

## **Sustainability as Corporate Orthodoxy: Generating Insights into Social Movements and Corporate Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

This paper traces the emergence of a social movement that has attempted to transform the fundamental character of organizations in Australia. Unlike many other such social movements, this worldwide social movement has been largely unresearched and even unnamed. We refer to it as the Organizational Renewal Movement 1966-1996. However, while the movements activities have been global, we concentrate particularly on the movement's course in Australia. The story we tell here demonstrates how this new social movement gained momentum and influence and eventually became institutionalised as part of prevailing management orthodoxy. We trace the movements development through various stages as its ideologies, intervention techniques and philosophies became incorporated as standard management and corporate practice.

It is argued, that just as managers and corporations found many of the original ideas of the Organizational Renewal Movement, such as teamwork and participation heretical, in terms of their recommendations for efficiency and profitability, so do currently many managers and corporations find issues of the environment and ecological sustainability threatening to current corporate practices of productive efficiency. A key issue remains - how do we transform our organizations and institutions so that ecological practices move from what Hoffman (1997) describes as heresy to dogma.

Drawing on an historical analysis of corporate transformation in Australia, ten propositions are developed regarding insights into the role that social movements can

play in generating management and organizational change. In particular, it is noted, that as social movements become institutionalised, their potency for radical action dissipates, however their ability to generate compromised action increases. Similarly, it is noted, that, generating institutional change requires more than changing an 'organizational field' or industry network, political, social and economic forces, create greater possibilities to leverage change agendas.

Finally, the research suggests that social movements play an important part in reinvigorating management and corporate practices. The research also suggests that any future research agenda look further at the impact that social movements have in diffusing and institutionalising practices within corporations and the roles played by various actors both inside and outside of the movement. It is suggested that greater potency for generating corporate transformation will occur when human and ecological sustainability agendas are linked - social movements provide a unique tool for understanding this dynamic.