

TURUN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULUN JULKAISUJA

PUBLICATIONS OF THE TURKU SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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*GREENING
ORGANIZATIONAL
STUDIES
- A Critical Reflection*

Sarja Keskustelua ja raportteja/

Series Discussion and Working Papers

8:2004

ISBN: 951-564-203-5 (PDF) 951-564-202-7 (nid.)

ISSN: 1459-7632 (PDF) 0357-4687 (nid.)

ABSTRACT

The basic purpose of this paper is to shed light on the ambivalent role of environmental research in the field of organizational studies. Environmental management has become one of the most popular and fashionable discourses attracting new scholars, journals, and conferences. At the same time business-as-usual mindset, without a doubt, still prevails in the mainstream environmental management discourse. As the mainstream refuses to recognize the other side of the equation, nature, the ecological dimension remains more or less voiceless in the discourse. It is suggested that because of this limited scope, environmental management discourse can be most comprehensively seen as an autocommunication-process producing alluring, though empty, rhetoric about sustainability. It seems that the discourse has produced political sustainability to corporations, perhaps more than actual ecological sustainability, while generating variations of 'therapy' to scholars as well. Different variations of 'therapy' might suffocate the more critical scholars, while producing mental relief to the others.

Key words:

Environmental management; corporate greening; rhetoric; taboo; therapy.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

It is said that every field of science has its own special value. For medicine the constituting value is a healthy human being, a patient being treated by doctors with the best available techniques. For business studies the basic value is a healthy company. The corporate wellness is measured by indicators such as profitability, liquidity, market share, increase in sales, and personnel well-being. (Nurmi 1983.) It seems that from the present-day perspective the great tragedy of the field is that its conceptions of organizational environment have traditionally excluded natural environment, or as Shrivastava (1995) puts it, for a long time nature was considered no more than ‘a bundle of resources’. This denaturalist perspective on organization environment meant that environmental protection wasn’t considered important for corporate wellness either. On the contrary, excluding the last few years, the field has been quite hostile to environmental values. Naturally, as pro-environmental values have gained increasing popularity in the society, the traditional one-way relationship to nature has been modified. Still, the traditional business-as-usual mindset and concepts (profit, liquidity etc.) dominate the value-base of the field.

Critical management scholars have reminded us that even though today more is made from less, i.e. industrial eco-efficiency has improved, the increasingly growing number of consumers combined with growing material consumption creates a very problematic long-term formula. What has been achieved in material and energy efficiency and product design, might be, and often is, lost due to higher levels of consumption. Thus, regardless of some positive signs, it is clear that modern environmental management alone is pathologically insufficient to lead to sustainable development (Welford 1995). While it is obviously impossible to measure the actual contribution of academic environmental management discourse in improving eco-efficiency or sustainable development, it is clear that an increasing number of business school researchers, particularly scholars in the field of management and

organization studies, seem to be interested in specializing in environmental management.

In real life, scholars are far from being the objective servants of science in the noble quest for knowledge. Instead, whether we admit it or not, subjective opinions lead researchers to construct reality into the direction they prefer (see e.g. Welford 1998). In addition, since environmental issues clearly belong to the category of the most sensitive topics, conflicts are easily provoked. As we have witnessed e.g. in the recent intensive debate on Bjørn Lomborg's (2001) book 'The skeptical environmentalist', environmentalism itself is, in fact, turning into hegemonic discourse with its own institutions and ideological control over symbols, imagery and modes of thought (cf. Godet 1998; Levy 1997). This doesn't mean that we have to agree with Lomborg's arguments on the 'real state of the world'. Nor do we need to agree with anybody else who opposes environmentalism, but simply to maintain an open and critical mind for all issues, including environmentalism. Business scholars, just like average people, are divided by environmental issues into opposing camps. When it comes to the relationship between economy and ecology, at the other end of the continuum are those in favor of pro-environmental values, those who in general perceive business and economy as hazardous for ecological sustainability. The other end of the continuum is inhabited by those who usually have nothing against environmental issues, but who are still keen on keeping ecology out of economy – if the former doesn't benefit the latter, that is. It seems that in recent years the great majority of business scholars have been redefining their stand, moving from the anti-environmental end to somewhere in the middle of the continuum, thus wanting to see ecology and economy being balanced.

