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Legitimising Sustainability: how individuals gain legitimacy for an emerging corporate strategy from internal organisational actors

Sarah Birrell Ivory

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

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The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Sarah M B Ivory

Abstract

Legitimacy is widely accepted as an important resource for an organisation, strategy, or individual to possess. However, the process of gaining legitimacy has received limited attention in the academic literature. This thesis examines the strategies and actions that individuals employ in the process of legitimising their sustainability strategy within an organisation. Based on semi-structured interviews with 51 Heads of Sustainability, the research extends the existing 'conformance, selection, manipulation' legitimising strategy model, becoming one of the first to demonstrate how these legitimising strategies are interrelated both concurrently and temporally. It finds that multiple legitimising strategies are used simultaneously by individuals. Moreover, a pattern emerges whereby individuals begin with conformance-only legitimising when sustainability has limited integration, but employ all three legitimising strategies where sustainability integration is extensive. In addition to this, the research articulates two specific categories of actions that are used by individuals in the process of deploying these umbrella legitimising strategies: framing and developing coalitions of support. Framing actions comprise micro-reframing, disassociation, contextualisation, analogy, and differentiation and personalisation. Developing coalitions of support actions comprise leveraging sponsorship, networking, enhancing employee engagement, and continually promoting. From this empirical research a generalised legitimising pathway is proposed which demonstrates the progression of legitimising from using conformance-only through to using all three legitimising strategies, and the actions employed by the individual in these different stages.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The construct of legitimacy has been widely studied in the business and management field and represents the general perception that an entity is desirable, proper, or appropriate (Suchman, 1995). This 'entity' may exist at different levels of analysis including the legitimacy of an individual, an organisation, or an organisational strategy (Ruef and Scott, 1998). Gaining legitimacy for an organisational strategy from internal actors contributes to that strategy being accepted and implemented (Flynn and Du, 2012). Despite this, much legitimacy research has remained at the organisational level and neglected the intra-organisational environment. Moreover, research has centered on examining and defining the *outcome* of legitimacy with much less attention paid to the *process* of attaining such legitimacy. Indeed, much of the literature focuses on the constituent elements of legitimacy or typologies such as pragmatic, normative, and cognitive (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995). Given legitimacy at the organisational level has been described as a resource at least as important as capital, personnel and customer goodwill (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002), and at the intra-organisational level as playing a supportive role in framing organisational identity and shaping strategic direction and decision-making (Drori and Honig, 2013), it is surprising that the process of acquiring legitimacy – either for an organisation or for an organisational strategy – has received comparatively less attention (Suddaby and Greenwood, 1995) and understanding these processes has remained a difficult and persistent problem (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2006). Castello and Lozano (2011) specifically call for additional work to provide empirical evidence of and a classification for the process or processes associated with attaining legitimacy, while others echo this call for further focus on these processes

(Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Zott and Huy, 2007). For example, in defining internal legitimacy as the legitimacy bestowed upon an organisational strategy by internal organisational actors Drori and Honig (2013) argue that the literature has not explored the process through which this "originates, develops and is maintained" (p. 347).

This thesis addresses this aspect of legitimacy theory, contributing to knowledge regarding the processes individuals undertake to legitimise an organisational strategy. The context chosen to study these phenomena is that of the emerging corporate sustainability strategy. Organisations are increasingly developing sustainability strategies broadly aimed at increasing positive impacts and reducing negative effects of their operations in order to balance the triple bottom line of environmental, social, and economic outcomes (Elkington, 1997). Beyond this, however, the way in which each business understands and enacts 'sustainability' varies. However, critical scholars are increasingly problematising the idealised 'win-win-win' approach to corporate sustainability (Hahn and Figge, 2011), arguing that a better depiction of sustainability strategy development involves trade-offs and negotiation among competing aims. As such, individuals charged with gaining legitimacy for the sustainability strategy face a complex task, making this an ideal context in which to study the emergence and progression of legitimising processes.

Heads of Sustainability from 51 organisations were interviewed to determine what processes they employed to gain legitimacy for their sustainability strategy from internal actors within the organisation. This purposive sampling strategy (Silverman,

2005) saw respondents chosen based on their appropriateness to address theoretical concepts under investigation and to meet the study's research aims (Davidsson, 2008). This research has been approached from a critical realist perspective, which combines a 'depth realist' ontology with an associated 'neo-realist' epistemology (Blaikie, 2007). It does not aim to uncover general laws, but to understand and explain the underlying mechanisms, which are not usually observable (Sayer, 1992), necessitating the examination of processes that go beyond surface appearances. Moreover, in keeping with a retroductive research approach often associated with critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978) and commonly used in process work (Ayers, 2011), the researcher used existing models to understand the empirical data, with the aim of then revising and extending these models using data which emerged following a more inductive approach to analysis (Harré and Secord, 1972).

The overall research objective of this study was to uncover the processes that individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within the organisation. However, this research process started more broadly, originally contemplating the difference between corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Because such a topic ventured into semantics and proved difficult to inform a cohesive and convincing research design it was revised. Reflecting on the underlying drivers of the such a topic, the researcher realized that the material issues was the extent of integration of sustainability and, importantly, the way in which sustainability was legitimised differently to CSR. To further refine the scope the research refocused solely on sustainability (with the comparison to CSR excluded), and in particular the ways in which individual's attempted to gain legitimacy for this

strategy. Four research questions were designed in order to meet this objective. First, legitimising strategies employed by individuals were identified. Suchman's (1995) conformance, selection, and manipulation legitimising strategy model was used to study the data, in line with the retroductive approach to research which begins analysis by using an appropriate model (Bhaskar, 1978). This model presents three legitimising options: conform to the existing environment; select an amicable venue in the heterogeneous environment which is conducive to non-conformance aspects of the strategy; or manipulate the environment to suit the strategy. However, while Suchman (1995) only hints at the interplay of these strategies and their progression over time, this research goes further to examine these aspects in detail. This includes whether and how the strategies are used in combination, and whether and how they are used in a temporal progression, for example sequentially. These examinations are depicted in the first two research questions:

Research Question 1: What legitimising strategies are used in the process of legitimising sustainability?

Research Question 2: How do legitimising strategies interrelate, both concurrently and temporally?

Further, the research then addresses the actual underlying actions which comprise the process of legitimising, ensuring the focus remains on the individual. Moreover, in order to provide a comprehensive view of the legitimising process the research addresses interrelationships between legitimising strategies and the underlying

actions individuals employ. These examinations are depicted in the third and fourth research questions:

Research Question 3: What legitimising actions underlie the legitimising process?

