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**Building 'Connectivity' with Stakeholders:
The Link Between Environment and Strategy**

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ABSTRACT

The 1980s witnessed growing concern about the impact of industrial activities on the environment, with public debate focused on issues related to biodiversity, deforestation, pollution, global warming, poverty, the depletion of natural resources, and the need for a new era of environmentally-sound economic development "to ensure that [humanity] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", one of the original definitions of sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987:8). Accordingly, there has been a broadening vision of a company's roles and responsibilities beyond profit maximisation, and with this, growing acceptance of the stakeholder model of the firm popularised by Freeman (1984).

In response to stakeholder demands and pressure for improved environmental performance, companies have made varying efforts to 'green' their enterprises, report on their policies and achievements, and incorporate the environmental concerns of stakeholders through different processes of engagement.

Some companies have been more successful than others in building 'connectivity' with their stakeholders on environmental issues. I believe that this is related to the different discursive strategies that have been developed and evolved over time by companies. My proposition is that the constraints on the production of discourse flow from the partially conflicting aims and interests of the framers of the discourse (companies) and the users (stakeholders). Companies that manage these tensions and gaps more successfully are expected to be perceived as producing more acceptable discourses, while those less skilled are expected to produce less acceptable discourses, exacerbating dissatisfaction levels.

In order to come forward with more robust approaches for building 'connectivity' with stakeholders, my research will focus on the Life Sciences sector. The use of biotech techniques to develop products and services in agriculture, healthcare, and food processing reached 2.7 billion ecus in Europe in 1997, compared to nearly 16 billion ecus in the United States, according to EuropaBio, the industry's umbrella organisation in Europe. Currently, enormous resources are currently being committed within this sector to preserve relations with stakeholders who are wary about perceived risks in relation to the food supply-in the wake of the BSE beef scandal and public hostility in Europe over the introduction of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs). Life Sciences companies are now searching desperately for new strategies to deal with the fall-out in the marketplace and with their key stakeholders.

The Life Sciences sector has come under increasing pressure to disclose information about the risks associated with the use of biotechnology and GMOs. In this respect, the development and use of discursive strategies has been particularly profound. To investigate this phenomenon in more depth, I aim to develop three case studies on companies that have adopted certain strategies and approaches for reporting to and dealing with their stakeholders. The three cases (Novo Nordisk, Novartis, Monsanto) are all drawn from the Life Sciences sector and each is dealing with similar stakeholder issues related to biotechnology, GMOs, and risk.

During the Eighth International Greening of Industry Conference, I will report on initial work in developing these case studies and any preliminary findings.