This paper takes a somewhat unorthodox perspective on environmental management. Instead of explicating e.g. strategic issues, environmental management systems, or reporting case-study findings – as in the mainstream environmental management discourse is often done – this paper is interested in the academic environmental management and its popularity as a phenomenon. Unlike in some more established fields of social scientific environmental inquiry, such as environmental sociology and environmental philosophy, the greening of industry research has focused sparsely on these kinds of issues of 'introspection'. The starting point for the paper is a pursuit to shed light on the ambivalent role of environmental research in the field of organizational

research. Accordingly, the paper firstly analyses the role of environmental research on traditionally hostile ground, and tries to reveal some taboos veiled by optimistic, even naïve, rhetoric. Secondly, as management scholars often rationalize and strategize environmental management to make it more attractive for corporations (Fineman 2001), the paper asks why it is that environmental management is such an attractive topic for scholars themselves.

2. A HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF CORPORATE GREENING AND ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE

After the Second World War the technological development winged mass production into huge proportions, and the western way of living was determined by consumption, material well-being, and growing individualism (Massa 1998). Even though natural scientists, and many average citizens through their own experiences, were aware of the environmental changes, pollution, and the diminishing of natural resources – the progeny of the new way of living – the modern society was not ready to question this growth-oriented worldview. Thus, the first actual global wave of environmental worry didn't appear until during the 1960s and 70s.

Historically, the only responsibility the corporations had, was to produce profit to the owners. During the first half of the twentieth century, the responsibility was extended to include the well-being of employees. The ecological boundaries of corporate activities didn't receive attention, however. Even though during the 1960s corporations had faced growing pressure in environmental issues, the natural environment remained a more or less non-existent entity for management scholars.

The history of corporate greening is far from streamline (Hoffman 2001), but if some basic general outlines are to be raised, one should focus on the changes in the overall perception of the relationship between ecology and economy in the societal discourse. At the beginning of the 1970s a long and intense debate in favor of and against the economic growth was provoked; continuous economic growth was considered to be impossible in a limited world, and hence a *zero-growth* scenario was suggested. This was influenced especially by the famous report of the Club of Rome (Meadows et al. 1972). At the same time the business-world strongly opposed to any environmental regulations, especially the zero-growth scenario, as well as any attempt to slow down the economic growth. Questioning the economic growth was just too much for the business-world.

Alongside with some massive environmental catastrophes the next decade brought a new kind of optimistic – naïve one might say – environmentalism associated with the concept of *sustainable development*. Contrary to that of the zero-growth scenario of the 1970s, one of the key ideas of sustainable development was the mutual consistency of economic growth and environmental issues (see *Our Common Future* 1987). Although the definition of sustainable development, as defined by Brundtland's commission, was, as such, highly demanding, the interpretations of it made by individual interest groups seeking to benefit themselves – such as politicians and the business world, in particular – caused the concept to lose most of its power. Even though nobody really seems to know what sustainable development means, it did, ironically, turn out to be a highly popular, and socially widely accepted ideology. (Kallio et al. 2003; Banerjee 2003.) Importantly, the idea of mutual consistency between economic growth and environmental issues offered corporations fertile ground to 'green'. And, of course, as a consequence of the growing social pressure, there was but little choice for corporations to change their rhetoric and orientation towards environmental issues.

To sum up, for decades corporations and business advocates opposed any attempt to bring up environmental issues and acted only when compelled by laws (Schot – Fischer 1993; Hoffman 2001). The change of heart was therefore a radical one, when during the late 1980s and early 1990s corporations suddenly reoriented 180° and professed to be 'sustainable corporations'. Knowing the fast changing nature of the management genre and its innovative consultants, it is peculiar that it should have taken roughly twenty years for most companies to realize that they were actually pursuing a no-win game. It took, however, even longer to bring the environmental issues into the discipline of management studies. Because of this, Paul Shrivastava (1994), for example, accused organizational studies of being 'castrated' when it came to environmental issues. This led him, among others, to set objectives that soon turned out to be clearly unrealistic.

Environmentalism will be one of the most potent forces of economic, social, and political change in this decade. By the year 2000, organizations and organization theory will need to transform themselves dramatically to accommodate environmental concerns. Despite the rise of environmentalism over the past two decades, organizations and organizational theorists have failed to adequately address environmental concerns. (Shrivastava – Hart 1994, 607.)

After the slow start, a little hammering and polishing here and there, including new books, special issues in journals, special themes and tracks in conferences, some brand new environment-dedicated journals and conferences – all important factors for management fashion (Kieser 1997) – and the natural environment had been included within the realms of the discipline. Scholars were obviously inspired by environmental issues, and many business school researchers, along with consultants, were enthusiastic in marketing environmental management to corporations. This led to counter arguments as well, as some scholars and consultants – naturally situated at the orthodox end of the ecology vs. economy continuum – attempted to shoot down some of the most overstated rhetoric presented by management scholars from the other end of the continuum.

