by humans, and that humans are exceptionally resourceful and exempt from the laws of nature (Norton, 1989, 1991; Cairns, 2001). While Promethean positions appear to be less often articulated in the light of increasing evidence of environmental problems, as Dryzek (1997, p. 45) notes, positions consistent with a Promethean discourse do not necessarily require formal articulation, and may in fact represent the unspoken assumptions that form the basis on which many humans continue to live. In other words, we may continue to live our lives in denial of such trends, even if we do not seek to explicitly deny them, or consciously believe those that do.

3 The various possible strands of deep green ecological thought are discussed in greater detail in Dryzek (1997), Lewis (1992), Benton & Short (1999), Jamison (2001), and McGregor (2004). Strands of thought in Environmental Justice, Social Ecology and Ecofeminism, (see, for example, Bookchin, 1971, 1980; Harvey, 1996; Merchant, 1980, 1992) are depicted in a later diagram (see Figure 2) as part of the New Environmental Paradigm where, recognizing the complexity of the debate, they are shown distinct from Deep Ecology. Concern with the environment was not central to traditional socialist ideology (e.g. Marx), however.

4 Colby refers to “biocentrism” as the basic value underlying the most extreme deep ecology and “eco-centrism” as underlying eco-development. Others (e.g., Eckersley, 1992; O’Riordan, 1981; Pearce, 1993; Benton & Short, 1999), however, use the term “eco-centrism” to represent the value basis of the most extreme deep green positions.
Further, these axes approximate well Sach’s (1999) point noted earlier about how actors position themselves in regard to the crisis of justice and the crisis of nature. Positions in the lower right hand quadrant, consistent with the dominant social paradigm and frontier economics, are low on both, while those in the upper right hand quadrant are high on both. Hopwood et al divide the various actors and contributors into three categories based on the extent to which such calls do or do not demand change to existing systems and institutions: transformation, reform, and status quo. In Hopwood et al’s (2005, p.42) version of the status quo:

Development is identified with growth and economic growth is seen as part of the solution…Supporters of the status quo…argue that business is the driver towards sustainability. Increased information, changing values, improved management techniques and new technology all operating through the market are the best means to achieve sustainable development.

For Hopwood et al, then, supporters of the status quo recognise the need for change, but seek it through largely existing means. Those who are positioned within the status quo represent advocates of Colby’s resource management paradigm, but include others who retain elements of the dominant technological paradigm – namely strong beliefs in economic growth and technological progress. Hopwood et al locate pronouncements by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) firmly within the status quo and at the extreme (least radical) end of the debate.

The work of Colby (1991), Olsen et al (1992) and Hopwood et al (2005) avoids the strident and simplifying polarizations evident, for example, in the NZBCSD’s own press release. They illustrate the complexity of emergent “middle” positions within which to examine the pronouncements of the NZBCSD and its members. While Colby and Olsen et al emphasise the prospect for synthesis and compromise, Hopwood et al indicate the diversity of voices that make up the sustainable development debate.

**Paradigms, Ideologies and Organisational Communication**


Paradigms are not only beliefs about what the world is like and guides to action; they also serve the function of legitimating or justifying courses of action. That is to say, they function as ideologies. Those who do not share the paradigm will question the justification for the action it supports. Hence, conflict over what constitutes the paradigm by which action should be guided and judged to be reasonable is itself a part of the political process. The struggle to universalise a paradigm is part of the struggle for power.

Olsen et al. (1992, p. 19-21) distinguish ideologies from social paradigms on the grounds that they are intentionally formed and propounded for specific purposes. Attracting supporters, justifying actions and/or legitimising the exercise of power and control are all identified as possible purposes. Ideologies, they suggest, are often expressed in clear and simple terms with strong emotional appeal, and serve to provide meanings, simplify existence, and provide certainty.

Like Cotgrove (1982) and Olsen et al (1992), Thompson (1984, 1990) seeks to emphasise what Geertz (1964, p.52) refers to as the interest theory of ideology; that is, ideology serves to rationalise interests and is used in the struggle among (social) classes or groups for each to advance certain interests its members hold in common by capturing (and maintaining) political
power and economic advantage.\textsuperscript{5} Thompson (1984, 1990) also argues for a negative or critical concept of ideology in which we should seek to understand \textit{“the social uses of symbolic forms”} and \textit{“meaning in the service of power”} (Thompson, 1990, pp. 7-8, italics in original). The study of ideology, he suggests (1990, p7), requires us to investigate:

\ldots the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds, from everyday linguistic utterances to complex images and texts; it requires us to investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed; and it calls upon us to ask whether, and if so how, the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms serves, in specific contexts, to establish and sustain relations of domination.

Thompson (1990, pp. 56-57), however, is also keen to distinguish his conception of ideology from those notions that singularly focus on relations of domination associated with class conflict, and from notions of ideology as necessarily being illusions and distortions of reality, and by implication, false. He suggests (p. 9):

\ldots the symbolic forms through which we express ourselves and understand others do not constitute some ethereal other world which stands opposed to what is real: rather, they are partially constitutive of what, in our societies, ‘is real’…social life is, to some extent, a field of contestation in which struggle takes place through words and symbols…ideology…is an integral part of this struggle.

By identifying certain modes of operation of ideology, and strategies of symbolic construction, Thompson (1990, p. 60-67; see also Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; 2000, pp. 113-138; Deetz, 1996) also provides a series of insights into how (organisational) communication might be used to establish and sustain relations of domination. Table 2 provides an overview of these modes and strategies.\textsuperscript{6}

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That corporate reports and other forms of organisational communication can and do play a part in forming world views and ideologies that mediate, suppress, mystify and transform social conflict is well established in the critical accounting and management literature (e.g., Tinker & Neimark, 1987, p72; Cooper, 1995; Deetz, 1992; Levy, 1997). The need to understand organisational accounts and annual reports within their social and political context (e.g., Burchell \textit{et al.}, 1980), as socially constructed (e.g., Hines, 1988), and as serving partisan, ideological and propaganda roles (e.g. Tinker, 1980; Cooper & Shearer, 1984; Burchell \textit{et al.} 1985; Tinker & Neimark, 1987; Cooper, 1995; Collison, 2003) is also well established.
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\textsuperscript{5} This Thompson seeks to distinguish from a broader neutral perspective on the origin and role of ideology: ideology as collectively shared values, norms and beliefs. Downplaying the intentional and political aspects of ideology, Geertz (1964, p. 53; see also Van Dijk, 1998, for example) refers to the strain theory of ideology, and suggests social life inevitably produces ambiguities, conflicts and strains, and ideologies are used to cope with the anxieties that result.

\ldots shared, interrelated sets of beliefs about how things work; values that indicate what’s worth having or doing; and norms that tell people how they should behave… [and] the sharing of beliefs, values, and norms incorporated in their ideologies binds groups of people together and thus promotes their social solidarity…[while] the rationalised understandings that ideologies provide help to sustain individuals in enacting their social roles (Apter, 1964, cited in Trice & Beyer, 1993).

Geertz’s strain theory of ideology, then, suggests social paradigms and ideologies are largely synonymous.

