

## **The rhetoric of leadership: the competition toward environmental friendliness**

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### **Abstract**

As taking environmental consideration may be considered to be a bizarre activity for organization actors, efforts to present environmental activities as business-as-usual emerge. A dominating rhetoric used by environmental advocates is the metaphor of competition. Environmental adaptation is a race; rewards for the winners include more innovative product development, barriers of market entry, lean resource use, committed collaborators, and a better corporate image. Losers are those who will not be able to reap all the benefits, and hence the race is on.

In this paper I analyze how a business-driven environmental ideology is forwarded to organization actors in a transnational manufacturing corporation. The paper explores how the three discourses Nature, Market and Management are used by managers to convey the ideology. A fundamental concept within the three discourses is that of competition, which works as the prime argument for setting the ideology to work.

### **The environment is becoming part of management practice**

In the 1960s, environmental issues were of little concern to most business organizations. In the 1990s, the environment is an important judgment in managers' decisions. The number of environmental regulations are increasing and environmental organizations that did not exist in the 1960s now have large numbers of members. Many European countries have green parties with parliament representation, and the general public claims to be increasingly interested in environmental issues (Bennulf, 1994). Business magazines have special issues on the environment, 'environmental manager' is an established profession and corporate environmental management is a subject at an increasing number of universities. Managers are exposed to environmental issues more frequently than earlier, and experience pressure to become more environmentally considerate. The influence from environmental pressure groups is even expected to increase in the future (Belz & Strannegård, 1997). Environmental issues are hence of concern to business managers, and "the environment" is taken into account in an increasing number of business decisions.

Even though business organizations consider environmental issues to be increasingly important, media tells us that the state of the world is continuously deteriorating, and companies are accused of being heavily responsible for this development. Corporate managers to a certain extent accept such charges; they consider the organizations they represent to play a role in this context (Belz & Strannegård, 1997). Then how come companies do not take more environmental responsibility than they do? Even though environmental

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consideration has started to become a part of management practice, pressure groups are not satisfied with the environmental responsibility that business organizations take. There is even an agreement among corporate leaders that comprehensive measures are needed, but such activities are not carried out to the extent that they could.

One could expect that the influence of ecological reason, i.e. the agreement among decision-makers that action has to be taken in order to come to grips with environmental problems, would mitigate environmental destruction. However, as Eder (1988/1996) points out, this does not happen.

An explanation for the gap between ecological reason and societal inertia may be the relationship between adaptiveness and efficiency in organizations. Adaptiveness implies an organization's long-term ability to survive while efficiency involves short-term survival and incremental improvements of existing routines (March, 1994). These demands may be contradictory in the sense that they compete for resources and shift attention away from one another. Welford (1997) sees the passivity regarding injustices in the world as a result of selfishness. We do not consider it to be our responsibility to handle the problems of the world or we may not be deeply affected by them as they are remote from our everyday lives. According to Eder (1988/1996), the preachers of ecological reason put the blame on economic interests, which catch only parts of the phenomenon. Non-economic interests also resist ecological reason. For instance, resistances to change that has nothing to do with economic interests may counteract ecological reason.

Business organizations today are putting more resources into environmental responsibility than ever before, while pressure groups are demanding changes. One could hence suppose that business organizations would turn environmentally considerate in a remarkable speed. This is however not happening. Before one can speculate further about why business organizations are not undertaking more activities in the environmental area, it is necessary to ask the question of why environmental activities are undertaken at all. It seems to be crucial to understand why environmental considerations all of a sudden are finding their way into corporate decisions if one is to understand the relationship between organizations and the natural environment.

The perception that environmental and business objectives are intertwined in the 1990s seems to be increasingly frequent. If this is the case, environmental consideration and business objectives are complementary and are not seen in isolation. To take environmental consideration is according to proponents of the view a prerequisite for business, and all environmental change efforts involve business considerations. This view may be driven by the increasing pressures on business organizations. Legislation is getting stricter, environmental organizations pressure, and customers demand more environmentally friendly products. Environmentally friendly products sometimes sell better than others, and environmental concern may be a source for potential differentiation and increased revenues. Also, environmental initiatives, which waste and energy reductions may be considered to be, at times lower costs.

The implication of this is that the perception leads to a route toward coming to grips with some of the world's environmental problems. When business organizations perceive traditional business and environmental objectives to be inseparable, environmental problems will be mitigated (IVA, 1994; Sjöberg, 1997).

The Swedish multinational corporation Multicorp in the mid-90s proclaimed that business and environmental issues are connected and need to be treated as one. In the next section, I will show the dominating perceptions of how environmental issues “should” be handled in the organization. The data stems from thirteen months of participant observation of the corporation’s environmental efforts.

## **Environmental perceptions in Multicorp**

### *Following*

Employees at Multicorp are aware that environmental issues may have implications on day-to-day business. Environmental issues are therefore never dismissed as non-important. However, perceptions regarding the extent to which environmental issues are important vary.

The perception, *following* may be summarized as follows: It is possible that there will be legislative demands in many areas sooner or later. If environmental initiatives are taken at an early stage, it is possible to pinpoint areas of potential problems. This implies that the organization will be in a good position once legislation comes, and perhaps a number of those problems has already been solved. If one starts to work early, it is possible to avoid “panic-solutions” that may be very costly. It is better to work systematically towards finding environmental solutions, and be prepared when legislation strikes.:

The knowledge of environmental issues is very recent, and if you are early in implementing environmentally friendly solutions, the risk is that you have to do it all over again. New findings appear all the time, and if you are too early it might be very costly. But on the other hand, if you never start, you’re always going to be last, and being last costs you too (marketing manager).

Proponents of this view do not consider it feasible to move ahead too quickly. The reason for this is that they consider the environmental field to be non-mature. Constantly, new solutions are developing, and if one implements the latest development, there is a great risk that one has to start all over again when new findings appear. Yet, if the organization never begins, it will lag behind and that is risky as one is exposed to authorities and environmental organizations. Hence, the solution is to implement environmental solutions when they are tested, work systematically and try not to lag behind. The solution is thus not to be leading and not to be last, but to keep up. There are also niches in the market that demand environmentally friendly products. The niches are however just niches, and not yet mass-markets. As such they should not be foreseen, but excessive efforts should not be put into exploiting them either. Multicorp is no niche-manufacturer, and when niches are identified, they have to undergo assessments regarding the extent to which they are profitable.