Questioning today's win-win rhetoric is akin to arguing against motherhood and apple pie. After all, the idea that environmental initiatives will systematically increase profitability has tremendous appeal. Unfortunately this popular idea is also unrealistic. ... For all environmental issues, shareholder value, rather than compliance, emissions, or costs, is the critical unifying metric. That approach is environmentally sound, but it's also hardheaded, informed by business experience, and, as a result, much more likely to be *truly* sustainable over the long term. (Walley – Whitehead 1994, 46, 52.)

The debate on business and the environment has been framed in simplistic yes-or-no terms: “Does it pay to be green?” Many business school academics and environmental leaders have answered yes. ... The underlying assumption is that the earth is sick – and that therefore it *ought* to be profitable to find ways to help it return in good health. ... [E]nvironmental problems are best analyzed as business problems. ... [T]he basic tasks do not change when the word “environmental” is included in the proposition. ... That's why managers need to bring the environment back into the fold of business problems and determine when it *really* pays to be green. (Reinhardt 1999, 149–150, 157.)

At the beginning of the academic environmental management discourse there prevailed a clear optimism among scholars that corporate greening would importantly profit both the corporation and the environment (as Shrivastava 1996 even named his book). In some cases the optimism was clearly excessive. Therefore it's only reasonable to ask that if corporate greening indeed profits corporations, environment and consumers simultaneously – and is thus a win-win-win solution (Elkington 1994) – haven't we in fact discovered a true panacea, and if so, how could we have been so blind that we didn't recognize this philosophers' stone earlier? Most likely, had we posed

this silly question even to the most optimistic advocate of environmental management during the early 90s, we would probably have got a disconcerted answer, as everybody knows that there just aren't panaceas. Even so, when it soon turned out that the actual ecological results of corporate greening were fairly modest at best, the field was filled by pessimism and inner criticism during the mid-1990s. This comes clear for example from Richard Welford's radical personal reorientation (see also Dobers et al. 2001).

In the last five years we have seen a fundamental change in the way that industry views the protection of the environment. This is not suggesting that industry has done nothing in this respect in the past; it has, but recently we have seen the dominant ideology among senior management in industry shifting towards a less ruthless view of the planet in which we live. Huge steps forward have been made in the field of environmental management and much bigger steps are yet to be made. (Welford – Gouldson 1993, ix.)

It is simply surprising how dominant the business-conservative (or business-as-usual) viewpoint has become. Often associated with slogans such as 'there is no alternative', 'that's what it is like in the real world' and 'there is no turning back', this discourse fills me with sadness. Sadness because the people who espouse it often secretly hold rainbow aspirations but dare not come out of the corporate closet. ... Such people with limited creative abilities have no right to be running businesses, let alone other people's lives. (Welford 1997, 37.)

During the past decade environmental management has received criticism from various different perspectives (see e.g. Dobers et al. 2001; Welford 1997; Purser et al. 1995; Gladwin et al. 1995; Shrivastava 1995; Levy 1997). Unsatisfied with environmental management, some critical scholars suggested more radical management utopias. Shrivastava (1995), among others, suggested a new ecocentric paradigm to replace the existing anthropocentric one. This kind of ecocentric thinking is at the same time theoretically highly intriguing and problematic, and without a doubt utopist from the practical management perspective (Fineman 1998).

Today, even though it is rarely explicitly stated, it seems that the greening business discourse has somewhat unanimously abandoned the idea of ecocentric management as a realistic future vision while the concept continues to haunt here and there (Newton 2002). At the same time it is clear that the problem of the ever-growing ecological footprint of humanity remains and needs to be solved (see e.g. Hart 1997; Living Planet Report 2002). It seems

therefore only reasonable to say that in many ways the history of corporate greening has only begun.

Approximately four decades after the initial ignition of the societal environmental awakening, greening finally entered perhaps the most unlikely corner, reaching the hearts of corporations, economy and management studies. As a consequence, economic growth is constructed mutually compatible with ecology; corporations have become ‘green corporations’, while some of them have gone far enough to publicly profess their leading role in environmental protection; and an increasing number of business and management scholars have become ‘environmental researchers’, introducing a new area, concepts and theories into the discipline organization and management studies. What used to be ‘outside’ is brought ‘inside’ and has turned out to be highly fashionable and profitable (Fineman 1998); clearly, ‘green’ sells well – if not in actual properties of products, because of the premium pricing, then at least in images of ‘greenness’.