\textsuperscript{6} Alvesson & Deetz (1996) also identify four themes they consider recur in writings about organization from the perspective of ideology critique: (1) naturalization of social order – the way a socially/constructed world is treated as necessary, natural, rational and self-evident; (2) the universalisation of managerial interests and suppression of conflicting interests; (3) the domination of instrumental, and eclipse of competitive, reasoning processes; and (4) hegemony, the way consent becomes orchestrated.
To summarise so far, then, we conceptualise organisational communication on sustainable development as part of a field of contestation; as part of an active engagement in the socio-environmental dialectic to resolve the ongoing conflict between the production-expansion thesis and its ecological limits antithesis. Such attempts at synthesis we judge to be an ongoing discursive and ideological struggle over environment and development. Consequently, in exploring the role of corporate reports and association pronouncements, not only do we seek to understand how the NZBCSD and its members frame the debate on sustainable development, we also seek to understand the symbolic forms through which they represent sustainable development and themselves and, to the extent possible, how meaning serves existing relations of power.

APPROACH AND METHOD

Hall (1997) identifies three different approaches to representation: reflective, intentional and constructivist. The reflective approach suggests representations reflect meaning: meaning already exists ‘out there’ and language is the medium through which this meaning is communicated to others. Often labelled conventional or structuralist, language is understood to be “a transparent medium for the transport of meaning” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p141). Intentional representation holds that language reflects what the writer or speaker wants to say, that is has an intended meaning. This perspective takes the transmission of meaning model as given, but fails to acknowledge the distance between the author(s), text(s) and reader(s). The constructivist approach is one that we find most useful for this analysis, and suggests that meaning is not fixed but constituted through language (Demeritt, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). “The main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced; it is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean” (Hall, 1997, p 24, emphasis in original). As Deetz (1996, p.2) argues, “…conceptions are always contests for meaning. Language does not name objects in the world; it is core to the process of constituting objects.” Such a perspective moves from an essentialist position to one where meaning is constituted through the practice of language.

In this paper we adopt what Phillips & Hardy (2002) refer to as an interpretive structuralist approach. This approach acknowledges two important characteristics of language use. The first is

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7 This study is part of a larger programme of work. The first stages of the programme, which also provides background on the NZBCSD and the development of sustainable development reporting in New Zealand, consisted of content analyses of the first eight sustainable development reports in 2001, and a further analysis of 30 NZBCSD members’ reports released in 2002 (see Milne et al, 2003 and Chapman & Milne, 2004 for details). These analyses were based on SustainAbility’s report benchmarking tool, and serve to illustrate the relatively poor and patchy performance reporting practices of all but a few members. Particularly noteworthy from these analyses was reporting emphasis on top management policies and discussion and on reporting to stakeholders – narrative, discursive and rhetorical aspects of reporting dominated. Where “hard data” was present, the second of the analyses noted the tendency to report win-win indicators associated with energy and materials efficiency, and to focus on “immediate” stakeholders such as employees and local communities. Absent was reporting on the negative impact of core business practices. While such analyses permit us to assess the extent of, and to some extent the quality of reporting against a fixed set of items, and by comparison across different reporters, they do not allow us to assess the potential meaning of such report content.

8 Constructivist positions, however, vary, and our point here is not to argue or express the belief that language constructs all that we know about the world or all that exists in the world. Unlike Gergen (1985), Edwards et al. (1995), and Potter (1996, 1998), for example, we do not adhere to the strongly constructionist or relativist position that there is nothing outside of the text, and that all phenomena are fundamentally linguistic in origin. To hold such a position, as Palmer (1990, cited in Nightingale & Cromby, 1999) notes, is to suggest talk is just words, divorced from the material, historical, and social conditions of its origin, and, consequently, the world is no more than idealist speculation. Papers that engage with, and argue against a strongly social constructionist view of nature and the environment include Peterson (1999), Smith (1999), Kidner (2000), and Crist (2004).

9 Phillips & Hardy (2002, p20) distinguish interpretive structuralism from critical discourse analysis (CDA) on the grounds that while both are acutely aware of the context in which language is constituted, CDA places particular emphasis on relations of power. They note, however, that their classification scheme is to a matter of degree and good studies invoking either approach will be sensitive to the other. While we are concerned to try and unearth the
the constitutive role of discourse. The second is the importance of context in the understanding of text. Language use is explicitly bound in the notion of context. Thus representations do not occur in isolation but affect, and are affected by the context within which they are situated (Hardy & Phillips 1999; van Dijk 1997). In order to recognise this context we position the findings among other social and academic representations of sustainable development, making it possible to recognise that there are different meanings to the concept and different ways of thinking about and understanding sustainable development.

We see these perspectives on discourse as consistent with that advocated in Thompson (1984, pp. 173-204; 1990, pp. 272-303) and described by him as a methodological framework of depth hermeneutics. Based on Paul Ricoeur, Thompson suggests three phases for an interpretative methodology: (1) a social-historical analysis of the conditions that form the context of the production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms; (2) a formal or discursive analysis of those symbolic forms, and; (3) the interpretation or re-interpretation of those symbolic forms, where one seeks to explicate what is said or meant by those symbolic forms. He adds that the modes of operation and strategies of symbolic construction he identifies with ideology (shown in Table 2) are not ideological as such and should be regarded as rough guidelines which can facilitate specific empirical enquiries in specific contexts.10

**Materials and Methods**

We draw on two main sources of materials: a corpus of written and presentational materials produced by the NZBCSD and triple bottom line reports from organisational members of the NZBCSD. The Council’s website [www.nzbsd.org.nz](http://www.nzbsd.org.nz) includes an extensive archive of materials (publications, speeches and events, news and media releases and newsletters) dating back to its formation in May 1999. The bulk of these materials were accessed up to the end of 2002, but we have continued to follow up the website and access later materials. Many texts provide articulations as to the meaning of sustainable development in the voice of the Council. We also identified eight members’ triple bottom line reports, issued in 2001. These reports are the earliest available since the council formed, and constitute the first formal public statements made by council members. These formal documents (usually) produced annually, include information such as the environmental initiatives undertaken by the organisation. These were produced by businesses from a diverse range of industries and of varying size and ownership structures. The reporting history of the companies also varied.11 A full list of the source data and TBL reports is provided at the end of the paper.

The methods adopted here were to loosely follow Thompson’s framework. First we sought to understand the origins of the NZBCSD and locate it within the wider socio-political New Zealand debate of business and sustainable development. This we present first in the next section. Second, we sought to conduct a close interpretive examination of the texts – that is the members’ annual reports and the pronouncements of the NZBCSD.12 This second phase of analysis was undertaken in several stages. First, we analysed the content of the NZBCSD materials. This analysis sought to identify the main ways in which the Council discussed the concept of sustainable development.

ideological effects of the NZBCSD discourse, our approach is more typical of a close-grained micro analysis of business communication in its wider context.

10 Alvesson & Deetz (2000, pp. 112-138) also seek to avoid a “cookbook” of detailed rules and emphasise some “general guidelines” for framing critical research. These include: intensifying interpretation, evaluating language use in an action context, relating accounts to identity constructions, incorporating historical context, emphasizing the political nature of empirical work, and activating the reader (see also Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p 85).