Research Question 4: How do legitimising strategies and legitimising actions interrelate?

In addressing these four research questions this study aims to make both a theoretical and an applied contribution. The thesis aims to contribute to the empirical evidence which exists regarding the process of legitimising, as well as to the frameworks that theorise this process. In doing so, it aims to understand how people go about legitimising sustainability and to develop a framework which depicts the complexity of this process. In addition to this, as a secondary contribution, this research aims to contribute to the sustainability literature, especially as regards strategies and actions that support the integration of sustainability into an organisational environment. Finally, the thesis aims to provide practitioners with an explicit understanding of the legitimising process. It is hoped that this will improve their ability to successfully undertake legitimising by better articulating the progression of legitimising and contextualising practitioner's actions, audiences, and aims.

This thesis adopts a relatively traditional structure with this introduction followed by the literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The literature review presents the relevant elements of legitimacy theory, examining its

historical emergence before outlining and contextualising the current state of the literature. It builds a distinction between of the *outcome* of legitimacy and the *process* of legitimising, as well as the *outcome* of internal legitimacy and the *process* of internal legitimising. In doing so, it concludes that this latter process construct deserves further attention both empirically and theoretically. Following this, the methodology chapter establishes the critical realist approach to the research, contextualising this in the appropriate ontological and epistemological domains, and demonstrating why this is appropriate given the research objectives. The specific data collection approach of semi-structured interviews is discussed, with detail of the data sample provided. Data analysis procedures are also outlined with specific examples provided to demonstrate how the analysis progressed in order to validly answer each research question.

The results chapter is structured around the four research questions. First, evidence of the three legitimising strategies of conform, select, and manipulate is presented with sufficient discussion to ensure the parameters of these strategies are understood and their prevalence within the data is clear. Then evidence is presented which demonstrates how these strategies overlap, with individuals using multiple strategies at different points in time. By categorising all 51 respondents based on their extent of sustainability integration – limited, intermediate, or extensive – evidence of how these legitimising strategy combinations progress over time is presented. Underlying actions are then identified in the data with two broad action categories emerging inductively: framing and developing coalitions of support. Specific actions within

each of these categories are identified and discussed. Finally, evidence is presented of how the legitimising strategies and legitimising actions overlap and interrelate.

The discussion chapter draws these results together and a generalised legitimising pathway is presented. This pathway reflects the progression of legitimising from limited integration where conformance-only (C-only) legitimising is used, through to intermediate integration where selection legitimising is added to conformance (CS), to extensive integration where manipulation legitimising is also present (CSM). It also depicts the most common legitimising actions used in these different stages. The pathway is contextualised in the existing literature and a number of different issues are raised and discussed including, for example, the reliance on conformance as a foundational strategy for legitimising, as well as the risk of using a C-only strategy over the longer term both for achieving legitimacy and for the construct of sustainability.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the results, examines the theoretical and applied contributions, discusses the limitations and outlines recommended areas of future research. This thesis concludes that the process of legitimising is a complex task for practitioners to undertake as they progress through different stages of sustainability strategy integration. Individuals must make proactive choices regarding their legitimising strategies and be aware of the implications of their choices. Moreover, these choices must be monitored over time: as legitimising progresses it involves a more complex and multi-faceted interplay of different strategies and actions.

This introductory chapter has established the area of research studied in this project, identified gaps in the current literature and briefly proposed how these will be addressed by examining legitimising strategies and actions that individuals employ to legitimise an organisational strategy. In so doing, it serves as both a primer and a summary, establishing the research position and justifying the further examination of this area. By summarising the thesis structure, it also provides the reader with a guidebook for the chapters contained in the remainder of this thesis, as well as a summary of each chapter. It is to these other chapters, starting with the literature review that this thesis now turns.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The research objective of this study is to uncover the processes that individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within the organisation. As such, it is necessary to address and explore the two key aspects of this process: legitimacy and sustainability. This literature review considers each of these in order to build a comprehensive picture of existing theoretical and empirical contributions which may inform the research objectives. It briefly examines the history of legitimacy in social thought and links this to Suchman's (1995) widely accepted definition of sustainability as the generalised perception or assumption that actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate. Following from this, the process of attaining legitimacy - termed 'legitimising' - is examined both using evidence at the organisational level and extrapolating this to the intra-organisational environment to understand the process of internal legitimising. Sustainability is then presented which contextualises the study and provides important elements which may influence how this process develops. However, given the paucity of literature addressing the process of legitimising sustainability strategy specifically, evidence is then examined from other novel and change-based contexts which also focus on the agency of the individual including entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, and institutional work. This provides a comprehensive summary of existing literature related to the research objectives, a clear understanding of the paucity of research addressing the process of internal legitimising, and an appreciation for the fact that this is particularly apparent in novel contexts such as the process of legitimising an emerging organisational strategy such as sustainability.

2.1 Legitimacy Theory

2.1.1 Legitimacy

The study of legitimacy features prominently in the history of social thought. By the fifth century BC the Greeks were already asking under what conditions the use of power was legitimate, while the nature, conditions, and consequences of its legitimacy were featured in both Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* (Zelditch, 2001). In the modern era, the concept of legitimacy can be found in a number of different social scientific fields including psychology (Zelditch, 2001), politics (Coicaud, 2002), and legal studies (Tyler and Mitchell, 1994), as well as throughout business and management disciplines including accounting (Cho and Patten, 2007), finance (Pollock and Rindova, 2003), entrepreneurship (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) and strategy (Suchman, 1995). For example, in the accounting field studies have explored social and environmental disclosure as tools to legitimacy (Cho and Patten, 2007) and the contribution of auditing to legitimacy (Power, 2003), while in the finance field there is empirical investigation into whether perceptions of organisational legitimacy shape investor behaviour (Pollock and Rindova, 2003) and whether organisations with high levels of legitimacy are insulated from unsystematic variations in their stock price (Bansal and Clelland, 2004).