3. THE TABOOS AND RHETORIC IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Environmental research in the field of business is located in the intersection of three hegemonic discourses: modern science, economy and environmentalism (Starkey – Crane 2003; Levy 1997; Escobar 1996; Purser et al. 1995). What results when these three hegemonic discourses are brought together is modern environmental management. Corporate greening, environmental management in particular, is a product of highly troublesome marriage of opposing interests, perhaps seemingly rational and promising when analyzed from the surface-level, but increasingly problematic when the analysis is taken onto a deeper level. It seems that the sound image of environmental management as both environmentally and economically rational behavior, can be maintained only through construction of certain rhetoric and taboos. To reveal these, one can start by asking *what* is managed when environment is being managed, and what does it mean to *manage* environment?

In environmental managerialism the ‘environment’ that is being managed varies from the abstract and ‘subjectivist environment’ to the concrete and ‘objective environment’. When a corporation needs natural resources as raw material for production, what is managed is the ‘concrete environment’: nature is transformed into more manageable ‘environment’ and further ‘bundles of resources’ with observable and measurable outcomes (Banerjee 2003). On the other hand, when it comes to corporate environmentalism, what is managed is typically the ‘subjectivist environment’, one that is detached from the observable and measurable outcomes. In the latter case the product of environmental management is ‘greenness’, instead of e.g. the decreasing of sulfur emissions. This alludes to what Levy (1997) calls ‘political sustainability’, i.e. that the essential rationale of modern environmental management is to produce social legitimacy for corporations thus securing their hegemony by blunting any serious challenges to question their hegemonic position. Reaching political sustainability might be far more effective through social

construction – production of images and symbols – than by investing in new technology, for instance.

There is a sense in which the green corporation is a simulation created in a self-referential circle of symbols. A green corporation is one that markets green products to green consumers; green consumers are constituted through their consumption of green products and images, and the products are green because they are sold by green companies to green consumers. A green corporation practices EM [environmental management] and is hailed in the media and academic literature for doing so. EM, in turn, is the set of practices that green companies perform. ... To the extent that green imagery eclipses a more grounded understanding of environmental issues, companies might find it easier and cheaper to construct themselves and their products as green rather than undertake expensive and risky investments in equipment and processes to reduce environmental impacts. (Levy 1997, 136.)

It should be recognized that the concept and phenomenon known as greening can be understood at least in two fundamentally different ways. The lay meaning of the concept is associated with environmental protection and ecologically more sound ways of behaving/operating. The sociological and academic meaning of the concept refers, on the other hand, to a cultural and social phenomenon where new symbols are transformed into social reality (Buttel 1992). In the latter, social constructivist meaning, greening takes place in social reality and inside people's heads. The greening in the latter meaning does not automatically lead into greening in the former meaning, as is often the case. For example new pro-environmental values among average people do not automatically lead to more ecologically sound ways of consuming/living. This is also often the case with modern environmental management. As a consequence, the corporate greening increasingly deviates from the greening understood in the lay meaning, even though without a doubt the lay meaning of greening is exactly what is expected from corporations in most cases.

Yet as Escobar (1996) has claimed, it is all in all a relatively novel assertion that nature and environment can be managed. Christianity and Western culture, in contrary to e.g. the Far East and primitive cultures and religions, did of course separate man from the rest of the nature, and morally justified him to establish a dominance over nature (White 1967; Hargrove 1989). And in a similar vein after the medieval times, during the renaissance of science and Cartesian times, the purpose of science was defined to subject nature under man (von Wright 1987), while in the modern era the man-nature

dualism, with its hierarchical power-relation, was ultimately refined (Purser et al. 1995). However, it should be kept in mind that during the early days of Christianity the human-nature relationship was constituted more on a struggle against nature than actual management of it. And, during the Cartesian time before modernity, when the obvious purpose of science was defined to subordinate nature, this was primarily due to man's ethical and intellectual cultivation, not in the purpose of changing nature (Pietarinen 1997). Hence, the actual management of nature and its resources is a much more recent phenomenon – inherently a modernist phenomenon.