11 See Milne, et al. (2003) for more information on the companies involved.

12 As noted in fn. 7, our approach to these texts stands in contrast to the conventional content analyses that have previously examined annual reports for social and environmental disclosures (e.g. Gray et al., 1995; Hackston & Milne, 1996; Deegan & Gordon, 1996). Our aim here was to work intensively with an important and manageable sample of reports and materials, asking the question ‘what are the representations of sustainable development as evident through the language used within this report or NZBCSD document?'
and (re)presents this to external audiences. Statements were extracted from these documents which constructed representations of sustainable development and these were subsequently coded into themes. Second, we examined the eight triple bottom line reports. A qualitative analysis of all the reports by two of the authors was undertaken. The process of analysis involved each of the readers independently reading the texts and identifying key statements employed when representing sustainable development. The reviewers then compared and discussed their individual findings to derive a set of overall themes. Third, we compared the findings from the first two stages of analysis. We looked for how sustainable development was ‘talked’ about in both the NZBCSD documents and the reports and looked for similarities between the language and points of difference. We found the themes identified from the NZBCSD and the reports were similar and perhaps more surprising was the extent to which comparable statements were being used across reporters and the Council. There were in fact numerous examples of “language sharing”. The result of this analytical process was the identification of four common and key themes. These four themes which constitute sustainable development within this set of texts are discussed below.

The third phase of analysis has involved our subsequent interpretation or re-interpretation of the materials analysed in phase two in the context of both the socio-political environment in which they are produced as well as in light of the conceptual and empirical work unearthed in the literature. In this phase we have examined and re-examined the core themes and extracts in the context of the paradigmatic schema introduced earlier, the critical observations made of other empirical work in relation to business and sustainable development, most notably Livesey (2002), Prasad & Elmes (2005) and Newton (2005), as well as using the broad schema of Thompson (1990) and Alvesson & Deetz (1996) to critically reflect on the symbolic constructions (re)presented by the NZBCSD and its members.

Throughout the process of conducting this analysis we were, and were made aware of the necessarily interpretive and subjective nature of the research. We recognise that “all knowledge is situated, contingent and partial” (Taylor, 2001, p. 319), and acknowledge that our reading of the texts is but one possible reading (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Furthermore, in such interpretive analysis we recognise our (unavoidable) involvement in the construction of meaning as readers and analysers of the texts, and their subsequent re-interpretation. In terms of the paradigmatic frameworks offered earlier, it should be clear that all three of us hold values and beliefs (ideological positions) that are distinct and to varying degrees in opposition to those of the NZBCSD, its members, and yet others who would make up the dominant social paradigm. As such, what we present here is:

…not an objective picture of social reality [for no such position exists] but a set of impressions and interpretations produced by situated persons, characterised by feelings, imagination, commitments and particular pre-structured understandings…what is offered is one story (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 136).

Having said that, and by including extracts and at times extensive quotes from the reports and other materials, we do seek to let the texts ‘speak for themselves’ as much as possible, albeit, of course, within a framework we have constructed and on the basis of extracts we have selected. Others, we accept, will inevitably hold other interpretations.

NEW ZEALAND BUSINESS TALKS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The New Zealand Context
New Zealand has always had a strong and outspoken conservation movement with strong and at times radical and preservationist attitudes (e.g., Forest and Bird preservation society, Native Forest

13 Indeed, in presenting early versions of this paper, we were accused by some commentators of ‘green campaigning’, and perhaps less critically of needing to be aware of our own rhetoric and ideological biases.
Action, Maruia Society, Federated Mountain Clubs, The Guardians of Lake Manapouri), but these have tended to articulate concerns on specific issues (development proposals), or more generally for the protection of native flora and fauna. New Zealand has also pioneered fisheries management legislation, arguably based on principles of sustainability. The late 1980s and early 1990s also saw debate around the “principles of sustainable management” as part of the resource management law reform process, which ultimately led to the Resource Management Act (1991). Most recently, however, we locate at least three organised “voices” publicly articulating and debating sustainable development; the NZBCSD, the New Zealand Business Round Table (NZBRT) and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment’s Office (PCE).

The NZBRT was founded in the mid 1980s and has continued to promote a free-market economic ideology through its Executive Director’s (Roger Kerr) speeches, and through sponsored lecture tours of those with similar views (e.g., Lomborg’s *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* and Henderson’s *Misguided Virtue: False Notions of Corporate Social Responsibility*) (see, for example, www.nzbr.org.nz; Easton, 1997: 211-231; Potter, 2001). In “Making Sense of Sustainable Development”, for example, Kerr (2002) articulates a notion of sustainable development consistent with Colby’s frontier economics and Olsen et al.’s (1992) dominant technological social paradigm. Favoured are “creating clear property rights, developing markets for trading, and introducing commercial structures and incentives” to solve numerous environmental problems. Consistent with the optimism of writers noted earlier (e.g., Lomborg, Bailey, Simon), Kerr suggests:

Efforts to pursue intergenerational equity need to take account of the fact that future generations will almost certainly be far, far better off than present generations. …sustainable development and economic growth are quite consistent - indeed that growth promotes sustainability…Worse, for some environmental advocates, sustainable development is essentially concerned with putting boundaries around economic growth. This would make it impossible to improve environmental conditions around the world… Most of the environmental trends that we observe today suggest a sustainable present and future. Julian Simon’s long-run forecast was that: *The material conditions of life will continue to get better for most people, in most countries, most of the time, indefinitely. Within a century or two, all nations and most of humanity will be at or above today’s Western living standards. I also speculate, however, that many people will continue to think and say that the conditions of life are getting worse.* Those who form their opinions on the basis of science rather than superstition must continue to argue that the doomsayers are wrong. Development is sustainable, and more sensible understandings of what sustainable development means and how to achieve it appear to be gaining ground. In contrast, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment’s Office through two reports (*Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development for New Zealand, 2002; See Change: Learning and Education for Sustainability, 2004*) articulates positions that encompass many aspects of

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14 Easton (1997, pp.211-230) identifies the Business Round Table as part of the “New Establishment” which formed following the election of the Fourth Labour Government in 1984, and famously took up “Rogernomics” based on (Friedman’s) monetarist policies of Finance Minister Roger Douglas. He suggests “the Establishment” is used to “cover the group of men (and latterly some women) who are most closely involved in the governing of New Zealand. It includes key politicians, businessmen, and public servants who are influential in decision making, have a commonality of vision and a networking of relations. The term covers the “ill defined amalgam of institutions, social classes, and forces which represent authority legitimacy, tradition and the status quo” (Stallybrass 1988:248). He further goes on to say “Neither does an establishment mean a country is not democratic, for the group may be responsive - and ultimately subject - to the wishes of the majority. However every establishment tends to look after its own interests and to reflect the viewpoint of its members.”

15 In a later national newspaper column, Kerr went on to reiterate the point that “Sustainable Development and economic growth are quite consistent. Indeed, growth promotes sustainability”. This latter remark appeared in the *New Zealand Herald*, 4 April 2003, as part of an article titled “Wealth Creation environment’s best friend”.