The proponents of the *following* view have what they call a pragmatic view of environmental activities. They are all for an environmental adaptation of products and processes, but it can not be a goal in itself. Investments have to be justifiable; customers have to be willing to pay for environmental features, or cost reductions have to be obtained. Hence, environmental investments have to be viewed as any other investments, or the stock market will respond negatively.

## ***Leading***

The perception *leading*, focuses on the benefits of environmental activities that go beyond legal requirements. An efficient use of resources will lower costs, and environmentally friendly products will generate increased revenues. The reason behind the conviction is the belief that customers appreciate products that are energy-, water-, or detergent-efficient. Hence, an environmentally friendly product usually has an economic selling argument in addition. The view of politicians is very different from the *following* perception: trying to catch up with politicians is an uneconomical way of running a company. Politicians will force investments, and trying to catch up with government regulations is considered to be an unwise strategy. The *leading* proponents believe that regulatory demands will increase dramatically in the environmental field, and say that they are absolutely sure of it. Also, they consider market pressures to be strong, and that it is necessary to meet market demands early as pressure from the market will be increasingly fierce.

The proponents of the *leading* view state that it is necessary to undertake environmental activities, otherwise the world will collapse:

“We have to do it, or this world will go down the drain. We in industry really have to take our responsibility. I mean look at some of the countries in Eastern Europe. You can hardly breathe there. You keep your breath as long as you can. I mean we really have to do something” (financial manager)

“All our activities must be integrated in eco-cycles and harmonized with what nature can tolerate” (member of environmental staff unit)

“I want to be able to look my children in the eyes when I tell them what we do when it comes to environmental questions. We have to take environmental consideration or we will jeopardize future generations” (CEO)

Proponents of *leading* at times use moral arguments, and state that environmental consideration is some thing that has to be done, whether people want to or not. It is as if Multicorp has no choice: nature demands environmental consideration, and therefore mandatory concepts like “have to” and “must” are used.

The proponents of *leading* state that different operations of course have different environmental impact. Yet, they have a moral obligation to undertake environmental activities, but they also find it necessary because of business reasons. Pressure to become more environmental considerate comes from various groups in society, and hence there is no alternative that environmental measures have to undertaken. The measures have to be undertaken quickly in order for the organization to be prepared; otherwise both the natural environment and Multicorp’s long-term survival will be jeopardized.

## ***Integrating the environment into business decisions***

In order for environmental issues to be taken seriously, there is a conviction that environmental consideration must be integrated into daily work. Environmental experts, a staff unit and coordinators can only be supportive, but as long as environmental considerations stay outside daily decisions, no change will occur.

The staff unit was established as a result of the CEO's initiative, and the reason behind that decision was only to get a focus on environmental issues. The environmental experts' (staff unit and coordinators) resources are by people in the product-lines considered to be very small seen in relation to the size of the group. Hence, one should not expect the experts to solve problems. Their role is to get the people in operations to work with the issues. One can only expect them to keep a continuously heavy pressure on the product-lines.

The environmental experts see integration of environmental issues as their main task. For example, when customers ask for environmental information, or demand environmental questionnaires to be filled out, coordinators urge the marketing department to answer the questions themselves. A risk put forward by environmental experts as well as non-experts is that of creating an environmental "organization" on top of operations. This is manifested in the environmental director's utterances stating that the objective of the environmental staff and coordinators is to divest themselves. "The day environmental issues are fully integrated in business decisions, experts are no longer needed", he put it.

According to many organization actors, environmental activities should not be driven radically. If the environmental experts were to be seen as 'eco-fundamentalists' in their work, their ideas would not be met with sympathy. The integration of environmental issues into the business strategy had to be undertaken stepwise. Small incremental steps were the key to success. It was considered to be better to start with areas where environmental friendliness could increase sales. Many of Multicorp's products have a close relationship between economic and environmental features. For instance, to reduce energy consumption, water usage, and detergent usage is both economic and is better for the environment. If the environmental experts focused on the area where economic and environmental product features were interlinked, they would be able to show quick results. An employee in a marketing department stated that products that consume less energy, water and detergent are in the interest of customers, even if they do not care the least about the environment.

"Starting where it was easy", i.e. focusing on products that consumed energy, water and detergent was an organizational perception regarding how environmental activities should be carried out. Once results were shown in these products, the environmental experts could move on to other products where the benefits did not have such an apparent economic connection. However, the environmental experts should not miss the chance that the Multicorp products in many instances had the unique possibility of being marketed both as economic and "smart", while environmentally sound.

### *Environment proxies' and non-proxies' view of the environment*

The environment proxies have a conception of what the "others'", i.e. the non-proxies, view of the world looks like. Douglas (1987) states that rational arguments have no effect on when two parts have different standpoints, as institutions control how we classify our experiences of the world. Douglas criticizes theories based on rational choice assumptions as in most situations, choices are non-existent as a result of social coercion. Instead of individuals making choices, institutions make choices. Coercion is an example when a "thought world" creates patterns of social interaction. A "thought world" emerges when a group of individuals, without taking an active decision, come to share the same perceptions of certain phenomena.

Being part of the same thought world, according to Douglas, enables individuals to take collective action

Following Douglas (1987), I see environment proxies and non-proxies to reside in two different thought worlds. As I will show in the following, proxies consider the non-proxies to have a view of the environment that is very different from the proxies'. They, according to the proxies, consider environmental issues to be important occasionally. It may be necessary to come to grips with emissions in production and make products more energy-efficient. It is important to comply with legislation, manage environmental organizations, and sometimes exploit environmentally aware customer segments.

The proxies consider themselves to have a more sophisticated, far-reaching and "correct" view of environmental issues. They consider their knowledge level to be higher, and they consider it necessary that the non-proxies' view reach the same level of sophistication. The non-proxies' are routinely considered to consider environmental issues to *sometimes* be important; and to consider environment issues to be limited to factory-issues and material contents in products. Proxies, on the other hand, consider environmental issues to be strategically important. They consider a holistic view, life-cycle perspectives, and integration of environmental issues into business consideration to be more correct. As the thought worlds of the proxies do not correspond to those of the non-proxies, the gap must be filled. The proxies' objective is to make the two different thought worlds merge into one; i.e. the proxies strive to make their thought world become dominating. This could be viewed as control carried out by ideologically shaping the thought worlds of the non-proxies. The environmental world-view of the proxies is thus an organizational ideology that they forward onto the non-proxies.