In the age of quantum physics and genetic manipulation it is difficult to entirely deny man's success in 'managing earth'. Obviously, much has been learned about nature and environment. However, the idea of being able to manage the environment in a sense of mastering its resources at the current magnitude, without coincidentally compromising its ability to resile (see Haila – Levins 1992), is far more difficult to accomplish than the controlled experiments in laboratories, and currently clearly an impossible task. Moreover, for market mechanism to be able to allocate resources effectively there must be adequate prices for goods. As the recent studies (Costanza et al. 1997; Balmford et al. 2002) have shown, ecosystem services are being pathologically undervalued – if valued at all. However, not having even gone to the enormous ethical problems of pricing e.g. biodiversity or human life, it is obvious that all this is trivial compared to the fact that, in spite of the indisputable (natural) scientific advancement, we continue to have very limited knowledge about the extremely complex and intertwined processes of nature, such as the global warming. History has shown, however, that new technologies, chemicals, methods etc. are being implemented while the best available knowledge concerning them is insufficient; take the sad case of DDT as an example. The prevailing myth of progress, i.e. the modernist vision that things just can't go wrong because the humanity is inherently heading towards the perfect world (von Wright 1992), has produced a risk society, myopic to its own processes (Beck 1992). To sum up, the question of lack of knowledge and systematic production of risks is something that the mainstream environmental management discourse seemingly wants to circumvent.

The technical use of scientific knowledge and the taboo of lack of knowledge, linked with the modernist omnipotence and arrogance, in managing earth's resources, discussed above, is just one dimension of

environmental managerialism. Besides having a dominant power-relation to environment, environmental management, largely due to globalization, insists on maintaining a dominant power-relation to those who are void of scientific knowledge and economic power, namely the Third World people.

Like the earlier scientific management of labour, the management of nature entails its capitalization, its treatment as commodity. ... The question in this discourse is what new manipulations can we invent to make the most out of nature and 'resources'. But who is this 'we' who knows what is best for the world as a whole? Once again, we find the familiar figure of the (white male) Western scientist-turned-manager. ... But can reality be 'managed'? The concepts of planning and management embody the belief that social change can be engineered and directed, produced at will. ... A blindness to the role of planning in the normalization and control of the social world is also present in environmental managerialism. As they are incorporated into the world capitalist economy, even the most remote communities in the Third World are torn from their local context, redefined as 'resources' to be planned for and managed. (Escobar 1996, 328–329.)

As the Third World countries are forced to open up their economies to global markets, their usually quite considerable stocks of natural resources are taken to benefit those in the First World. While the resources are exported, the culture of consumption is imported. In modern management discourse this neo-colonialism is often veiled in the rhetoric of democracy, raising living standards, sustainable development etc. (Banerjee – Linstead 2001). Due to their hegemonic nature, images of both scientific knowledge and environmentalism – and environmental management as manifestation of corporate environmentalism and science – have a valuable role in legitimizing the neo-colonialism.

To be able to maintain its own legitimacy, it is crucially important for environmental management discourse to assure stakeholders that economic and environmental goals can be reconciled (Levy 1997). Accordingly, it seems obvious that average people are more concerned about their own immediate well-being than that of the more abstract well-being of nature, and hence it is suggested that only through rising living-standards a wide-scale environmental protection can take place. Therefore, it indeed appears only logical that economic growth contributes to environmentalism through the affluence of man. Whereas economic growth without a doubt creates some sort of wealth, although highly unequally, the existence of man, however, is not constituted by economy but ecology – natural capital instead of man-made capital. And

once the natural capital has been turned into man-made capital it can't, at least not explicitly, be returned to natural capital. Even though economic growth might create environmentally sound behavior to some extent, it creates, to an even greater extent, consumption and thus more ecological burden. It is almost needless to remind about the catastrophic implications if the living-standards of the current population of six billion people reached the affluence of an average American (Hart 1997; Living Planet Report 2002). To conclude, even though frequently suggested otherwise, it is extremely difficult to see how the growing consumption – sacred to the economists and corporations – could benefit, more than damage, the quest for ecological sustainability. However, for environmental management discourse, questioning the mutual compatibility of economic growth and ecological sustainability is inherently a taboo, one which is keenly linked with the ultimate taboo of economic growth, discussed earlier in this paper.

Clearly the questions presented above ‘*what is managed when environment is being managed?*’ and ‘*what does it mean to manage environment?*’ are far from single-tracked issues. One thing is clear, however, as Levy (1997, 136) says: “an analysis of corporate environmentalism reveals the presence of economic and political forces prepared to devote considerable resources to shape the “meaning of greening” to suit their own interests.” Anyone familiar with environmental management and capable of critical thinking should be able to recognize this. However, regardless whether it is the natural resources or the political sustainability that is respectively being under the influence of ‘management’, there are certain taboos that are willingly left aside from the mainstream discourse. Above four such taboos have been brought up with a short description of their contexts. The taboos are – progressing towards the most sacred one: i) the lack of knowledge concerning the environment and the inability to manage it; ii) the maintenance of the biased power-relation between man vs. nature and between First World vs. Third World; iii) the mutual compatibility of economic growth and ecological sustainability; iv) the continuous economic growth and consumption. It is obvious that the first three taboos are all linked with the ultimate taboo of continuous economic growth and consumption.