16 The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is an independent commissioner from Government, Business or any other group in New Zealand with the statutory authority (under the Environment Act, 1986) to make reports to the New Zealand parliament.
Colby’s eco-development perspective, including its aspiration, and those of Olsen et al.’s (1992) ecological and sustainable development paradigms. The forward to Creating Our Future suggests (our emphasis):

The fundamental task in front of us over the coming decades is to redesign our socio-political-economic system in ways that reintegrate the dependencies between people and our underpinning ecological systems. And redesign we must: firstly, in the way we think about the whole issue of sustainability; secondly, in the way we design for a more sustainable future; and thirdly, in the actions we take. This third step is the hardest since this is where current ideologies, beliefs, value systems, economic theory and ecological constraints ultimately conflict…

The PCE’s office further reiterated the enormity of the challenge in the preface to See Change in terms of both the likely required changes, and the likely resistance to such changes.

This century may well be one of relearning on a grand scale – relearning how we Homo Sapiens can sustain ourselves on a planet that has limits…I’m not suggesting that New Zealanders should deconstruct our twenty-first century society to pursue some hunter-gatherer model. However, along with many others, I am suggesting that we need a much deeper understanding of the demands and pressures of our current society and its economic systems on the health and long-term sustainability of our natural resources… We are living beyond nature’s income… We need to learn why it is important to live within nature’s limits.

…There will be heated debate, because this learning will increasingly challenge deeply held beliefs about our social and economic systems…such debate is inevitable, and there will be strong resistance in some sections of society, governance and business…

Between the NZBRT and the PCE’s Office we locate the NZBCSD. This location is not some convenient device on our part. The location reflects evidence and arguments from all three groups. The PCE’s 2002 report, for example, distinguishes its own thinking on sustainability and sustainable development from that espoused by the NZBCSD, which it considers “weak” and only likely to slow down ecological and social degradation rather than reversing it (PCE, 2002, p. 35). Likewise, Kerr’s (2002) speech considered the NZBCSD as relying on the “hopelessly problematical” definition of sustainable development advocated in Our Common Future (WCED, 1987). His point being how could present generations predict the needs of future ones, and why should they sacrifice in favour of future generations that will be so well off? Furthermore, a key aspect of the emergence of the NZBCSD was the open and public rejection of the right-wing market and economic ideology of the NZBRT by several of its founders (see Potter, 2001). Since its inception, the NZ press and prominent members of the NZBCSD have been keen to distinguish the NZBCSD from the NZBRT, and Potter (2001) evidences how both groups are vying for power and political attention. Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, the NZBCSD has sought to position itself as offering an alternative “middle way”, and throughout 2006 and 2007 has sought to articulate sustainability as the “mainstream middle majority way” based on survey evidence that 70% of New Zealand respondents want both economic growth and a better quality of life including a protected environment, while only 5% clearly preferred one over the other. The remaining 20% did not express a view (see www.nzbcsd.org.nz).

Founded in 1999, the NZBCSD currently has about 55 organisational members ranging from very small consultancies to New Zealand’s largest manufacturers, retailers and service organisations. Membership is by invitation only. The council itself is constituted of the CEOs of the member organisations. In addition, however, a small but active staff organise events, make presentations, manage the website and a newsletter, issue press releases and promote its activities and projects to wider forums. Potter (2001) traces the origins of the NZBCSD to a small number of prominent individuals and a small number of prominent events. The NZBCSD has been proactive with zero waste, climate change, youth employment, schools partnership, and sustainable labelling projects. And these have recently been extended to include supply chain management, emissions
management and economic incentives for sustainable development. The earliest of the projects the NZBCSD tackled, however, was the promotion of triple bottom line reporting, or what it refers to as sustainable development reporting (SDR). One of the conditions of Council membership is accepting a commitment to publicly release a SDR report within three years, and a key initiative was the development of a reporting guideline officially launched in 2002 (www.shapenz.org.nz/sdr/SDR_Guide.pdf).

A Balancing Act: Articulating “Sustainable Development”
In contrast to the NZBRT’s sole emphasis on sustainable development coming from economic growth, and the PCE’s emphasis on redesign within ecological limits, the NZBCSD conceives of approaching sustainable development via “the three pillars of economic growth, environmental protection, and social progress”, and sets its mission to be a “catalyst for change”, and “promote eco-efficiency, innovation, and entrepreneurship” (NZBCSD, 1999, 2001, 2002). We see here, then, reference to environmental protection as well as eco-efficiency and economic growth, suggesting a mix of Colby’s paradigms of environmental protection, resource management, and frontier economics. Furthermore, the NZBCSD’s projects (e.g., zero waste, emissions management, economic incentives) indicate an emphasis on ‘economising ecology’ – a position consistent with Hajer’s (1997) notion of ecological modernisation. Moreover, in terms of the growth versus environmental protection debate of Olsen et al.’s paradigms, the NZBCSD equivocates and fails to explicitly prioritise one over the other. Instead, it promises both.

To influence policy development, the NZBCSD has employed “leadership forums”. The first of these sought to provide a definition of sustainable development for all New Zealanders. As Rodger Spiller, previous Executive Director of the NZBCSD, states:

The NZBCSD Leadership Forum in February 2000 was a meeting of 50 minds from New Zealand business, government, and society. As part of its work the forum produced a definition [of sustainable development] for New Zealand. Sustainable Development means systematically fostering a responsive, knowledge-intensive economy and a participative, caring society, in ways that enhance eco-system services and our unique natural environment. A summary of the common elements of the NZBCSD’s Leadership Forum are presented…below (Spiller, in Boardroom, February 2001, p. 1).

Leadership forums, and the above scenario, we suggest, “constitutes its own practicality by asserting its commitment to working within the system and jointly involving all existing players in the generation of visions and strategies” (Prasad & Elmes, 2005, p856). In the process, the articulated position, and indeed the NZBCSD, gains legitimacy through compromise and attempts to unify and universalize (Thompson, 1990 p.60) – Everyone walks the talk. As Prasad & Elmes (2005, p. 856, emphasis in original; see also Livesey, 2002) argue, “compromise gets constructed as being ‘practical’ because it ostensibly avoids so-called extremes such as ‘frontier economics’ and ‘deep ecology’ (Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995), and because it strives to balance or arrive at some kind of middle ground between opposing viewpoints and paradigms.” Ostensibly, like the claim “sustainable businesses are profitable, contribute to social progress and ecological balance”, the image promises to serve the interests of all, and “explicitly avoids addressing basic social contradictions that other discourses might have introduced” (Hajer, 1997, p. 32; Livesey, 2002).

17 Details on all these projects, including detailed progress reports for some of them can be found on the NZBCSD website www.nzbcsd.org.nz
18 Interestingly, the NZBCSD in many of its submissions reinforce these objectives as a preface to the submission, often claiming “sustainable businesses are profitable, contribute to social progress and ecological balance and protect New Zealand’s quality of life” (see, www.nzbcsd.org.nz).
Further evidence of compromise is taken from other presentation slides at the first leadership forum. At that time the NZBCSD suggested the following perspective in answer to the question what is sustainability?