In Kunda's (1992) culture study of a high-tech corporation, he found organizational ideology, which he defined as "an authoritative system of meaning" (p. 52), forwarded and supported by three different authorities. The first was *managerial authority*, e.g. senior manager's views of the company philosophy. The second was *expert authority*, implying support from internal experts on corporate culture. The third was *objective authority*, which in Kunda's study was a selection of statements produced by external observers of the corporation, e.g. press clippings, consultants and academics.

In Multicorp, these three authoritative voices are at hand. Just like in Kunda's high-tech company, organization actors in Multicorp use different emphases, arguments and authoritative support when they try to convey their ideology. In the next section, I will point at some of the dominating arguments used to convey the ideology.

### **Within the staff unit: keeping the faith**

Since the formation of the staff unit, the members have talked about the *believers*. They are considered to be quite few: the members of the staff, the CEO, some of the coordinators and a handful of actors at different positions in the organization. *Believing* alludes to the connection between environmental and business objectives. The members of the staff unit consider environmental questions to have a great potential when it comes to changing the way things are carried out in the organization. For example, an environmental strategy can create

increases in sales in certain customer groups, it can lower costs, it can make actors in the line think more long-term, and it can increase share-holder value.

The members of the staff unit see contradictions in the environmental and business objectives in day-to-day business, but the objective of turning all activities environmentally friendly is long-term considered to be the right thing to do.

"We run into contradictions all the time. Being environmentally friendly sometimes costs a lot, and it's hard to justify that cost to managers in the product lines. But long-term it's a matter of believing. Some investments will cost more, but if we are consistent in what we do we will create a better corporate image, we will be credible, and we might even get a headstart in some markets where legislation and market pressure is strong. In the long run, I really think it's the right thing to do."  
(member of environmental staff unit)

The members of the staff unit state that they believe in environmental issues, and their task is to change others, to make them believe too. It is not an easy task as actors in different parts of the organization at times come up with counter-arguments to the environmental strategy. These actors point at contradictions in the short-term, such as low market demand, that the products are not environmentally friendly enough to be credible, etc. The members of the staff unit are aware of the contradictions, but try to convey the message of strategic direction and long-term business objectives.

The members of the staff unit see believing as a crucial part of implementing the environmental strategy, and if organization members become believers, environmental issues will be managed in a good way. Believers will take the right decisions. According to the staff unit, an absolute necessity in order to turn others into believers is that they themselves see environmental issues the same way. Shared meanings and conceptions of the world may be seen as prerequisites for collective action (Smircich, 1983). Individuals need to relate to each other and the world around them similarly in order to undertake organized activities (Weick, 1979). Thus, that the members of the staff unit keep a similar view of the world is indispensable for implementing the environmental strategy. This is also seen in the way that the unit tries to keep an internally consistent picture of how environmental issues relate to other organizational activities. Within the staff unit, there was a discussion that was in the true sense of the term: ongoing. There were daily discussions regarding how important environmental issues are, how they will come to impact the industrial systems in the future, why it was necessary to undertake certain activities, and what these activities should be. Continuously, there was a discussion of how environmental and business objectives relate to each other, if any contradictions exist, and the necessity to overcome them. The following extract is from a taped discussion within the staff unit. All three participants are members of the unit, and the subject under discussion is how the environmental strategy shall be communicated:

A: While isn't the best way then to draw a straight connection to profit-thinking?

B: But environment and profit can be contradictory. This is where the business thinking comes in, shareholder value and all that, to see this as an integrated way of making money and serve customers and other stakeholders.

C: But this thing about either-or...

A: We have to de-dramatize that.

C: Yes right, I don't think there are so god damn many contradictions. The problem is that you say that it is either-or.

A: Yes.

C: I mean everything is always either or. We always live with compromises, and try to optimize from different perspectives at the same time, that is the very essence of living.

B: Sure.

C: You don't have one choice and you won't be happy with one choice... You have a myriad of choices and this is the way it is here too.

A: Yeah, calmly and concretely you see... OK that is the way it is supposed to be, but if you meanwhile are able to describe it undramatically...that within the framework of our business we shall find the smart ways to use as little resources as possible, to save what we can, to...come up with new technological innovations that give us better positions to make the environment better for all of us. That one communicates more in small steps, it's all the time this to prioritize...

C: ...And to get around this "either-or". This is something we have to have with us in everything we do. If the restriction is that we can't spend any money on it, I mean we are still doing things. Either we do this consciously or we do it unconsciously. Either we do it with conviction or we do it without conviction, and we have to have our conviction along and do as much as possible. That is the message we have to convey.

The extract above is an example of discussions regarding how to formulate arguments: to "de-dramatize" contradictions between environmental issues and profit, to prioritize, etc. In this section, my interest is however focused on the arguments of the staff unit internally; and the extract above may be seen as a process of identity construction within the staff unit.

B states that there could be contradictions between environment and profits, which C quickly replies to. If this is seen in terms of identity, I interpret it as follows: B questions the business-environment strategy as he sees the two as potentially contradictory. C wards off the questioning of the strategy by arguing for the necessity of believing; to have the conviction along. C sees contradictions arise when the problem is talked about. The problem appears as it is spoken of, and ambiguities, insecurities and contradictions are part of private as well as organizational life. C's suggestion is to just cope with the contradictions instead of talking about them; to manage them quietly. C's statement is an argument for belief; there are contradictions, they are inevitable ingredients of life, but believing in the rightness of a business-driven environmental strategy simplifies the problems of contradictions. A is supporting C; the contradictions between environmental issues and profits have to be seen as undramatic. The second the relationship is considered to be problematic (dramatic), the staff unit's worldview is jeopardized. Even though "people with the right view" (see Chapter 4) have been recruited to minimize the risks of losing faith, the staff unit is nevertheless in a continuous struggle to keep the belief.

During the first few months after the formation of the staff unit, the presentation material of their own role was continuously altered: the models got increasingly complicated, and covered more aspects as time went by. Some nine months after the establishment of the unit, the environmental director showed a picture to the rest of the staff unit. It illustrated how Multicorp' business processes and the staff units activities were interlinked. His comment to the picture was:

"This is what we do. Everything...yes everything we do fit into this picture. It's all a matter of creating shareholder value" (Environmental Director).