Within the organisational field, legitimacy has largely been studied at the organisational level of analysis (Maurer, 1971; Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995). It has been described as the "congruence between the social values associated with or implied by [organizational] activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system" (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975: 122), as well as "the extent to which the array of established cultural accounts provide explanations for [an

organization's] existence" (Meyer and Scott, 1983: 201). Suchman's (1995) definition incorporates both the evaluative and the cognitive dimensions and is widely used as a seminal definition:

> *"Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574).*

Audiences perceive legitimate organisations as more worthy, more meaningful, more predictable and more trustworthy (Suchman, 1995). Where a disparity exists between the "social values associated with or implied by [the organization's] activities and the norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system of which they are a part" (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975: 122) there is a threat to organisational legitimacy. Organisations that lack legitimate accounts of their activities are more vulnerable to claims that they are negligent, irrational or unnecessary (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). Legitimacy provides organisations with a "reservoir of support" that enhances the likelihood of organisational survival (Tost, 2011). Legitimacy can entail either active or passive support (Oliver, 1991): it may involve either affirmative backing for an organisation or mere acceptance of the organisation as necessary or inevitable based on some taken-for-granted cultural account (Tost, 2011). Achieving legitimacy may lead to continuity or persistence because audiences supply resources more willingly (Parsons, 1960). Some argue that the role of legitimacy as a means to gain economic and competitive ends cannot be understated: a firms' legitimacy, and the legitimacy of their business activities and alliances "has a potentially profound impact on their ability to attract resources, potential partners, and opportunities for market growth and sustainable competitive advantage" (Dacin, Oliver and Roy, 2007: 183). This evidence from the extant

literature supports the description of legitimacy as a resource at least as important as other resources, such as capital, technology, personnel, customer goodwill, and networks (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002).

It is important to note that these definitions of a legitimate organisation indicate that to survive, organisations must meet expectations of the society in which they operate, even though these expectations may have little to do with technical notions of performance accomplishment (Scott, 1987; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). This notion of the role of institutions is controversial within the legitimacy field. In its formative years, the study of legitimacy within organisational research divided into two distinct traditions: institutional and strategic. Those in the institutional tradition (Meyer and Scott, 1983; Zucker, 1987; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1991; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) adopted a detached stance and emphasized the ways in which sector-wide structuration dynamics generate cultural pressures that transcend any single organisation's purposive control (Suchman, 1995). This institutional school suggests that organisations 'receive' legitimacy by conforming to system-wide norms, beliefs, and rules (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). Legitimacy is seen as operating at the subconscious or preconscious level and so there is little chance organisations will be reflectively aware of it or use deliberate strategies to manipulate it (Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). The institutional approach sees legitimacy as an inevitable consequence of socialisation (Sonpar, Pazzaglia and Kornijenko, 2010) which is viewed not as an operational resource, but as a set of constitutive beliefs (Suchman, 1988): "organizations do not simply extract legitimacy from the environment in a feat of cultural strip mining; rather, external

institutions construct and interpenetrate the organization in every respect" (Suchman, 1995: 576). From this perspective legitimacy is "virtually synonymous with institutionalization" (Suchman, 1995: 576). However, this approach has been criticised as it underplays both how different institutional forces may pressurise organisations to prioritise different values (Sonpar et al., 2010), and the presence of institutional contradictions requiring negotiation and settlement (Reay and Hinings, 2009). Moreover, and significantly, it ignores the existence of agency in relation to legitimacy (Drori and Honig, 2013).

Those in the strategic tradition (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer and Salanick, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981; Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990) adopted a managerial perspective and emphasized the ways in which organisations instrumentally and actively manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to garner societal support (Suchman, 1995; Sonpar et al., 2010). Studies in this tradition depict legitimacy as an operational resource (Suchman, 1988) that organisations extract from their cultural environments and that actors deliberately enact or ignore in pursuit of their goals (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Sonpar et al., 2010). Organisations can exercise strategic choice to alter the type and amount of legitimacy they possess (Suchman, 1995; Scott, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). Perrow (1970) states that because legitimacy is problematic for organisations they are likely to take actions to ensure their continued legitimacy. Organisations are not simply passive recipients of legitimacy but work actively to influence and manipulate the assessments they receive from their multiple audiences (Ruef and Scott, 1998).

While differences between the strategic and institutional traditions of legitimacy theory have real consequences, Suchman (1995) argues that real-world organisations face both strategic challenges and institutional constitutive pressures. While organisations "can and do formulate strategies for fostering legitimating perceptions of desirability, propriety, and appropriateness ... managers rarely convince others to believe much that the managers do not believe themselves" (Suchman, 1995: 577). In his seminal paper, Suchman (1995) calls for research to incorporate both the ways in which legitimacy acts like a manipulable resource in the strategic tradition and the ways in which it acts like taken-for-granted belief in the institutional tradition.

Moreover, more recent scholarship has depicted the interplay of the institutional and the strategic. Institutions can be thought of as enduring elements of social life that affect the behaviour and beliefs of individuals and collective actors by providing templates for action, cognition, and emotion (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011). Recent interpretations of institutions understand them not as exterior and reified social structures "but rather as collective interpretations, shared meaning systems, and ongoing processes of collective sensemaking" (Suddaby, Seidl and Le, 2013: 335). As such, researchers must think of institutions "not as enduring formal objective structures detached from the actors who authored them, but as contingent outcomes of ongoing interactions and inter-subjective interpretations of the individuals and social groups through which they are constituted" (Suddaby et al., 2013: 338). Individuals can be influenced by and can also influence institutions. This seemingly simple statement is the foundation of neo-institutionalism which, among other things, aims to bring the individual back into the purview of institutional analysis (Lawrence et al., 2011). Importantly, this shifts the

understanding of the individual to that of an agent whose motivations, behaviours and relationships can influence institutions (Lawrence et al., 2011). Within the current research context, this means that the study of individuals and their processes of legitimising should be open not only to the obvious strategic implications - how the individual actually gains legitimacy proactively, intentionally and instrumentally - but also to how institutions influence these processes, and how these processes influence institutions. It is only through this complex and all-encompassing perspective that the true process of legitimising can be uncovered and theorised. As such, while this research focusses largely on the strategic tradition of legitimacy, in studying the legitimising processes undertaken by individuals, it does so with explicit recognition of, and appropriate attention to, the institutional tradition when analysing and interpreting results and articulating the implications. Individuals do not create legitimacy in a vacuum, but "within a particular organizational field, economic market, socio-historical space and geographical place" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 372). By ignoring the institutional context there is a risk of "oversimplifying legitimacy into a matter of marketing and effective presentation rather than approaching it as a complex process of socially constructing reality" (Neilson and Rao, 1987: 525). These authors caution against this and call for researchers to "invest energy in the creation of *process theories* that describe the complexity of interpretive activity" (Neilson and Rao, 1987: 525, emphasis added). Indeed, as this literature review, the results, and the discussion will demonstrate, the strategic/institutional divide within this field may be acting as an obstacle for legitimacy to achieve its full potential both as a theoretical construct and in practical usefulness. Drawing on this call for energy

into process theories, this thesis will now turn to the process of legitimising as it is currently depicted in the literature.