In the mainstream environmental management discourse the taboos are typically being dispelled by embedding the corporate greening with rhetoric such as win-win, eco-efficiency and eco-modernism (Welford 1997), and

implicitly linking environmental management with universal goals such as equity, freedom, justness and so forth. Behind all this echo the overall tidings of joy telling that with skillful scientific manoeuvring a harmony between economic and environmental interests can be found, just as the advocates of sustainable development suggested. The debate concerning the taboos, and issues near to them, is left to a few well-known critics. Their bombardment is allowed – at least to some extent – and occasionally even published on the pages of prestigious mainstream general management journals. This is because the critical language and tone of environmentalism is inherently a part of the environmental management discourse, and something that, through skilful utilization and ‘management’, might be turned into an advantage. Through the inner, i.e. intra-discourse, criticism the ultimate taboo of economic growth might be spared from getting more deeply – more deeply than it already is – under the fire of some dangerous external stakeholders, such as NGOs (cf. Crane 2000). However, one shouldn’t underestimate the effect of the overall spread of pro-environmental values either – values that have, as suggested earlier, affected average management scholars (and journal reviewers) as well. When it comes to the mainstream environmental management discourse as its part, it is obvious that rhetoric somewhat hostile to traditional management is something that just comes along with the themes of environmental research, even though it seems that in the case of mainstream this is often no more than autocommunication without any deeper critical meaning.

Whilst criticism is allowed to some extent, in many cases even the most critical scholars quite obviously want to circumvent the ultimate taboo of economic growth, and thus the question of consumption reduction. This is ironic, given the fact that consumption reduction is such an obvious road to more sustainable living, and usually the first recommendation suggested by environmental researchers of other fields. This is an indicative reference to the fact that the discourse remains to be distorted when analyzed from the perspective of the balance between economical and ecological goals. Even though it is claimed that the environmental management research has become increasingly sophisticated (Starik – Markus 2000), there is a clear absence of rigorous analyses concerning the question of what is happening to the environment due to environmental management – a lack of a two-way thinking. The mainstream environmental management discourse chooses to recognize only a portion of the reality when leaving this dimension out of focus. When the mainstream

scholars debate e.g. on the possibility of win-win solutions, nobody usually bothers to ask whether the environment is actually winning – which is of course far from an unambiguous issue.

4. UNDER THE JUGGERNAUT – GREENING BUSINESS RESEARCH AND THERAPY

Social reality is built around and becomes understood through discourse. However, not all the construed discourses have a similar effect in the social reality or upon its construction. Some discourses have a higher ‘truth value’ than others. They easily become generally accepted self-evident means of discourse, sometimes considered absolute truths not readily questioned. (Kallio et al. 2003.) It was stated at the beginning of this article that all disciplines have their own special value, and that for business studies this value is a healthy company (Nurmi 1983). We know today that there is no future for business in a dying world, and that in general, while there are some exceptions of course, the business suffers when the earth suffers. In addition, it seems that this fact is somewhat accepted not just in the environmental stream of management and organization studies, but among the discipline at large as well. When looked especially from the mainstream perspective of the discipline, much needs to happen before ‘ecologic health’ of a company is appreciated as highly as ‘economic health’, however. The discourse of economic health therefore has more ‘truth value’ than the discourse of ‘ecologic health’. While environmental issues have currently been added to the list of indicators that can be used in determining the wellness of a company, they, however, continue to be clearly inferior compared to the more substantial indicators such as profitability, liquidity, market share, and increase in sales.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1989), discourses, and hegemonic discourses in particular, represent a kind of ready and polished end result of reality construction. According to Potter and Wetherell’s view, what is truly essential in the examination of discourses is the re-explication of the constructive nature of the seemingly self-evident ways of constructing social reality. It is quite clear that there isn’t much room for serious pursuit of ecological sustainability if matters are articulated in such a way that everything would seem to have its own ‘natural place’. In the end, change is possible through the very realization that even the most established discourses

are not perfect and final systems of meaning. Even beneath the seemingly coherent outer layer of the hegemonic discourses there usually are some breaking points and sometimes even considerable contradictions, which open up the possibility of problematization. (Kallio et al. 2003.)