The words suggest that the work task is clear-cut and well-defined. Yet, the members of the staff unit are at this time still talking about the unit's role and function. A picture that gives answers to what the staff unit is doing seems to be helpful to the members of the unit; it reduces uncertainty as regards what the job is about. This interpretation is in line with Watson's (1994) suggestion that managers constantly try to shape their worlds and identities. A constant creation of meaning is carried out, as managers ask themselves what the meaning of their job is.

The identity struggles can within the staff unit also be seen through the development of an internal language within the unit. The language gets increasingly abbreviated, complicated and abstract over time, and it also gets harder for outsiders to fully become part of their conversations. The development of the language might be explained by that the unit is small and that the members understand each other without expressing full sentences. The staff unit is becoming a well-defined entity within Multicorp, and they interact with associations such as the "World Business Council for Sustainable Development" and "Swedish Environmental Managers". These associations use certain types of expressions that make sense only to the insiders (e.g. "eco-efficiency" and "corporate sustainability"). In addition to such concepts, the members of the staff unit use their own concepts. For instance, a presentation slide that six months earlier was called "the relationship between environmental activities and shareholder value", was later referred to as "the lobster" as the graphical shape of the picture looked like such. Thus, a more complicated and abstract language seems to develop within the staff unit.

A possible explanation to why the language becomes abstract and fragmented is that the staff unit works closely together and an internal jargon makes communication quick and effective, as the members know what the others are talking about by their use of key words. This makes the staff unit as a team more welded together; but it also makes entrances for newcomers hard. While the internal modes of communication become effective, actors outside the staff unit may become increasingly distanced.

The abstractification of the language could also be interpreted as a way to create a feeling that the job is important and qualified and that the members of the staff cannot easily be replaced. Statements regarding the importance of the staff unit are frequent: the unit has real impact on the corporation's strategy if it does a good job. The members of the unit consider it absolutely crucial to understand (and believe) the intrinsic ways that environmental and business issues relate to each other.

The members of the staff unit spend enormous amounts on formulating texts. The article in the internal magazine, the environmental annual report and similar texts were subject to seemingly never ending reviews. The texts had to be absolutely perfect, and convey the absolute correct message. Even though the members of the staff unit were mostly engineers, their work at times more resembled that of journalists or literary critics.

In the cafeteria, in the staff unit's office, and at some other places in the office buildings there was a poster that manifested Multicorp environmental strategy. It was artistically made and had photographs of National Geographic character. The text read:

"Multicorp shall lead environmental development. Even for business reasons"

One of the members of the unit was unsatisfied with the formulation of the text. He said that it conveyed not a wrong, but an incomplete message. "Even" should be replaced with "Also" in his opinion. "Also" illustrated the business-driven environmental strategy much better; it made the thought of integration clearer he considered.

The processing, altering and turning of words and wordings is a quest for the perfect formulation just as it is part of the identity process described in the previous chapter. But there appears to be a back side to the search for perfection: that of alienation. The staff unit's role is to integrate the environmental issues, but their use of language risks to cause an opposite effect:

Maybe the wording is too perfect. Every word is weighed on a golden scale so they seem to lose meaning. This is what I think regarding the annual environmental report...at some point we have to take a stand, it is better to say that this is the way it is, what we believe in (member of the environmental staff unit).

In the annual report, every statement needed back-up from "facts" regarding the activities that had been undertaken. It thus contained information about reductions in emission levels specified according to substance. If the wording is too perfect, it becomes dry and loses "soul" as the same staff member put it. If the language use is to depict everything that the staff unit is doing and be correct it becomes complicated, specialized and distances the environmental staff unit from the line. Such language use might be picked up by other environment proxies, and develop into a deepening cliff between specialists and non-specialists. This is something that the staff unit is aware of and keep struggling with. The environmental director was after a presentation to the line told by one of the members of the staff unit to be restrictive in his usage of words that they take for granted within the staff unit: eco-efficiency, green range, fleet average etc. The struggle not to become alienated from the non-proxies is continuously ongoing but it is seemingly hard to keep the same language use. To a certain extent, the green language becomes a "dialect" of its own: complicated, specialized, abstract and fragmented. Some of the concepts that are used are meaningful only to those initiated in environmental management "lingo". Hence, specialists, through their language use thereby alienate themselves from the non-specialists that they try to convey their ideas to.

### *Staff to coordinators: the missionary approach*

The environmental staff unit has established the "environmental coordinator network". Each product line has an environmental coordinator who is to handle environmental issues specific for the product line. Some months after the staff unit was formed, a conference with environmental coordinators was held. Members of the staff unit said that they wanted the conference to be something big, a symbolic action that was going to show that something new was about to start. The objective of the conference was also to present what the role of the staff unit was, and discuss how the "greening of Multicorp was to be organized". The unit wanted to manifest the importance of the conference; the invitations stated that it was of utmost importance that the coordinators attended, and the CEO was invited to hold an hour-

long presentation. The reason that the staff unit wanted the CEO to give a speech at the conference was that it would show the importance of the environmental issues. The very fact that the CEO attended the conference was an example of managerial authority (Kunda, 1992), and the contents of his speech manifested this even more:

"I think that environmental concern and the change that environmental awareness and concern among all stakeholders will bring about the greatest fundamental strategic change in all of the modern industrial society. It will be the greatest fundamental strategic change" (CEO).

The main objective of the conference was to define the role of the coordinator network. Indicators such as the importance of the conference, the invitation of the CEO, and the contents of the speeches, conveyed the message that environmental issues are of top management dignity. The message that environmental issues are related to business objectives was put forward, and the job as a coordinator will not necessarily create environmental specialists, but can be a way to work with general strategies. The environmental director took himself as an example. He moved from being a product-line manager to be the head of the staff unit; from general management into a staff unit. He communicates this to the coordinators:

"Environmental issues are intertwined with business objectives. I have been in general management and I've seen what strategic potential green strategies can have. I would never have taken this job if it was only about environmental issues. It's just as much about business, and it's a way to work with general strategies" (environmental director).