2.1.2 Legitimising

There are three early contributions to the modern study of legitimacy within organisational research which are regularly referenced when exploring the construct (Maurer, 1971; Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995). In each case, the authors reference the *process* of attaining legitimacy in addition to discussions of the *outcome* of legitimacy. Maurer (1971: 361) asserted that "legitimation is the process whereby an organization justifies to a peer or superordinate system its right to exist". Dowling and Pfeffer (1975: 122) reference "the process of legitimation through which organizations act to increase their perceived legitimacy", while Suchman (1995) devotes a substantial section of his seminal conceptual article to explore "the challenges inherent in … gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy" (p. 572).

This early attention to the process of attaining legitimacy is unsurprising given that legitimacy focuses on instrumental or intentional action for mobilising approval (Drori and Honig, 2013), placing such action at the centre of the study. What *is* surprising, however, is that despite these early references to the process of attaining legitimacy, this has received less attention in the subsequent literature, empirically or conceptually, especially compared to the study of the outcomes or typologies of legitimacy. Although considerable attention has been paid to the constituent elements of legitimacy and its forms of expression (Suchman, 1995), less effort has gone into identifying the processual aspects of legitimacy such as understanding how it is acquired, maintained, and lost (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Moreover, the

research that has emerged suffers from a lack of cohesion, of empirical validation, and of in-depth interrogation. As such, while legitimacy has long been recognised as a fundamental outcome that is basic to social organisation (Zelditch, 2001), understanding the general processes that underlie legitimacy has remained a difficult and persistent problem (Johnson et al., 2006). This is in part attributable to the empirical focus on the outcomes of legitimacy, rather than the processes of attaining that legitimacy. Zelditch (2001) distinguishes between the outcome of legitimacy and the process of legitimising when calling for greater focus on the totality of the construct including the "nature, causes, conditions, and consequences of legitimacy" (p. 7). Castello and Lozano (2011) call for additional work, providing empirical evidence of and a classification for the process or processes associated with attaining legitimacy. Others echo this call for further focus on the process of attaining legitimacy (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Zott and Huy, 2007).

There is some terminological confusion as regards the process of attaining legitimacy. As there are multiple terms used in the literature to describe this, it is useful to briefly identify these different terms, explore how they are currently used and settle on terminology that ensures readers are clear as to the constructs underlying the terms. Much of the literature uses the term 'legitimation' to describe the process of attempting to gain legitimacy following early references from Maurer (1971) and Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) (Neilson and Rao, 1987; Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Kostova and Zaheer, 1999; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Kumar and Das, 2007; Drori and Honig, 2013). For example, Lindblom (1994) distinguishes between legitimacy – which is a status or condition – and legitimation – which is the process

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underlying that state. However, other terms that have emerged include 'legitimacy establishing activities' (Williams Middleton, 2013), 'legitimation strategy' (Kumar and Das, 2007), 'strategic legitimation' (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002), 'legitimacy processes' (Patriotta, Gond and Schultz, 2011), and 'legitimating processes' (Ruef and Scott, 1998). A careful examination of the references above reveals that some authors use multiple terms to describe this process. One key example of this is Suchman (1995) who refers to the process construct as 'legitimation', 'legitimation process', 'legitimation attempts', and 'legitimacy management'. However, he also sometimes uses the term legitimation to describe the outcome of legitimacy. Flynn and Du (2012) recognise that the terms *legitimation* and *legitimacy* tend to be used synonymously, ignoring the distinction between process and outcome. Further confusion arises where the term 'legitimation' is used to describe the action of the audience in bestowing legitimacy either as an individual (Flynn and Du, 2012) or from a collective perspective (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999). For example, Tost (2011) refers to an individual level process construct when she explores "the process of legitimacy judgement formation, use, and change" (p. 687). That is, she explores an individual level process concept from the perspective of the audience forming legitimacy judgements. Within this current research project, to avoid such conceptual confusion and ensure clarity of focus, the term 'legitimising' is used to refer solely to the *process* of attaining legitimacy undertaken by the individual practitioner. Legitimising is a process which assumes a managerial perspective and may be purposive, calculated, and frequently oppositional (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). The intent of legitimising is "to foster the belief among constituents that the

organization's activities and ends are congruent with the expectations, values, and norms of constituents" (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990: 182): that is, to gain legitimacy.

2.1.3 Internal Legitimacy

While the majority of extant theory and empirical research of legitimacy and legitimising takes place at the organisational-level (Suchman, 1995), more recently the concept of internal legitimacy has gained attention (Castello and Lozano, 2011; O'Dwyer, Owen and Unerman, 2011; Tost, 2011; Drori and Honig, 2013). Internal legitimacy focuses on the intra-organisational environment, where individuals establish legitimacy of organisational strategies within their own task environment (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999; Kostova and Roth, 2002). Drori and Honig (2013) provide the first definition of internal legitimacy:

> *"the acceptance or normative validation of an organizational strategy through the consensus of its participants, which acts as a tool that reinforces organizational practices and mobilizes organizational members around a common ethical, strategic or ideological vision" (p. 347).*

Extrapolating the organisational-level definitions of legitimacy provided at the start of this chapter to the intra-organisational context, the following can be stated in relation to internal legitimacy: the generalised perception or assumption that a firm's strategy is desirable, proper, or appropriate (Suchman, 1995); to be considered legitimate organisational strategies must meet and conform to organisational expectations and, as a result, be accepted, valued, and taken for granted as right, fitting, and good (Meyer and Scott, 1983); and an organisation's strategy is said to be legitimate to the extent that its means and ends appear to conform with the organisation's norms, values and expectations (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975). Many

authors point to the importance of internal legitimacy research (Tost, 2011; O'Dwyer et al., 2011; Drori and Honig, 2013), and Suchman (1995) notes that "managerial initiatives can make a substantial difference in the extent to which organizational activities are perceived as desirable, proper, and appropriate" (pp. 585-586) although he goes no further in exploring this internal context.