If these breaking points are recognized by the advocates of the hegemonic discourse, they are, it seems, either consciously or unconsciously circumvented as taboos and veiled in rhetoric. And of course, discourses have their own defence mechanisms against the counterclaims of the potential opponents. The main options are 'therapy' and 'nihilation'. Of these 'therapy' is used to secure that potential deviants remain on the inside of the symbolic universe of a certain field of social action. 'Nihilation' for its part is used to suppress everything that is on the outside of the very same universe, to deny all the phenomena and interpretations that don't fit in this universe. This can take place in two ways. Firstly, all conflicting interpretations can be translated into concepts originating from one's own universe. Secondly, unfit interpretations may be given a negative ontological status, i.e. they may be branded inferior. (Berger – Luckmann 1979; Kallio et al. 2003.)

Would these 'therapeutic measures' be used if a management scholar, due to his/her environmental research, would too forcefully question the ultimate taboo of economic growth? Probably yes. At first he/she might find it difficult or impossible to publish in the field's mainstream journals, and eventually to even maintain his/her position as a legitimate scholar. Critical scholars need therefore either to restrain from attacking the taboos too vigorously, or to skilfully veil their criticism in the mainstream rhetoric. What comes to 'nihilation', there is some well-documented evidence showing how business advocates keep e.g. NGOs, lay public, community groups and 'renegade' scientists outside from legitimacy by presenting them as non-rational and non-scientific, thus further branding them as inferior and 'not to be taken seriously' (Eden 1999). What results is environmental management discourse tangled with business-as-usual mindset, clearly reluctant to regenerate when it comes to the taboos. After recognizing this, it's no wonder that some critical scholars (e.g. Shrivastava 1995; Gladwin et al. 1995; Purser et al. 1995; Welford 1995; 1997), suggested alternative management utopias, while some of them went far enough to entirely abandon the environmental management paradigm.

Besides the sense of 'therapy' as a sort of suffocative measure presented above, there is also another kind of 'therapy' involved in environmental

management discourse. This goes together with what Ahonen (2001) calls as *therapeutic autocommunication*. According to Ahonen:

To compensate ... [the] cruel truth, it is necessary to have the Grail, constantly renewing descriptions of an ideal community in the discourses of progress, where all values, ideals and hopes, supportable as such when examined individually, could be simultaneously fulfilled, for everybody. ... In this sense, the cultural locus of the discursive search for wisdom on the efficient running of organisations is to function as gigantic therapeutic autocommunication – and simultaneously a subject producer. (Ahonen 2001, 365–366.)

As environmental management is located in the intersection of opposing interests, it provides an opportunity for scholars, condemned to work in a field traditionally hostile to environmental issues, to express their pro-environmental values in their own profession – and who knows, it might even benefit the quest for sustainability. Just how many times have I heard from my students how everything here (in the School of Economics and Business Administration) seemed so harsh until they finally discovered environmental management. It is therefore my conception that if this aspect of ‘therapy’ is ignored, then an important factor is lost when analyzing the popularity of environmental research in the field of management, while there are, of course, other factors involved as well (see Fineman 2001).

A ‘therapy’ of this sort serves especially those mainstream researchers who are unwilling to abandon the traditional tenets and values of business studies, but who are still concerned about environmental issues. For exactly the same reason – i.e. for environmental management standing in the intersection of opposing hegemonic discourses and thus in a way playing with two cards by being a sort of environmentalism that is not ‘real’ environmentalism – environmental management works as an irritant for those scholars and environmentalists who are fundamentally upset because of the current situation where economy continues to dominate ecology.

The current fad of corporate environmentalism has been an attempt to address the ecological crises within the “environmental management” or “normal organization science” paradigm. ... [W]e argue that the environmental management approach simply doesn’t go far enough, that it really amounts to an incremental strategy, and that it does not highlight how deep-seated the ecological crisis is. (Purser et al. 1995, 1074, 1083.)

Anthony Giddens (1990) has used a metaphor of a massive juggernaut wheel – running down a hill while its riders hopelessly try to control it – to draw an analogy to modern society. This is obviously a metaphor suitable for describing not only the nature relationship of the modern society (Couch 1997) but also the environmental management discourse concerning the greening of business. From the critical management perspective then, the mainstream environmental management appears as a part of the juggernaut mechanism. Mainstream environmental management discourse produces alluring though empty rhetoric about sustainable development and mutual compatibility of economic and ecologic goals. As a by-product of the discourse the field itself becomes constructed increasingly ‘green’. However, the fundamental problems remain: from ecological perspective nothing has been solved, and the economic growth and consumption continue to be the common denominators for all environmental problems. Meanwhile, unsustainability deepens as the speed of the wheel continues to accelerate.¹

¹ When it comes to environmental problems and consumption increase the evidence is indisputable and clearly overwhelming (for summaries see e.g. Living Planet Report 2002; Gustafsson 1999; Worldwatch Institute’s State of the world reports 1985 – 2004). At the same time there is, however, a small though loud minority in the scientific community that claim environmental problems to be more or less nonsense (see e.g. Paunio 1991; Lomborg 2001).