The message conveyed is that environmental issues are top priorities, and that these issues contain something more. Working with environmental issues is not only about the environment, but also about business. The environmental work tasks will not pigeon-hole people into becoming environmental specialists, but can also offer opportunities to work with general strategies. A main argument that the staff unit uses in the staff-coordinator forum is that environmental consideration is one of the values in the CEOs "Vision and Values". It is key to the organization's general strategy, and therefore environmental issues are far from being peripheral support activities. In summary, the environment is an important top management issue, and environmental initiatives are sanctioned by top management.

Within the staff unit, the issue of keeping faith is a central activity. In the staff-coordinator forum, faith is again central, but now as something that has to be spread. In front of the coordinators, the staff unit shows no doubts. Believing is what is necessary, and the word is to be spread. A metaphor that would seemingly be useful would be that of missionaries, and this is the one literally used by the staff unit; it's a "metaphor-of-the field" (Manning, 1979). At the coordinator conference, the staff unit had a consultant make a presentation of what the role of the missionaries should be. The slide central to the presentation is depicted in Fig. 1.

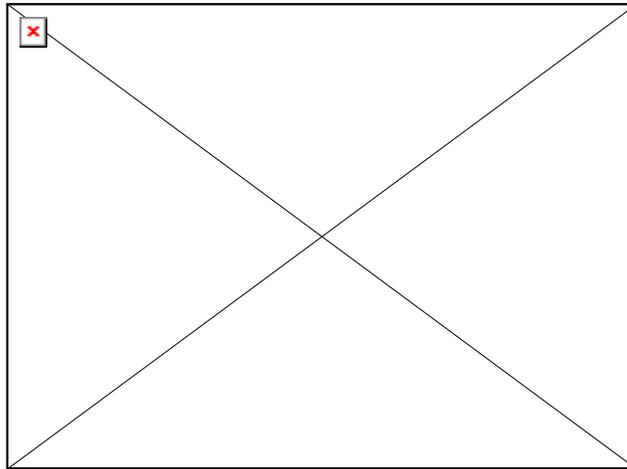


Fig 1. Slide of "The Missionary Approach"

The staff unit continuously used many of the concepts depicted in "The Missionary Approach", which is an overruling metaphor in the staff-coordinator forum. Metaphors are, as Morgan (1980) states, ways to better understand organizations and organizational actors, and analyzing the metaphors-of-the-field is a cutoff to understanding organizational phenomena. "Metaphors serve a very important function in the spreading of new ideologies, by fitting new meanings into imagination-stimulating messages. Their role is thus to reduce the uncertainty involved in any encounter with the new; they refer to something more familiar than the metaphor. They can be regarded as short-cuts in an explanation, since they try to evoke a single image encompassing the entire range of meanings embedded in the object. And their decorative characteristics satisfy the need for color and a touch of life in an otherwise sombre organizational reality" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1993, p.22). The environmental strategy is a new ideology, which, as most coordinators are new on the job, needs to be filled with meaning; a meaning that the staff unit chooses to give it. Shotter (1993) put it: "...the good manager must give a sharable linguistic formulation to already shared feelings, arising out of shared circumstances - and that is perhaps best done through the use of metaphors rather than by reference to any already existing theories" (p. xx).

The Missionary Approach is used by the staff unit to explain how the coordinators should view their job. Coordinators are expected to know how a missionary works, and it is the wish of the staff unit that the coordinators shall carry out their jobs as such. Hence, the connotations that the coordinators have to missionaries shall be transferred to their job at Multicorp.

The act of telling the coordinators to have a missionary approach, is a missionary activity in itself. Hence, the staff unit make themselves models for how the coordinators shall organize their work. The suggestion is to be missionaries, just as the staff unit is engaged in missionary work when conveying the message. The image is strong: the staff unit is verbally conveying the message, while simultaneously being an example of it. Hence, the idea of a missionary approach is put forward as a suggestion of how to act toward the line, while it is an exhortation to the coordinators to become missionaries.

"Belief" is the first point in the missionary approach. Belief alludes to the rightness of the environmental strategy in itself: that environmental consideration is profitable. Even

though the coordinators may have doubts, they have to believe it. Just as within the staff, keeping the belief is problematic, but is key to turning the coordinators into proxies. All coordinators are not devoted proxies, and there is always the risk that the devoted lose their faith.

The skeptics and those unaware of environmental issues need to be influenced and convinced to believe too. That the coordinators shall “do unto others...” was clarified to imply that they should try to make others believers, just as the coordinators have to be believers themselves.

To be visionary implies to speak about future gains. Just like scenario planning, it is a way to overcome the time gap. In the future, environmental issues will be important, even if they seem to be unimportant at present. No matter the width of the time gap, the suggestion from the staff unit is to take measures where financial implications are likely to occur in the short term.

Building local networks is an explicit suggestion to engender environment proxies within the own product line; and to do so in the coordinator-staff forum. Then, when it comes to ideological support the recommendation is to seek it from “above”. This implies the network and the staff unit: the environmental specialists who hopefully are devoted proxies. The staff unit has no formal power over the coordinators, so the term “above” has got nothing to do with formal loci of control. However, as it is the staff unit who stands for the ideological wordsmithing; in times of (identity) crisis, this is where to turn.

Although the staff unit has no formal power over the coordinators, arguments are forwarded as if there was such a relationship. The environmental director uses the words *mandatory* and *must*. For instance, the environmental director at the conference with the coordinators stated:

“Now, what is mandatory in all the product lines is to align to Group Environmental Strategy and integrate in product line business strategy plan, this is starting from 1996. The implementation of measures is also mandatory. I’m talking about the Green Range and the Fleet Average” (environmental director)

Strictly, the environmental director does not have the formal power to state that anything is mandatory. But he has support from the Vision and Values statement, and the CEO’s official statement:

“You all know that Leif has now clearly said that the environmental strategy should be integrated in general business. Therefore the integration into PL business strategy is a must.” (environmental director)

Through the CEO support, the staff unit can forward environmental issues as absolutely necessities. There is no room for negotiation regarding the importance of undertaking initiatives, as it is a direct order from the very top. All the staff unit is doing is executing the CEO’s command. The use of *mandatory*, *non-negotiable* and *must* is what rhetoricians like Aristotle and Cicero call creating ethos. But the use of *must* goes beyond a rhetorical trope. The staff unit in the staff-coordinator forum hints at the backup from top management (in the

form of the CEO). In addition, the unit puts forward musts from the environment: nature itself:

"All our activities must be integrated in eco-cycles & harmonized with what nature can tolerate"  
(text on staff unit's presentation slide)

Such a *must* stands unquestioned. The integration of activities is a demand from both the CEO and nature itself. Thus, to become an environment proxy appears to be clearly inevitable, not only if one wants to obey the laws of nature and if one wants to stay in Multicorp.