At first, references to “ecological systems”, “life-sustaining functions”, “social and ecological limits”, “future generations” and issues of equity suggest notions consistent with Colby’s (1991) eco-development paradigm, if not deep ecology, and certainly with several of the “sustainable development” belief statements outlined in Table 1. Moreover, other slides and commentary refer to “ecological footprints…demonstrating that current patterns of production, consumption and waste management are unsustainable”, and that “we need two more planets to sustain everyone at US standards of living” placing this early discourse well within Olsen et al.’s (1992) sustainable development paradigm. Subsequently, however, these aspects of sustainability have entirely disappeared from NZBCSD pronouncements. Instead, we now see greater emphasis on “eco-efficiency”, “business viability” based on being “financially sound”, and “balance, but not trade-offs”. Moreover, in the NZBCSD (2005) press release noted earlier, we see reference to “Economic growth will itself provide a platform for investment in society and the environment” – a point we consider more consistent with the traditional paradigm of technological and economic supremacy and consistent with that of the NZBRT.

Several NZBCSD members (e.g., Hubbard Foods, The Warehouse) do refer to “dilemmas” and “challenges” in meeting the conflicting demands of stakeholders (see Livesey, 2002 for similar reporting by Shell). However, like the mother association, they rarely report how these are resolved, or in who’s interests. Most often, and consistent with Prasad & Elmes’ (2005) observations, conflicting demands are ‘balanced’. Indeed, Mighty River Power’s 2001 sustainability report is titled ‘An Intricate Balance’, and ‘balance’ is perpetuated throughout the report. Meridian Energy, likewise, refer to attaining a ‘delicate balance’ in “achieving outcomes where all interests can be met to the best of our ability” (2001 report, p. 12, our emphasis). Similarly, reporting itself can serve “…to provide stakeholders with a balanced view of the company’s role in society…” (Watercare Services, 2001 report, p5). Balancing, then, serves all interests, but is seen as a difficult challenge, and one that is both an essential element in becoming a sustainable company, and an essential objective for leadership in that those doing the balancing are capable and in control (Hajer, 1997, p 33; Livesey, 2002).

Despite references to balancing, however, they need to be judged in perspective, since in the name of balancing business it seems is capable of simultaneously satisfying all demands — ‘there is balance but no trade-offs’. Conflicting factors often appear with little or no comment about the tensions that might exist in achieving them (Hajer, 1997, p.32). Mighty River Power, for example, in citing the UK’s Strategy for Sustainable Development, imply a capacity to simultaneously achieve “social progress which meets the needs of everyone”, “effective protection of the environment”, “prudent use of natural resources”, and “maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment” (2001 report, p. 17). Metaphors and euphemisms serve to conceal, deny or obscure existing relations of domination (Thompson, 1990, p.60), and we see here how ‘balance’ serves to maintain economic growth by promising biospheric conservation at the same time (Prasad & Elmes, 2005, p. 856, our emphasis).20

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19 The powerpoint slides from this forum are available on the NZBCSD website at [www.nzbscd.org.nz](http://www.nzbscd.org.nz).

20 One of the latest manifestations of “balancing” arises in the context of climate change and greenhouse gas mitigation, where organisations seek and claim to balance their greenhouse gas emissions with carbon offsets and credits (For example, see, Smith, 2007).
**Win-Win: The Business Case for Sustainable Development**

Going green makes pragmatic sense because it makes organisations more competitive and enhances the bottom line (Prasad & Elmes, 2005, p. 855). Furthermore, by promoting market-based and economic solutions to ecological problems (Colby, 1991; Hajer, 1997), the NZBCSD strengthens and consolidates a “business case” for sustainable development. Prospective members are told that “doing good leads to doing well” and more specifically, they can:

- Increase financial return for and reduced risk for shareholders
- Attract and retain employees
- Improve customer sales and loyalty
- Grow supplier commitment
- Strengthen community relations
- Contribute to environmental sustainability

Sustainable development is linked with a “win-win” situation throughout member reports. The win-win scenario manifests itself as concern for eco-efficiency (less inputs, less waste, and therefore less costs), competitive advantage (greater market share, greater sales revenues), and better risk management (less regulatory costs, protecting existing sales). Sanford Limited, for example, is “Reducing costs by managing consumption and minimising wastage of resources such as fuel, water and electricity” (200/2001 report, p. 4). Hubbard Foods see other benefits including “…worker morale, profit and increased competitiveness” (2001 report, p. 1 *Environmental Section*), and Urgent Couriers aims to provide “quantifiable, independently verified testament of Urgent Couriers’ achievements to differentiate it in a competitive market place” (2001 report, p. 7). Cutting costs, enhancing reputation, building trust, and creating opportunities are regularly touted as positive outcomes from pursuing sustainability.

As Prasad & Elmes (2005) observe, the real problem with economic utilitarianism is not that it does not produce beneficial outcomes for the activities under consideration. Some activities (e.g., waste and energy reduction) can produce outcomes that are good for the environment and for profits. The proviso, however, is that any such efficiency gains are not swamped by increased size and scale of operations, and in businesses seeking growth, competitive advantage and new opportunities, this is rarely possible. No, the concern of Prasad & Elmes (2005, p.285) is that win-win “creates a discourse of unrealistic expectations that are not always possible if the goal is indeed a serious attempt to reduce the industrial propensity to damage the earth.” Win-win produces legitimacy because it supplies a slogan that focuses on positive outcomes and appears to unify different interests. But it also serves as a euphemism to deflect and distract from the (almost certainly) greater win-lose situations that also exist. Ironically, then, win-win reinforces a continuing business capacity to damage the earth.

Furthermore, the ‘business case’ is not only limited to matters of organisational efficiency, it relates also to a capacity to lobby and influence the regulatory environment. As Spiller explains in a more candid moment:

> …the NZBCSD allows companies to contribute their experiences and thinking to the policy debate on sustainable development… In short, companies gain competitive advantage. They exert greater

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21 These benefits are echoed by other New Zealand organisations keen to promote business involvement with sustainable development. See, for example, the sustainable business network (www.sustainable.org.nz), the New Zealand Centre for Business Ethics and Sustainable Development (www.nzbesd.org.nz), Sustainability Reporting, DeloitteNZ, (www.deloitte.co.nz), and Landcare Research’s Triple Bottom Line Advisory Service, (www.landcareresearch.co.nz).

influence on the framework conditions under which they operate by being represented by a credible advocate... All this helps companies operate more effectively, and gives them an edge on the competition by being aware, ahead of others, and thus able to anticipate the emerging environmental and social trends, which might impact their business. (Spiller, in *Boardroom*, February 2001, p. 2).

**Journeying Towards Sustainable Development**

Advancing “towards sustainable development” is a further objective of the NZBCSD and its membership, and the NZBCSD portrays it project initiatives as the “thin end of the wedge”. Like balancing, the metaphor of ‘a journey’ is one that looms large in many NZBCSD publications, and more generally in much business and political discourse on sustainable development (Milne *et al.*, 2006).

**Figure 5: About Here**

While Prasad & Elmes (2005) do not refer to journeying, Livesey (2002) notes it as a rhetorical device in Shell’s 1998 report, and aspects of the manner in which it is deployed by the NZBCSD do convey a sense of practicality, action, and collaboration. The above diagram also serves to reinforce the power, knowledge and leadership of the NZBCSD and its membership as the following caption illustrates:

As illustrated in this diagram, NZBCSD project participants are at the forefront of leading the way towards sustainable development. Other NZBCSD members are able to leverage this work in fulfilling their commitment to sustainable development. The NZBCSD shares its project reports and insights with all NZ business to assist others to progress (The NZBCSD 2002 Annual Review, p. 5).