Research on internal legitimacy is in its infancy as "issues of internal legitimacy tend to be largely ignored in studies of organizational legitimacy" (O'Dwyer et al., 2011: 46). Exceptions include research into attaining internal legitimacy for audit and assurance practices within a professional services firm (O'Dwyer et al., 2011), analysis of practitioners in the process of building corporate legitimacy (Castello and Lozano, 2011), and exploration of the relationship between internal and external legitimacy (Drori and Honig, 2013). There is support for extending the focus of legitimacy to the internal context (Tost, 2011; Drori and Honig, 2013; O'Dwyer et al., 2011; Suchman, 1995). This is in part because it has been referenced as "an anchor-point of a vastly expanded theoretical apparatus addressing the normative and cognitive forces that constrain, construct, and empower organizational actors" (Suchman, 1995: 571). Internal legitimacy is used by individuals to promote their interests and to negotiate their position in the changing context of the firm's founding and evolution (Johnson et al., 2006; Tost, 2011; Drori and Honig, 2013). Flynn and Du (2012: 213) argue that "organizational actors obtain legitimacy for themselves and their activities in order to acquire the participation, enthusiasm and commitment from others that is necessary for managing their activities effectively (Pfeffer, 1981; Oliver, 1991), to ensure sustainable support for organizational leadership (Chakravarthy, 1997), to acquire resources for survival and growth (Zimmerman and

Zeitz, 2002), and to facilitate organizational changes (Chakravarthy and Gargiulo, 1998)." Moreover, as internal legitimacy relies upon emergent 'bottom up' practices accorded through individual agency it may play "alternatively a supportive or an obstructive role in framing organizational identity and in shaping strategic direction and decision-making" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 347). This indicates the importance of internal legitimacy for strategy development and implementation.

2.1.4 Internal Legitimising

Most of the extant legitimacy literature exploring the internal context focuses on the *outcome* of internal legitimacy. However, the process of legitimising may be considered at several levels including entire organisational populations, individual organisations, or subunits and specialised aspects of organisations (Ruef and Scott, 1998). For example, Andon, Free and Sivabalan (2014) explore the strategies individuals undertake to legitimise themselves and their position in the context of a newly created auditor role, which may be considered 'individual legitimising'. Ruef and Scott (1998) point to the paucity of legitimising research within the organisation, and suggest that it may be possible to "separate legitimating processes operating with respect to different organisational functions" (p. 881). By applying early theoretical work on the process of legitimising at the organisational level to the more recent internal legitimacy construct, the process of 'internal legitimising' can be understood as the process or processes undertaken by individuals attempting to gain legitimacy for an organisational strategy from internal organisational actors. Individuals may seek to legitimate new strategy through an array of substantive and symbolic practices. These may be subtle, however they may also be overt, as legitimising activities are apt to be intense and proactive as individuals attempt to win the

confidence and support of wary potential constituents (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990).

The lack of attention to internal legitimacy as an outcome is mirrored in the lack of attention to internal legitimising as a process. Drori and Honig (2013) argue that the literature "has not explicitly tackled the formation of internal legitimacy as an agglomeration of individual level strategies, nor has it examined the processes through which internal legitimacy originates, develops and is maintained" (p. 347).

This section has defined and contextualised the process of internal legitimising within the legitimacy literature. In doing so, it has demonstrated that while the process of legitimising received attention in the early literature, focus then moved to developing typologies of legitimacy: that is, to outcomes. Moreover, much of the extant literature explores legitimacy at the level of the organisation, with only recent attention to the intra-organisational context.

2.2 Existing Models and Frameworks

The previous section demonstrated the need to develop a better understanding of the process of legitimising an organisational strategy to internal organisational actors. While this research area has not been directly addressed in the existing literature, there are a number of contributions in the legitimacy literature which may support both investigation in this area, and contribute to an appropriate research design. As such, this chapter will now explore existing models and frameworks from the general legitimacy field. The purpose is twofold. This will both demonstrate the deficiencies of these models in filling the theoretical void identified above but will

also provide the opportunity to extract elements which may be useful in researching the process of internal legitimising.

Within the literature six models or conceptual frameworks of legitimising exist. This section will consider all six contributions chronologically, starting with the conceptual frameworks developed by Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), Lindblom (1994) and Suchman (1995), followed by the Legitimation Process Model (LPM) (Johnson et al., 2006), and the Legitimation Activity Model (LAM) (Flynn and Du, 2012), and the Staged Process Model (SPM) (Drori and Honig, 2013). Some of these models reference internal legitimising, while some reference legitimising more generally. However, each makes some contribution to current understanding of the concept of internal legitimising although as will become apparent, none provide a comprehensive model theorizing the concept.

Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) develop a conceptual framework to analyse "the process of legitimation through which organizations act to increase their perceived legitimacy" (p. 122). While it is acknowledged that this focus is on the organisational, rather than the internal level, the framework provides the first significant contribution to understanding the process of legitimising. Moreover, as is clear below, the elements of the framework can all be understood at either an organisational or an individual level. Finally, this contribution provides the foundation for the majority of contributions that follow. As such, it would be remiss to exclude this framework from consideration in this literature review. Dowling and Peffer's framework comprises three options available to an organisation aiming to attain legitimacy. The organisation can:

1. adapt its output, goals, and methods of operation to conform to prevailing definitions of legitimacy,

2. attempt to alter the definition of social legitimacy so that it conforms to the organisation's present practices, output, and values, or

3. attempt to become identified with symbols, values, or institutions which have a strong base of social legitimacy.

The authors go on to list organisational behaviours associated with each element of the framework, for example the co-optation of 'legitimate' individuals onto an organisation's Board as an example of identification with legitimate symbols. While this provides a potentially useful 'listing' of behaviours, it should be noted that it is based on one limited case study and, where examples for the framework did not emerge from that case, references to prior research. Nevertheless, it provides a foundation for subsequent frameworks. Moreover, and most interesting here especially in the context of other frameworks and models, is the authors conclusion that "since the changing of social norms is a difficult process, it is likely that most organizations will either adapt to the constraints imposed by the requirement to be legitimate or will attempt to identify their present output, values, and method of operations with institutions, values, or outputs which are strongly believed to be legitimate" (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975: 127). This conclusion is implicitly evident in Lindblom's (1994) framework and explicitly reiterated in Suchman's (1995) framework, both of which will be outlined next.