### *Staff to line: it's a race!*

The staff unit has got formal power over neither the coordinators nor the line. Yet their mission is to induce major changes. What they do have is a statement in the CEO's "Vision and Values" document stating that the environment is a key corporate value, and a widespread perception that the CEO considers environmental issues to be vastly important. But they have no formal power to support their work which is nevertheless managerial. Also, they have expert authority (Kunda, 1992), as their full-time job is to handle environmental issues.

Shotter (1993) states that the task of a manager is: "...not one of choosing but of generating, of generating a clear and adequate formulation of what the problem situation 'is'..." (p xx). The members of the environmental staff unit consider it crucial to create a coherent picture of the importance of environmental issues. The members of the staff unit want to match the view of the world (as regards the environmental situation) of the actors in the operating line with the view of their own. A common, unified picture is by the staff unit considered to be fundamental for their work.

"It is necessary that the people out in the product lines view the environmental situation about the same way as we do. We (the staff unit and the product line, my comment) have to be able to speak the same language, which means that we have to tell them what we know, and then they can shape their own picture" (member of environmental staff).

A unified picture is thus the same thing as the staff unit's picture. Yet it is not a question of imposing a view of the world that is exactly the same as the staff unit's. Rather, it's a matter of "about" the same picture. The staff unit sees this as telling the line as much as they can about what the environmental situation is like, and packaging it in such a way that it seems reasonable. The staff unit has a preconception of the line; namely that it is only to a limited extent skeptical. The problem is that it is uninformed about the environmental situation. What needs to be done is to educate the line, tell them what the world looks like. It is in this context that the staff unit considers itself to be helpful. They do not have the resources to help out in the day-to-day work on environmental issues, but to influence the product-lines that environmental issues are important. Daily issues is the work of line coordinators and non-specialist environment proxies. Thus, the unit sees its role to present a view of the world that

make the product line managers feel that environmental activities are inevitable to undertake, and that the strategy to be *leading* is the one right way to go. The members of the staff unit say that, as time is a limited resource, they want to avoid getting into conflict about the “correctness” of the picture that they present.

It is easier to create a shared understanding if the subject of a conversation is on an abstract level. For example, in negotiations, principal agreements are reached before concrete details are discussed (Strauss, 1978). As soon as discussions become more concrete, detailed, and “close” (i.e. having direct impact or connection) to the individual, consensus is harder to reach. In the staff-line forum, the staff unit is restrictive in getting to detailed when confronting actors in the line as there are some paradoxes to business objectives in their message. In many occasions, when the relationship between environmental and business objectives are contradictory, the members of the staff unit may ward off the questions by stating that a more general level is needed. An argument is that it is always possible to find individual examples, but on the whole, it is better to stick with the strategy. The following conversation fragment exemplifies how the staff unit treats questions that are problematic. Around 15 employees from Floor Care are gathered at an environmental seminar. B is a marketing manager, and A is a member of the environmental staff unit. A had just been presenting slides of increasing environmental awareness among customers in Europe, planned legislation and the agendas of various environmental organizations. B start talking after the presentation, and A is still at the podium:

B: Take PVC as an example. Why should we not use it? There are vast amounts of scientific reports that show that PVC is practically harmless to the environment. It’s a good material, hard to replace, and I promise you, the customers don’t care if we have PVC in our cords or not.

A: But now you are on a completely different level. You can always find individual examples, and I don’t want to discuss that now. Let’s discuss it during the break. It’s in the Vision and Values that we have to take environmental consideration. Either we do, or Leif will have to re-write them. But I think an environmental strategy that identifies opportunities and threats early will give us an enormous head-start.

To stay on an abstract level is a way to manage specific questions. A after the presentation talked to B and explained his view on why PVC should be banned. He started talking about the issues of “perceived” and “factual” environmental impact (see Chapter 5), and said that he did not want to have discussions about “specific issues” in there, but wanted to talk more generally about the strategy. During lunch A and B continued talking, and A’s persuasive talked proceeded in the quest to create another environment proxy.

A metaphor-of-the-field that is used much more than any other in the staff-line forum is that of a race. At the lunch following the seminar, A talked about environmental issues as *challenges*, that *competition* in the environmental field is fierce and that it’s profitable to be in the *lead*. This metaphor is clearly manifested in an article in the internal magazine *Executive* from 1996. The magazine is distributed to Multicorp managers world-wide. The staff unit had approved the article’s contents, and in the following, I view it’s contents as linguistic artifacts of the staff-line forum. Of course the article is also aimed at environment specialists and proxies, but the main readers are non-specialists and non-proxies, and therefore the staff unit-line forum is the most appropriate forum of analysis.

The article is entitled: "Focus on the environment puts us in a win-win situation", and is a quote from the environmental director. On a photograph on the title page, the environmental director poses on a running track. The preamble reads:

"The driving force in the environmental field is now shifting steadily towards markets and customers. Taking the lead still offers some advantages, but tomorrow conditions will be far tougher. Our aim is to reach a win-win situation where lean use of resources and product development are coordinated and generate benefits on both the cost and the revenue side, which will improve profitability"(text extract from internal magazine *Executive*)

In addition, the article is full of wordings that have direct connotation to a race or competition: "leadership", "laggards" and "gains". The metaphor is used explicitly both in text and visually. Environmental adaptation of business organizations is an unfamiliar activity to most managers, and it needs to be justified. Competition is however most familiar, as it is a main metaphor of capitalism and market economy. Hence, the use of the competition-metaphor can be seen as an effort to shift strange concepts into known territory. In the staff unit-line forum, the business arguments are more explicit in the other fora where the staff unit interacts. An example can be found in the extract from *Executive* above. In the last two rows (which like the rest of the article have been examined thoroughly and are thus not haphazard) state that the aim is to be beneficial as regards both costs and revenues. What costs and revenues have impact on is surely clear to those who receive *Executive*. Nevertheless, the relationship is clarified to the reader: it implies improved profitability. Without doubt, the preamble stresses the point that environmental initiatives have impact on profitability. It is even the last word and is clearly visible on the page. Profitability is the reward for winning the race. The other combatants are the producers of products that are similar to those of Multicorp', and implicitly the staff unit conveys that others are trying to be in the lead. But it is only those who are in the lead that earn the most money while sparing the environment.