The metaphor also serves to signal worthy participants, solidarity, learning, continuous improvement and progress and, as Thompson (1990, p.60) suggests, to legitimate, create and reaffirm a collective identity.

We recognise this is a journey and we are constantly looking to challenge the way we think and operate. We do so further encouraged by the knowledge that we are just part of a wider group of New Zealanders travelling the same road together. (*Industry Guide to Zero Waste*, August 2002, NZBCSD, p.14).

This conference programme shows that the New Zealand sustainable development is coming of age. New Zealand has come a long way on its sustainable development journey, and the early adopters in the business community have an important contribution to make in terms of inspiring others… (Rodger Spiller, quoted in *Today*, September 2002, p.3)

Many of the members’ reports, too, represent sustainability as a journey in three key ways, to depict sustainable development as a process, to explain the transformation of the company and its activities (journey to TBL reporting) and to highlight that progress is occurring. Like efficiency and balancing, the ‘journey’ of sustainable development signals a concern with means rather than ends and reinforces the role of business as essential actors in those processes – i.e., those who can and should produce efficiency (through calculation), balance (through judgements and decisions) and undertake journeys (through courage and adventuring). Mighty River Power, for example, identify that there is no end point for sustainability. “And there is no defined end point – the commitment is to a journey” (2001 report, p. 17). The publication of a “sustainability” report is also often signalled as evidence for this commitment. As Milne *et al.* (2006) observe, the strategic use of the journey metaphor further transforms sustainability into a pragmatic concern for business – that is, sustainability becomes a process of being on a journey.

**Actions not words: Doing Sustainable Development**

Through its projects and slogans, we gain a distinct impression the NZBCSD is about action. Forum participants are regularly told the NZBCSD is “not just about talk”, and the NZBCSD
Chair further reiterated the point when he suggested “…we believe in actions not words.” (Tindall, quoted in the NZ Herald, 31 March, 2003). Yet it is in the “doing” that we detect a transformation from business contributing to sustainable development to one of becoming a “sustainable business”, or more particularly to “sustaining business”.

The council’s projects answer the why and how of sustainable development…business is an indispensable part of the solution to the problems of the world…sustainable development is good for business and business is good for sustainable development (Spiller, NZ Herald, 24 October, 2002).

Over the past few years, questions after my presentations have switched from why have sustainable business practice to ‘how to’. This conference succinctly gives an answer to the ‘how to’ question, by giving practical examples of how to ‘Walk the Talk’. It provides answers to the proactive businessperson on how to implement sustainable business practices in their organisation (Dick Hubbard, quoted in Today, September 2002, p.1)

The “doing” of sustainable development is conveyed through members’ references to measurement, management, and expert control leading to sustainable development. The ‘triple bottom line’ blurs with ‘sustainable development’ throughout the reports and collapses down to concerns over eco-efficiency and stakeholder engagement (see also Livesey, 2002). Companies, through a variety of ways (e.g., scientific data, benchmarking, targets, and performance indicators), communicate a sense of control and progress towards sustainability.

Figure 6: About Here

As Figure 6 illustrates, Sanford Seafoods (2003 report, p.58), by way of eco-efficiency, is able to bridge the apparent paradox between economic growth and environmental protection:

Eco-efficiency measures make it possible to demonstrate progress in environmental terms while at the same time increasing economic growth. The smaller the ratio becomes over time the more it reflects an improvement in the efficiency of the resource’s use.

All of this, of course, is accurate, rational and offers a chain of defensible reasoning, but it is only possible to increase growth and environmental protection because Sandford chooses to side-step the total and absolute impacts (and the changes in them) the company has on the environment. And this is despite its reference to measuring an “Environmental Footprint”. The measurement and management of sustainable development is also often strongly reinforced by the verifiers of these reports. Advice from URS (audit firm) to Meridian Energy, for example, suggests:

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the future: what are the specific objectives that underpin the broad policy statements and how does Meridian Energy measure whether it is achieving these? Once the policy statements and specific underlying objectives are developed, the company can ensure that staff responsibilities and operational procedures are designed to meet these with reference to specific indicators (2001 report, p. 39).

Being responsible to and caring for stakeholders are a further means to articulate corporate concern for and capacities to practice sustainable development (Livesey & Kearins, 2002). Watercare Services, for example, suggest that:

Demonstrating the company’s commitment to sustainable development means recognising its role in the fabric of wider society. It also means the company must build strong relationships with, and create value for, stakeholders (2001 report, p. 35).

A range of stakeholders are identified by the reporters (e.g., employees, local communities, consumers/customers, shareholders, suppliers, the media, government, Tangata whenua - indigenous people of New Zealand, NGOs and schools/educational establishments0, but most
attention is given to employees, local communities, and customers. Publicly-listed companies (e.g., Sanford and The Warehouse) also give considerable attention to shareholders. Reports include the results of surveys and other consultative measures used to “engage” stakeholders, and while the motivations for such engagement are often couched in terms of responsibility and accountability, reporters are sometimes candid enough to report the instrumental benefits of such activities, echoing again, the business case:

…managing risks, gaining stakeholder loyalty, attracting and keeping good team members, accessing the growing ethical fund management industry, gaining new customers, promoting innovation and maintaining broad credibility are all further benefits of the social accountability rendered through Triple Bottom Line reporting. I have no doubt The Warehouse shareholders would be very interested in these benefits and support them fully (2001 report, p. 2, emphasis in original).

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION
In making sense of sustainability, the NZBCSD and its members’, as represented through their public pronouncements, have presented and promoted a middle-way discourse between traditional lobbyists for business-as-usual, and those expousing stronger environmentalist beliefs and values for change in society. The clear and transparent aim of this discourse we contend is to unify themselves and build solidarity among their membership, convey a sense of expertise and leadership, while at the same time attempting to universalise their own discourse and discursively position others as extreme, marginal and idealistic (Prasad & Elmes, 2005). The discourse of the middle ground (Livesey, 2002), however, also signals a new and different approach to environment and development – it is not strongly against either. Indeed, it is for both, and like sustainable development more generally, maintains the appeal of a “third way”. So far, the NZBCSD’s approach to articulating a middle way has, in some respects, been relatively crude. Businesses engagement with sustainability is a pragmatic (and economic) imperative that exists between free-market fundamentalism and the green left. Unless they follow the third way, businesses are missing out, and environmentalists are unrealistic anti-growth preservationists. And the NZBCSD has recently augmented this position by drawing on survey evidence showing that the middle-way is the “middle-majority-way”, with the pursuit of economic growth and environmental protection favoured by 70% of respondents.