Social and environmental accounting literature has historically drawn on Lindbolm's (1994) legitimising strategy framework, which identifies four strategies which organisation's seeking legitimacy may adopt. These strategies reference an organisation's 'relevant publics' (Gray, Kouhy and Lavers, 1995): a description of audience which may be employed quite broadly. However, given its context of social and environmental accounting, it has largely been applied to gaining legitimacy from external audiences through reporting and disclosure (Tilling, 2004) and focuses on organisational-level strategies. Nevertheless, it provides a different perspective on the process of legitimising which deserves attention here. The four legitimising strategies are detailed in Gray et al. (1995) and Jupe (2005) and paraphrased here. The organisation may seek to:

1. Educate and inform its "relevant publics" about actual changes in the organisation's performance and activities;

2. Change the perceptions of the "relevant publics", but not change its actual behaviour;

3. Manipulate perception by deflecting attention from the issue of concern to other related symbols through an appeal to, for example, emotive symbols; and,

4. Change external expectations of its performance.

These strategies can best be understood through reference to the 'legitimacy gap' (Gray et al., 1995). The first strategy is used where the legitimacy gap exists because of actual failure of performance by the organisation. The second is used when the organisation believes the legitimacy gap exists because of misperceptions by the 'relevant publics'. The third strategy is used to deflect attention from the legitimacy

gap. The final strategy is used when the organisation believes the 'relevant publics' have incorrect or unrealistic expectations about its responsibilities. It should be noted that while strategy 2 and 4 appear similar, one focuses on changing external perceptions of an organisation's activities, while the other focuses on changing external expectations of an organisation's responsibilities.

Gray et al. (1995) demonstrate how each of these strategies can be employed in the course of social disclosure and, in so doing, conceptually demonstrate the use of multiple strategies simultaneously. While this may seem self-evidence, it is relevant in light of the next framework which fails to explore such concurrent legitimising strategy use. While Lindblom's typology is attractive in its comprehensive nature and focus on the legitimacy gap, it has failed to gain traction outside the accounting field and suffers from a lack of empirical exploration and development (Tregidga, Milne and Kearins, 2007). Moreover, its explicit organisational-level focus makes it less applicable in an internal legitimising context. Nevertheless, given its explicit focus on communication as a medium for legitimising, it may prove useful in examining the individual's legitimising actions.

Suchman's (1995) model draws on Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) and has become the most widely used in understanding of the process of legitimising in the management field. While Suchman's seminal article largely focusses on the different types of legitimacy − that is, on outcomes − he also addresses different components of legitimacy management naming these as gaining, maintaining and repairing legitimacy. Within the gaining component, he presents three strategies for gaining

legitimacy: conform to environments, select among multiple environments, and manipulate environments[1]. These legitimising strategies are described below:

1. Conformance involves legitimising by aiming for conformity with the demands and expectations of the existing social structure in which the organisation is currently positioned (Suchman, 1995). This equates to Dowling and Pfeffer's (1975) ideas of adapting to prevailing definitions of legitimacy, and in line with these authors Suchman (1995) sees this as the 'easiest' strategy.

2. Selection involves some level of conformity to the environment but allows the organisation to select among the multiple environments in which it operates (Suchman, 1995). That is, it recognises the heterogeneous nature of the environment, with managers proactively "locating a more amicable venue, in which otherwise dubious activities appear unusually desirable, proper, or appropriate" (Suchman, 1995: 589). Selection is especially relevant where the construct being legitimised is hardly compatible with conformance to the environment, where the organisation is too big to be handled at once, or where some business units simply exert too much resistance (Aies and Weiss, 2012).

3. Manipulation involves making changes in the environment to achieve consistency between the organisation and its environment: "managers must go beyond simply selecting among existing cultural beliefs; they must

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[1] Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) added a fourth strategy: creation of something that did not already exist in the environment. However, this was specifically for the study of new ventures in pioneering fields such as dot coms valuing 'eyeballs'. As such, it is not included here. Moreover, it may be argued that this is simply a sub-category of the manipulate strategy.

actively promulgate new explanations of social reality" (Suchman, 1995: 591). Oliver (1991) describes manipulation as "the purposeful and opportunistic attempt to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures and evaluations" (p. 157). Note that the word 'manipulate' in this context differs from its use in Lindblom's (1994) framework discussed above.

Given the importance of Suchman's model to the subsequent literature and within this research project, for the purposes of this report this model will be termed the 'CSM legitimising strategy model'. While Suchman (1995) presents these legitimising strategies independently, he acknowledges that each involve "complex mixtures of concrete organizational change and persuasive organizational communication" and that they "clearly fall along a continuum from relatively passive conformity to relatively active manipulation" (p. 587). Moreover, in his conclusion he suggests further research into the use of legitimising strategies across social locations and through time, lamenting the fact that the field currently says "very little about the nature (or even the existence) of 'typical' legitimation progressions" (Suchman, 1995: 602). He asks, for example, if organisations employ limited repertoires of techniques in relatively fixed sequences. This suggests that the CSM legitimising strategy model may form a useful base for examining the process of legitimising. Indeed, this model is used in different ways in later research both formally (e.g. Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002) and informally (e.g. Aies and Weiss, 2012) and, importantly, allows for agency to be considered in the research context. However, as articulated by the author himself, his existing one-dimensional static description of each legitimising strategy falls short of depicting the true complexity of the process. Supporting this, in studying enterprise transformation approaches,

Aies and Weiss (2012) posit that combining aspects from all three of Suchman's (1995) legitimising strategies may significantly increase the probability of success. However, they fail to provide empirical or theoretical justification for this assertion, conceptual explication of how the interplay and overlap of these strategies may play out, or potential implications of such combination of strategies.

While Suchman does not expand on this idea of legitimising progression, a contribution from the social psychology field may shed light on this idea. Johnson et al. (2006) study the process of legitimising new social objects and develop a Legitimation Process Model (LPM) that aims to "understand the general processes that underlie legitimacy" (p. 53). The LPM consists of four stages, which are explicitly depicted as progressive steps. These steps are outlined below:

1. Innovation: a social innovation is created to address some need, purpose, goal, or desire at the local level of actors. Actors must construe it as consonant with and linked to the existing, widely accepted cultural framework of beliefs, values, and norms (Zelditch, 2001).

2. Local Validation: Local actors may explicitly justify the innovation in a way that is consistent with the already accepted cultural landscape, or it may acquire local consensus simply by not being challenged: "as a result of being successfully justified or implicitly accepted, the innovation acquires local validation. A new prototype or cultural schema is born as the acceptable way of doing things" (Johnson et al., 2006: 60).

3. Diffusion: Once local validation occurs, there is diffusion to other contexts through implied acceptance by various social actors. "Because the innovation has been construed as a valid social fact [in one situation], it is now adopted more readily by actors in other local contexts as mere fact" (Johnson et al., 2006: 60). As the new social object spreads, its adoption in new situations often needs less explicit justification than it may have needed in the first local context in which it was adopted.