5. CONCLUSIONS

During the 1990s, environmental management turned out to be one of the most prominent concepts cherished by management scholars, corporate representatives, as well as some politicians. Besides empty rhetoric, a substantial amount of sincere hope of sustainable future was placed in environmental management. Nonetheless, quite soon it was brought up by some critical scholars that in most cases the implications of environmental management remained insignificant compared to the changes needed for ecological sustainability. This isn't surprising, given the fact that modern environmental management is in many ways constructed on business-as-usual grounds. This becomes obvious e.g. from the analysis of David L. Levy (1997), who has identified four central tenets of environmental management: i) the environment can and should be managed, ii) corporate managers should be doing the managing, iii) environmental management is a win-win opportunity, iv) traditional management functions and concepts are the appropriate tools. Levy's analysis and conclusions have much in common with what has been said in this paper.

It is suggested in this article that there are taboos in environmental management discourse that are circumvented by mainstream scholars and that are veiled in rhetoric. Four such taboos were identified: i) the lack of knowledge concerning the environment and inability to manage it; ii) the maintenance of the biased power-relation between man vs. nature and between First World vs. Third World; iii) the mutual compatibility of economic growth and ecological sustainability; iv) the continuous economic growth and consumption. The first three taboos are all linked with the ultimate taboo of the economic growth. These taboos are veiled in rhetoric such as win-win, eco-efficiency and eco-modernism, while environmental management is further implicitly linked with universal goals such as equity, freedom and justness.

Environmental research has obviously an ambivalent role in the field of management and organization studies. The fact that rigorous analyses

concerning the ecological dimension of environmental management – and thus the ecological implications of environmental management practices – are relatively absent, seems to be a sort of a prerequisite for the discourse to maintain its taboos and its sound image as part of management studies. Even though to some extent it is allowed for critical scholars to shake up the discourse and publish even in prestigious mainstream general management journals, there are limits that shouldn't be crossed. The ultimate taboo of economic growth is something that even the most critical scholars seemingly feel uncomfortable to touch. The taboo is sparsely brought up in the greening business discourse even though it is one of the most obvious roads to more sustainable living, and usually the first recommendation suggested by the scholars of other fields.

Discourses naturally have their own defence mechanisms. 'Therapy' is used to secure potential deviants to remain on the inside of the symbolic universe of the field. Besides therapy in this suffocating measure, there is also another kind of 'therapy' involved in environmental management discourse. In the paper it is suggested that since environmental management is located in the intersection of opposing interests, it provides an opportunity for scholars, condemned to work in a field traditionally hostile to environmental issues, to express their pro-environmental values in their own profession. A 'therapy' of this sort serves especially those mainstream researchers who are unwilling to abandon the traditional tenets and values of business studies, but who are still concerned about environmental issues. From the critical management perspective the mainstream environmental management discourse produces merely alluring though empty rhetoric about sustainable development and mutual compatibility of economic and ecologic goals, thus further generating legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders.

However, it would be simply fallacious to suggest that nothing has been done. While the initial corporate greening took extensively place on the level of speech, the green talk has become increasingly concrete in many cases. It is clear, for example, that industry eco-efficiency has improved greatly since the early 1990s. The most obvious "greenwashing" has thus vanished. However, it would be equally fallacious to suggest that something would have been solved. On the contrary, all the indicators show unanimously that we aren't heading towards the sustainable society (see more closely Living Planet Report 2002). I think that this is something that the majority of people are well aware of, at

least here in the exuberant industrialized West. Since people are also green in their attitudes, it is the long longed change in behaviour that is needed: consume less and recycle more. The mantra of economic growth that is sold by corporations and politicians to average citizens – consumers – isn't exactly in line with this. How should we be able to teach our children to become more responsible consumers when all the media keep telling that increasing consumption is the panacea to all problems?

In the recent years some of the more proactive corporations have gone so far in their 'green rhetoric' that they have actually publicly professed their leading role in environmental protection, further stating – at least implicitly – that environmental legislation is therefore becoming useless. Besides the fact that this tells about the failure of environmental policy on both national and especially international levels – for the most part of which we have the Americans to thank for – this also tells about the nature of the 'greening'. As far as economic growth and increase in consumption continue to be the primary objectives for corporations, it is symptomatic to accept the leading role of corporations in environmental protection. In the long run this kind of environmental management cannot lead to real win-win solutions.

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