Appeal to the centre, of course, is a tried and tested political technique, and consistent with it in this case is the lack of acknowledgement that the middle-way of sustainable development is itself deeply contested terrain (Hopwood et al., 2005). Expressing ideological claims in clear and simple terms allows the NZBCSD to provide meanings, simplify existence, and provide certainty, whereas acknowledging the complexity of the sustainable development debate would serve to muddy the waters, create confusion, and fragment its own discursive position. The simplicity of a trichotomy serves to create a broad category capable of unifying the interests of many, and marginalising the interests of others. Despite compromise being a key tenent to the NZBCSD’s position, however, both Colby’s (1991) and Hopwood et al.’s (2005) mapping of the sustainable development debate illustrate that many protagonists would likely find it difficult to agree, raising the point that “the middle-way” is a subjective, relative and shifting category dependent upon the values, beliefs and knowledge of the taxonomist. For us (see also Hopwood et al., 2005), the NZBCSD’s position is little different from the dominant social paradigm of frontier economics, remaining firmly within the status quo. To their own members and others, however, it is likely to be judged considerably more radical.

As noted in our analysis, economic growth is not abandoned by the NZBCSD and its membership, and neither it is clear that it needs to be modified – sustainable businesses are first and foremost profitable. Neither, however, is abuse of the environment consciously condoned, and through references to eco-efficiency, ecological limits are provided some nodding acknowledgement. In taking up the sustainability agenda, and blending people, planet and profits, Welford (1997)
supposes that industry is hiding something back stage. We suppose, rather like camouflage, however, it is being concealed in full view through a series of subtle uses of images, metaphors and other symbols that permit the contradictions between development and economic growth on the one hand, and nature and the environment on the other, to mythically evaporate.

Through the rhetoric of practicality, through balancing, journeying, the economic imperative of pursuing win-win opportunities, and through other more direct appeals to action not words, business through its corporate reports and other communications is able to convey, and perhaps convincingly, it is “doing sustainability.” These provide the means to appear to synthesise the production-expansion thesis with the ecological limits antithesis. The ability of businesses to “do” sustainability, we suggest, occurs in two main ways – through the action and practices of eco-efficiency and stakeholder relations, and through the symbolism of reporting those practices.

While eco-efficiency adds a new dimension to corporate responsibility, it is largely consistent with much early and traditional management practice, particularly Fordism (see Hukkinen, 2003). As Hajer (1997) observes, ecological modernisation – and we locate the NZBCSD within this approach (see also Hopwood et al, 2005) – is based on many of the same institutional principles traditionally adopted to cope with the environment; namely, efficiency, technological innovation, techno-scientific management, procedural integration and co-ordinated management. In the words of Colby (1991), it seeks to economise ecology. Reporting references to win-win do emphasise eco-efficiency gains, and the economic benefits to be had, but they also distract attention away from the more basic contradictions associated with the nature and scale of development and environment (Prasad & Elmes, 2005). Invariably the efficiency benefits to the environment in many instances are swamped by the scale effects of growth and expansion, and yet these basic contradictions remain concealed in the language of balancing and win-win, or in many cases, as with Sanford Seafoods (Figure 6), they go unacknowledged through silence.

Concern for stakeholders also permits sustainability and sustainable development to be presented in a manner consistent with existing good business practices. As Prasad & Elmes’ (2005, p. 856) observe, influenced strongly by stakeholder theories, collaboration implies current environmental problems are seen as best solved by forging organizational links between different actors within the system. Early reference to stakeholders refers to management balancing a “multiplicity of interests” and responsible enterprises taking into account “employees, suppliers, dealers, local communities and the nation” (Johnson, 1971, p.50). Similarly, Bowman & Haire (1975, p. 54; see also Cyert & March, 1963) see such behaviour as being a signal of “good, sensitive, informed, balanced, modern, negotiating, coping management.” Business concern for stakeholders, then, is far from a new concern, but perhaps what is new that is conveyed by the NZBCSD and its members’ reports is that such behaviours are not apparently about trading off the vested interests of different stakeholders, but balancing them and simultaneously achieving them all. Consequently, this is now not only good for the business but also good for stakeholders and the environment, and in the process constitutes sustainable development.

A focus on eco-efficiency and stakeholder relations permits the NZBCSD to distinguish itself from the NZBRT’s more conventional frontier economic perspective, and that of the PCE’s concern for radically redesigning our economic, political and social institutions. It provides the means to articulate a middle-way: to forge a bridge between economics and ecology within a discourse of sustainable development (Livesey, 2002), and in the process potentially gain political advantage (Levy, 1997). Unless one avidly follows an ideology of maximising returns to owners, it becomes difficult to challenge organisations that advocate and practice corporate social and environmental responsibility. Implicit within a concern for stakeholder relations is at least some nodding acknowledgment of business concerns for fairness, justice and equity. And so the NZBCSD’s reasonable approach of “sustainable development” becomes difficult to challenge.
As a voice articulating action, linked to economism, compromise, and collaboration, the NZBCSD is able to promote its version of sustainability to particularly powerful decision makers. Evidence of such influence can be seen in congratulatory statements from the Prime Minister, the Minister for Energy, the Chairman of the Association of NGOs of Aotearoa, and Christchurch Mayor (NZBCSD Annual Review, 2002), and in that both the Executive Director and Chairman were part of the official NZ delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. National press reports suggest “…the council has extremely close links with Government.” “…The council has brainstormed with key Cabinet Ministers…” and “…the council is increasingly staking its claim as a force to be reckoned with…a newer voice which is increasingly being heard.” Through its systematic organisation and promotion, the NZBCSD’s position in New Zealand may become increasingly difficult to challenge because, to quote New Zealand’s Prime Minister, Helen Clarke, “…with sustainability issues, any steps forward are worthwhile.”

By constructing its own practical version of sustainability, the NZBCSD’s “middle way” discourse has the potential to crowd out and close down (Deetz, 1992; Hajer, 1997) other “middle way” articulations of sustainability, including actions based on other (ecological) principles – principles and practices that might actually be better for conserving the earth (Prasad & Elmes, 2005). And this is perhaps made the more likely by being presented and seen in contrast to that of the older and established, but increasingly unacceptable view of the NZBRT.

The danger and power of the NZBCSD’s discourse, however, lies not in its capacity to articulate a vision and set of practices for environmental salvation, but in its largely silent and continuing reinforcement of economic logic, expert control, and business superiority (Deetz, 1992; Levy, 1997; Livesey, 2002). Doubts must remain as to the extent of the differences between the position of the NZBCSD and the dominant social paradigm, and whether enlightened businesses are capable of meaningfully synthisising production-expansion within ecological limits. Members of the NZBCSD are clear they must remain financially sound and foster the means of their own growth and renewal, and that this is absolutely essential to achieving other social and environmental goals (also see Livesey, 2002). The idea that some organizing is for environmental destruction (Perrow, 1997), that (their) businesses might be unsustainable, and that a sustainable future might be pursued by reducing the scale of (or ceasing) such activities is not acknowledged. The reporting, the focus, the analysis, and the conceptualisation of sustainable development are entirely organization-centric (Shrisvasta, 1994). The organization and its survival remains the dominant objective, not the necessary sustaining of ecology.