In the staff unit-line forum the competition metaphor is linked to the unit's identity and its need for legitimacy. The unit has to prove its legitimacy to put their ideas forward. By using business arguments, the staff unit manages to get away from unwanted connotations. The unit is clear as regards what they do not want to be associated with. They do not want to be seen as "environmental fundamentalists with knitted sweaters and back-packs" as a member of the unit stated. They see a danger that the organization (line) will see them as specialists who consider the environment to be more important than profit. If that were to happen, it would be impossible to implement the strategy. Instead, which the *Executive* article shows, the staff unit wants to convey the image that the unit is lean and effective, smart, risk-minimizers but yet daring to take the lead in environmental consideration. Thereby, the moral arguments to the line are minimized. If the staff unit talks about saving the world and future generations, there is a risk that they will lose in credibility and be seen as idealists without understanding of day-to-day business.

Yet the strategy is underpinned by ideology. Even though the staff unit is restrictive in its use of moral arguments in the staff unit-line forum, they do use such arguments. To work with environmental issues without mentioning moral responsibilities would run the risk of

being perceived as cynical. The members of the staff unit often add a statement regarding these issues; like in the *Executive* article, where the environmental director is quoted:

“...the potential gains are immense. Not only for the Group in the form of cost reductions and a stronger competitive position, but also in the form of the heritage we wish to hand over. The moral dimension of working with the environment is what makes it so meaningful and exciting” (extract from *Executive*).

Even though the business arguments are more frequent in the staff unit- line forum, the staff unit is knowledgeable of how powerful the moral arguments can be. They consider themselves to be in a fortunate situation, having two sorts of arguments to alter between:

"People react differently to the concept "the environment". Some don't want to do anything if it seems to be "fuzzy" and far away from business-as-usual. Others love to do things for the environment. Therefore we have a pretty good situation. We can alter the use of business arguments and green arguments depending on who we are talking to" (member of environmental staff unit)

The staff unit is however not the appropriate convenor of moral arguments. Instead, a moral persuasion seems to be carried out by environment proxies that are non-specialists.

### **The inevitability of environmental adaptation**

The shaping of identity is done in moral terms (Watson, 1994). Organizations offer the opportunity for individuals to fulfill personal values.

“A very clear case of this being central to a person's work orientation might be their choosing to enter a religious or charitable form of work, where the opportunity to fulfill deeply held personal values would compensate for the sacrifice of the greater material rewards which might be available in more 'mainstream' careers. But even within the more pragmatic kinds of work entered by most people there is likely, at the minimum, to be an avoidance of undertaking tasks which clash fundamentally with personal values” (Watson, 1994. p. 74).

Working with environmental questions makes moral questions less complicated and the identity process easier:

"It's nice to work with environmental questions. When you meet people at parties or wherever and you tell them that you work with environment, you always get a conversation going. Sometimes you get bored with the subject yourself because you talk about it all the time, but I like working with environmental questions; after all you're doing something good." (environmental coordinator)

Perhaps this implies that it is easier to work with environmental issues than it is to engage in other pragmatic management tasks. “Doing something good” becomes important from a control perspective. If the shaping of identity, as Watson states, is done in moral terms, then the feeling of doing something good simplifies the process of self-identification. If members of the organization feel that they are doing something that is morally justified, they need not reflect upon whether their personal values and the organization's activities are contradictory.

As environment proxies work to induce change, their task may be easier than other change inducers'. They have two major groups of arguments to forward to the non-proxies: if there are business benefits, then organization actors should have faith in the ideology for business reasons, and if there are no business benefits, they should have faith in the ideology for non-pecuniary reasons.

But the power of the proxy repertoire goes beyond the two groups of business and moral arguments. The environment proxies, in addition to support from authorities, have three major discourses to draw from, namely:

- Nature
- Market
- Management

By discourse I mean "... forms for conversation which are accepted by people in certain social networks as conventional patterns of ways to talk and act" (Furusten, 1995, p. 8). Such forms for conversation can be used selectively as a set of arguments. In the following, I will discuss the three discourses and show how environmental arguments work as management tools for creating faith in the ideology.

### *Nature demands faith*

"Nature as a totality forever remains a faith object. No one ever sees the total environment" (Weigert, 1997, p. 44). Environmental problems are quasi-objects in Latour 's (1991) terminology, and we "know only images, signs, stories, and authorities' dicta with no direct touching of the natural world " (Weigert, 1997, p. 18). The environmental problems are therefore not tacit or concrete. According to Weigert (1997), the natural environment is a virtual reality. We are exposed to most environmental problems through cues, but a problem such as global warming enters our consciousness from signs, stories and authorities' dicta; usually through mass media. Thereby, environmental degradation is seldomly visible, but instead an issue which we have to believe in. If arguments make sense to us, if they seem feasible and trustworthy, we believe in them. If there is a mismatch between an individual's worldview and the arguments forwarded, the individual will not alter worldview. In modern Western society we are confronted with options of what to believe. We choose a framework, a set of beliefs, which we use to relate to other faith objects (Berger, 1980).

Environmental problems are faith objects; we rely to scientific testimonies. One day media tells us that scientists have found man-caused global warming to be getting more serious, the next that others have found out that it is not. Sunshine used to be healthy, now it is not. Scientific statements keep changing and scientists are in competition of whom to believe. Accepting an environmental argument implies to reject another (Myerson & Rydin, 1996).

The environment proxies in Multicorp have chosen a particular set of beliefs and arguments and rejected others. They have found, and constantly are on the lookout for, arguments that justify scientific unquestionability of their view. According to Svensson (1997), the concepts "nature" and "environment" are in the public debate being used the

same way as “God”, “development”, “science” and “society”. The latter concepts can be used to limit human freedom. Individuals cannot question “science” or undertake actions that are against “development”. Yet these concepts belong in a socio-cultural context; i.e. they are possible to question and criticize. The first two instead belong in a natural-biological context. “Nature” cannot be questioned, and the ozone-hole is not a part to negotiate with. Even though nature may be considered to be socially constructed, i.e. that the meaning of the natural environment emerges in conversation, a natural-biological discourse conveys messages undisputed.