4. General Validation: As a result of the diffusion of the new social object across contexts, societal consensus emerges once the social innovation is validated, diffused and accepted in multiple situations. That is, it becomes generally validated and part of the status quo, and is used to frame the future behaviour of actors.

In providing the first articulation of legitimising as a progression along a continuum of strategies, the authors make a significant contribution to the field. Moreover, introducing literature from the separate field of social psychology provides weight to the analysis of the theory of legitimacy and in particular the process of legitimising in the organisational field. However, other than mentioning the actors role in step one - construing the social innovation as consonant with existing norms - the authors do not address the actions of individual actors in relation to the process of legitimising. That is, while they explore the progression of legitimacy, the actions of individuals legitimising is again lost. In particular, steps 3 and 4 appear to give agency and life to the innovation itself, ignoring the agency and actions of individuals in actually achieving 'diffusion' and 'general validation'. Moreover,

again the paper draws only on past research and theory, with no empirical contextualisation or validation.

Attempts at such validation, albeit of a different model, can be found in the work of Flynn and Du (2012). The authors applied their Legitimation Activity Model (LAM) (reproduced in Figure 2.1) to their study of the legitimising process related to the introduction of a new information system (IS). The model describes the process of legitimising from the perspective of both those seeking and those providing legitimacy. However, while the LAM promises much for extending the understanding of an individual's legitimising process, it appears to quickly descend into a one-dimensional attempt to demonstrate who does what and when as regards legitimising, with limited conceptual development. For example, the authors suggest that individuals "apply several legitimation strategies based on their judgement of appropriateness" but fail to identify these strategies, either conceptually or empirically, or discern how such judgements of appropriateness should be made.
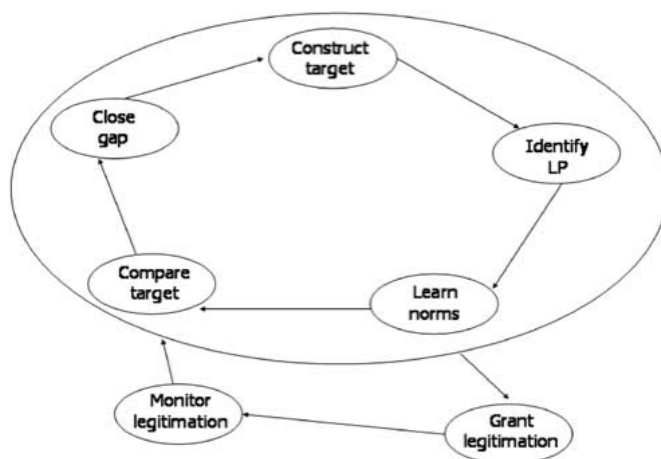
Figure 2.1: Legitimation Activity Model
(Source: Flynn and Hussain, 2004 reproduced in Flynn and Du, 2012)
(Note: LP = legitimation providers)

Nevertheless, the authors do provide some important contributions that warrant attention. Firstly, by distinguishing between legitimation seekers and legitimation providers they implicitly recognise the reciprocal nature of the legitimising process: indeed, without legitimation providers – that is, an audience – from whom to seek legitimacy, legitimising strategies become a moot point. This leads to the question of audience, which deserves further consideration and will be explored at the end of this section. A second contribution comes where the authors point to the importance of "monitoring and evaluating legitimation [as a] continuous, concurrent process". This flags the temporal nature of the legitimising concept and the fact that, given the constantly changing environment, legitimacy must be constantly reviewed.

In the final framework relevant to internal legitimising, Drori and Honig (2013) develop a Staged Process Model (SPM) (reproduced in Figure 2.2), recognising that scholarship "has essentially overlooked how legitimacy emerges and evolves … from an internal perspective" (p. 345).
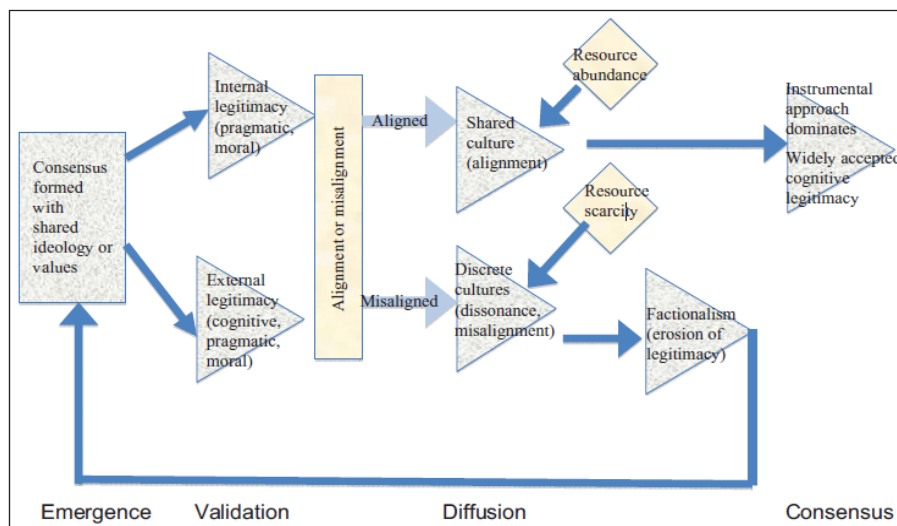
Figure 2.2: Staged Process Model Incorporating Internal and External Legitimacy
(Source: Drori and Honig, 2013)