CONCLUSIONS
This study has closely examined the texts of New Zealand’s Business Council for Sustainable Development, and those of a sample of annual reports from its members. In the process it provides an analysis of how some New Zealand businesses are responding to the sustainability agenda. In particular, it illustrates how companies, and their organised advocate – the NZBCSD, “talk” about sustainability and sustainable development. Moreover, since this group both sees itself as, and projects the image of, “leading the way” on sustainable development, many may see it as an influential voice. As the NZBCSD’s pragmatism gains ascendency, with it comes a discourse and ideology that paradoxically seems likely to compel us “to adopt a narrow economic language, standard of judgement, and world view in approaching and utilising the earth” (Worster, 1995, p. 418). Indeed, to hear some members of the NZBCSD, the council has already got the answers to the how and why of sustainable development. From our analysis, however, we see them as little different from corporate social and environmental responsibility, and as presenting little more than an illusion of change. For the NZBCSD and its members, sustainability and sustainable development is firmly embedded in ecological modernisation - environmental protection and

23 See, for example, NZ Herald, 24 September, 2002; O’Sullivan, NZ Herald, 30 September, 2002.
resource conservation through means of eco-efficiency and stakeholder engagement. Yet, as McDonough & Braungart (1998) have noted, if that is all that sustainability means, then there is a distinct danger that industrial capitalism will continue to finish off everything quietly, persistently, and completely.

While limited to a study of eight New Zealand organisations and their representative council, we suggest the analysis provided in this paper offers insights beyond developments in New Zealand. As we outlined in the introduction, increasingly one can see developments around the Western world that indicate a portion of the business sector is gearing up with increasingly sophisticated mechanisms, associations and institutions to respond to issues of sustainability and sustainable development. The NZBCSD is but one of a number of satellite business councils on sustainable development with ties to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development – a group that strongly promotes eco-efficiency, corporate social responsibility, and a business case for “sustainable development”. The emergence of the Global Reporting Initiative, with its on-going process of developing “sustainability reporting” guidelines, is also clearly implicated in providing an entity-focused view of sustainable development. And the judges’ report from various sustainability reporting award schemes suggests concern over businesses’ confusion of sustainability with corporate social responsibility (reporting). For companies claiming to be “doing” sustainable development, there are almost certainly changes in their business practices, both behavioural and reporting, and at face value these changes appear for the better. A careful examination of such developments, however, is likely to reveal that McDonough & Braungart’s warnings are for the benefit of all societies, and not just New Zealand’s.
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Table 1: The Emergence of the Sustainable Development Social Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Technological Social Paradigm</th>
<th>New Ecological Social Paradigm</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Social Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technological Beliefs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ecological Beliefs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sustainable Beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology have improved our quality of life</td>
<td>People must learn to live in harmony with nature to survive</td>
<td>The earth is like a spaceship, with limited room and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern technology has increased our freedom and independence</td>
<td>The earth is like a spaceship, with limited room and resources</td>
<td>Modern industrial countries are very seriously disturbing the balance of nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex technologies can be made virtually risk-free through continual improvements</td>
<td>Environmental protection should be given priority over economic growth</td>
<td>Science and technology have improved our quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology will always be able to find solutions to our problems</td>
<td>People should adapt to the environment whenever possible</td>
<td>Modern technology has increased our freedom and independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technological Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ecological Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sustainable Values</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature should be used to produce goods for people</td>
<td>Nature should be preserved for its own sake</td>
<td>Economic stability should be the major goal of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth should be given priority over environmental protection</td>
<td>Environmental protection should be given priority over economic growth</td>
<td>Actions should not be taken unless their long term consequences are clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The environment should be changed to meet people’s needs</td>
<td>People should adapt to the environment whenever possible</td>
<td>National population growth should be limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources should be used primarily for the benefit of the present generation</td>
<td>Natural resources should be saved for the benefit of future generations</td>
<td>Most consumer goods should be expensive but high quality and long lasting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonecological Beliefs

People must learn to control nature in order to survive

The earth is vast, with almost unlimited room and resources

The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial countries

Because we are human, we are not subject to the laws of nature as are other species

Source: adapted from Olsen et al. (1992) *Viewing the World Ecologically*

Table 2: Modes and Strategies of Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Modes</th>
<th>Typical Strategies of Symbolic Construction</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimation</strong></td>
<td>Rationalization</td>
<td>To claim to be legitimate (e.g., just and worthy of support) by way of a chain of reasoning which seeks to defend or justify a set of social relations or institutions and thereby seek to persuade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universalization</td>
<td>To appear open and available to all comers. To represent institutional arrangements that serve the interests of some individuals as serving the interests of all individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrativization</td>
<td>To embed claims in stories which recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissimulation</strong></td>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>To refer to an object or individual with a term customarily used to refer to another, and in process transfer positive or negative connotations. To ‘disguise’ and ‘borrow’ language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euphemization</td>
<td>To describe or re-describe actions, institutions or social relations with terms which elicit positive reactions. Sometimes slight and subtle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trope (e.g., metaphor)</td>
<td>The use of figurative language to create, sustain and reproduce relations of domination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unification</strong></td>
<td>Standardization</td>
<td>A standard framework is promoted to unify symbolic forms. While often serving particular interests, the framework is promoted as shared and acceptable to all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolization of Unity</td>
<td>The unification of individuals and the creation and reaffirmation of collective identity through a variety of symbols – e.g., logos, slogans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fragmentation</strong></td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>The emphasisig of difference, distinctions and divisions between individuals and groups to distance them, weaken and remove the threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expurgation of the other</td>
<td>To demonize the other. The creation and labelling of extremes. The construction of a harmful enemy to be collectively resisted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relification</strong></td>
<td>Naturalization</td>
<td>To treat affairs or events that are socially and historically constituted as if they were natural or inevitable, e.g., the gendered division of labour as genetically determined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eternalization</td>
<td>The portrayal of affairs or events as having no history, being permanent, and unchanged. With no sense of origin, their ending becomes unimaginable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nominalization/passivization</td>
<td>The turning of descriptions of actions and actors into nouns. Rendering verbs into passive form. To delete actions and agency and represent processes as things or events which occur in the absence of a subject.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Thompson (1990, p. 60).
Figure 1: The Contested Middle Ground of Sustainable Development

Figure 2: Mapping the Sustainable Development Debate

Source: adapted from Colby (1991)

Source: adapted from Hopwood et al. (2005)
Figure 3: The NZBCSD’s All Inclusive Vision for Sustainable Development?

Source: NZBCSD website, www.nzbcsd.org.nz

Figure 4: Early References to a Holistic Conception of Sustainability

Source: Leadership Forum, NZBCSD Website
Figure 5: The NZBCSD Leading the Way Towards Sustainable Development

NZBCSD Project Structure

All NZ Business

Towards Sustainable Development

NZBCSD Project Participants


Figure 6: Eco-efficiency Promises Environmental Protection and Economic Growth

Environmental Footprint

Sanford recognises its obligations and responsibilities to conduct our operations in a manner that protects the environment and conserves natural resources. The Company is committed to continually improving its environmental performance, whilst requiring that environmental benefit is an essential factor in determining methods for improvement. We measure our environmental performance as a ratio of the resource consumed (electricity, diesel, coal, etc) over the amount of product produced (seafood product in kilograms). This is called the eco-efficiency of the resource. Eco-efficiency measures make it possible to demonstrate progress in environmental terms while at the same time increasing economic growth. The smaller the ratio becomes over time the more it reflects an improvement in the efficiency of the resource’s use.