Environment proxies state that operations have to be harmonized with eco-cycles, that coming generations require environmental measures and that it is morally irresponsible to prolong along old action patterns. With these arguments they draw on the Nature discourse. Nature is non-negotiable, and its authority is unquestionable. It is similar to Kunda’s (1992) objective authority. In Kunda’s terminology, objective authority stemmed from mass-media, academics and consultants. The Nature discourse is translated by environment proxies and forwarded to non-proxies as an absolute objective authority. If convincing “evidence” that Nature is suffering is found; and if Nature itself demands environmental activities, the non-proxies had better change their world-view along the proxies’ line.

### *Market demands faith*

The marketplace not only implies a means through which goods and services are exchanged and where prices are determined. In addition to involving economic functions, Wuthnow (1987) states that it is something that participants in Western society are morally committed to. According to Wuthnow, members of Western society experience a moral obligation to participate in market activities, and withdrawing from market activities implies to keep a public trust. He exemplifies with Adam Smith’s pin maker whose withdrawal from the marketplace not only flawed his occupation as a business man, but also implied failure to live up to the duty of contributing to the good of society.

Markets symbolize arenas where individuals’ own talents are discovered and self-esteem arises. Markets are also symbols of individual freedom, Wuthnow claims. The markets symbolize the enablement of the right to choose, which has come to be synonymous to freedom. Freedom of choice also implies the responsibility for the decisions taken. In turn, a decision maker can feel pride in the awareness of acting morally.

“...we have a fundamental desire to think of ourselves as good and decent, morally responsible individuals. Consequently, we seek out symbolic activities that allow us to demonstrate our goodness, decency, and moral responsibility - activities that contribute self-worth in these areas.” (Wuthnow, 1987, p. 88).

The implication of Wuthnow’s argument is that markets function as convincers that we are acting as morally sound, free individuals, and that our actions are voluntary and in accordance to our own deliberate decisions.

Wuthnow’s thoughts on markets have much in common with Douglas (1970; 1986). She states that we create order by classifying the world as we perceive it. Our perceptions have to be pigeon-holed in order for us to get an overview and conquer chaos. The classification,

which determines our behavior, is according to Douglas (1986) not carried out by ourselves as individuals. Instead, institutions govern our classification of the world. Institutions are constructed by that we tell each other which kind of behavior is morally correct and which is not. We construct institutions in interaction by:

“squeezing each other’s ideas into a common shape so that we can prove rightness by sheer numbers of independent assent” (Douglas, 1986, p. 91)

If a sufficiently large amount of people agrees with what a phenomenon means, it thus becomes institutionalized. When individuals share the same cognitive base; i.e. have similar world-views and conform to the same social norms, institutions arise. Institutions stem from conventions, and conventions exist in order to make social life easier. In order for a convention to become institutionalized and taken-for-granted it needs to be perceived as analogous to a law-of-nature. This implies that the convention cannot be changed by human interference.

According to Douglas (1986), an example of a convention that has been institutionalized is the market function. Markets are governed by mechanisms beyond the control of individuals. Markets can thus not be interfered with as they are governed by powers analogous to those of natural laws. In short, there is little a single individual can do to have impact on market mechanisms.

With Wuthnow’s and Douglas’ ideas in mind, the use of market arguments by environment proxies in Multicorp are powerful. By using market arguments, the proxies draw on the discourse to act morally correct; and that the non-proxies have no choice anyway. To view environmental issues in such a way that the proxies suggest is an act of taking moral responsibility and keeping public trust as societal well-being rests on the market system. Also, as markets cannot be indisputable institutions, the non-proxies have to conform to what the markets demand. The market discourse becomes an objective authority (Kunda, 1992), and unquestionable, just like the Nature discourse. This leaves the non-proxies with no choice than to obey to the market, and while they do so they act morally correct.

### *Management demands faith*

Smirich and Morgan (1982) describe leadership as a process where leaders define the reality of others and the process is part of managerial work. Organizations are nets of collective action that have been created in efforts to shape the lives of human beings and the world as such (Czarniawska, 1992). Institutions develop when individuals share a cognitive base, i.e. think the same way (Douglas, 1987). Institutions are collective action patterns, and a prerequisite for collective action is thus a shared cognitive base. This implies that the managerial task of creating collective action is a matter of creating shared cognitive bases and shared world views. By creating the necessary conditions, i.e. presenting a ‘desired’ cognitive base, managers aim at having other organization actors construct their worldviews in accordance to the ‘desired’ one.

The environmental worldview postulated by proxies in Multicorp was the business-environment interlinkedness. Non-proxies were to adopt this worldview as it was part of the

fundamental Multicorp values. In the case they did not, they were not carrying out their job satisfactorily. Strategies and policies, utterances in internal magazines, and managerial talk convey that there is an Multicorp ideology regarding how environmental issues shall be handled. If organization actors do not adapt to the postulated world view, they make collective action impossible, and thereby counteract top management's intentions and ultimately the well-being of the company.

The top management discourse is the third in the environment proxy repertoire, and as such it is powerful. As it can be used in conjunction with the other discourses, the imaginary argumentation forwarded by the environment proxies is:

"Think as we do, because Nature gives you no option. In addition, the market demands you to think as we do, and if you don't, Multicorp will eventually run out of business. Finally, top management will not tolerate that Multicorp runs out of business because you don't think the same way as we do, and you will be in trouble before the organization as a whole will."

### **The metaphor of competition**

The environment proxies had to translate the environmental ideology in order to match it with the dominating perceptions in the organization. Through their repertoire of arguments they wanted to set the environmental ideology to work. The discourses Nature, Market and Management were used to back up the argument repertoire, and the ideology created a social and moral engagement. The ideology was also legitimating as it, through the Nature and Market discourses, matched societal streams of thought. It was communicated to be the right thing to do, not only from the own organization's point of view, but also from a societal perspective. That the ideology finally had a controlling function was manifested in the proxies work to limit influence from other institutionalization processes while keeping the "right" ideology from deinstitutionalizing.

All three discourses rest on the metaphor of competition. Backed up by the Nature discourse, the environmental staff unit conveyed the message that markets require organization actors to be environmentally considerate. Markets imply competition and top management requires organization actors to make the organization competitive. Hence, by using competition as the prime metaphor, the business-environment ideology finds its way through the organization.

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