The model is based on Johnson et al.'s (2006) LPM examined earlier, but with nuances to reflect "the interplay of actors, agency and institutions" (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2009: 3) which fosters legitimacy through emergence, endorsement, compliance and consolidation. The authors modify the LPM by "explicating the relationship between internal endorsement and the external structure, as well as by adding processes that examine the implications for internal legitimacy, including a feedback loop depicting the recursive consequences of internal and external misalignment" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 369). The emergence stage is typified by a strong founding ethos, which proactively facilitates the endorsement stage, "characterized by the development and evolution of both pragmatic and moral internal legitimacy" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 370). The compliance stage involves maintaining a relationship balance between internal and external environments. Only where this succeeds, can one move on to the final consolidation stage, where legitimacy becomes widely validated as a general consensus in society. It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the stages referenced in the text of the article: emergence, endorsement, compliance, and consolidation, and the stages referenced in the model reproduced in Figure 2.2: emergence, validation, diffusion, and consensus. It is not immediately apparent if these should be considered substitutes, if they are separate constructs, or whether an error has occurred in labelling the stages. Nevertheless, one strength of this model is its empirical rigour through extensive fieldwork culminating in a longitudinal case study. In addition to this, the feedback loop concept, and achievement of 'consensus' provides a conceptual 'end-game' for legitimising, at least theoretically, although this diverges

from Flynn and Du's (2012) observation about the continuous nature of legitimising. However, it may be said that the process of internal legitimising for an organisational strategy concludes where that strategy receives legitimacy: it becomes widely accepted and taken-for-granted. This compares to Johnson et al.'s (2006) 'general validation'. Moreover, the authors make a significant contribution through exploration of the link between internal and external legitimacy, demonstrating empirically that organisational legitimacy is "a product of action, which is continually reproduced and reconstructed by members of an organization in concert with external legitimation activities" (p. 345). That is, internal and external legitimising combine to contribute to organisational legitimacy. However, again there is a lack of reference to actual internal (or, indeed, external) legitimising processes or individual actions despite claiming to offer "an insight for scholars examining the micro-processes of legitimation" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 369).

Two issues have emerged in this analysis of existing models that deserve further attention and consideration: audience and temporal considerations.

The issue of audience, if not the specific focus of this study, cannot be ignored in the focus on the process of legitimising. The LAM explicitly references audience through the discussion of legitimacy providers, while the CSM legitimising strategy model can be understood as: conform to dictates of pre-existing audiences, select an audience that will support the new activities, or manipulate the existing audiences to create new environments. Audience is especially important in an intra-organisational context because legitimising strategies may be targeted towards individuals, groups such as departments, or even the whole organisation. Markowitz, Cobb and Hedley

(2012) conceptualise organisations as populated by individuals who exist in multiple organisational fields. Various categories of internal participants, including workers, managers, staff specialists, and members of the board, also make legitimacy evaluations that can affect their own levels of involvement and motivations (Elsbach, 1994). Attention to these various constituencies is important because such groups tend to have varying interests and to use diverse criteria and standards in assessing the legitimacy (Ruef and Scott, 1998: 880). As such 'legitimate for whom' becomes an important question. An extreme example provided by Johnson et al. (2006: 56) suggests that "organized crime … can be legitimate for particular actors but illegitimate for the broader society". A less extreme example can be found in the heterogeneous opinions within an organisation about what constitutes a 'legitimate' aim for the organisation.

The temporal dimension of legitimising is referenced by a number of authors, although never explored in detail (Flynn and Du, 2012; Johnson et al., 2006). Kumar and Das (2007) argue that legitimising is an ongoing activity with continuous pressure to take actions to maintain legitimacy, and no guarantee of success, while Johnson et al. (2006) describe the establishment of legitimacy is a contested process that unfolds across time. Reast, Maon, Lindgreen and Vanhamme (2013) incorporate the combination of different legitimising strategies over time in the process of legitimising controversial industries such as gambling, which they describe as strategic pathways. While their conclusions appear limited to controversial industries not widely generalisable - as they acknowledge - this does support the idea of a temporal progression of legitimising pathways. Moreover, Flynn and Du (2012) point out that legitimacy needs to be monitored over a period of time and if there

appears to be a failure individuals may need to repeat the steps of the legitimising process: "a key aspect of a trouble-free legitimation process is that maintenance and repair of legitimation is required over a sustained period of time" (p. 225). Because legitimacy represents "a *relationship* with an audience … [legitimacy becomes] vulnerable to unanticipated changes in the mix of constituent demands" (Suchman, 1995: 594 emphasis in original). However, as the object becomes 'institutionalised', that is as the proposed strategy becomes 'legitimate', proactive legitimising may become unnecessary (Suchman, 1995). Zott and Huy (2007) state that "the relative use of symbolic management is likely to decline as a venture's intrinsic quality becomes more visible" (p. 96). Issues related to both audience and temporal considerations are likely to emerge through the analysis.

This section has examined six existing models relevant to internal legitimising. While each model provides insight into the process of legitimising, all lack a comprehensive depiction of this process, while only one addresses the internal context. Particular deficiencies include a lack of attention to the role of the individual, including the actual actions they display in the process of legitimising, as well as a lack of consideration for the progression of legitimising either given contextual factors, or in examining how different legitimising strategies interrelate over time. Despite these deficiencies, it is clear that the current research objective is targeting a fertile although currently thinly populated area of scholarship. This chapter now turns to the context of sustainability which is the focus of this study, demonstrating that this provides an appropriate and useful focus for this study.

2.3 Sustainability and Sustainability Strategy

The previous sections have demonstrated the importance of the process of legitimising in gaining legitimacy for an internal organisational strategy as well as the lack of research into this process. This paucity of research is somewhat surprising given internal legitimacy is highly relevant especially in the context of new or emerging practices or strategies (O'Dwyer et al., 2011). It is accepted that where novel strategies are intended to be durable social changes, they must be legitimated (Flynn and Du, 2012). Intraorganisational proponents of a new paradigm need to 'explain, rationalize and promote' (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) the strategy in order to reduce uncertainty: that is, they must legitimise it. Drori and Honig (2013) further argue that aspects of legitimacy formation and maintenance are critical for the adoption of new ideas. Moreover, Suchman (1995) argues that legitimising process choices become particularly relevant when "embarking on a new line of activity, particularly one with few precedents elsewhere in the social order, [as] organizations often face the daunting task of winning acceptance … for the propriety of the activity" (p. 586). It is also argued that proactive legitimising is more likely to be successful when there is "uncertainty, turbulence, uniqueness, and complexity in the environment [which] provide openings for organizations to strategically put forth practices or models that strike external actors as appropriate or effective, thus conferring legitimacy" (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002: 422). As a novel strategy is introduced, individuals engage in legitimising processes with members of the organisation. In order to address the research objectives and examine this process of legitimising, sustainability was selected as an emerging strategy to form the context

of this research. There are a number of reasons for this focus which will be made explicit as sustainability is defined and explored in this section.

In many respects, legitimacy theory is based on the concept of the underlying social contract: business operates in society via a social contract, expressed or implied (Shocker and Sethi, 1974). An institution such as business must constantly meet the twin tests of legitimacy and relevance "by demonstrating that society requires its services and that the groups benefiting from its rewards have society's approval" (Shocker and Sethi, 1974: 67). Traditionally, legitimacy of a business in society has been considered in terms of economic performance: as long as a firm was successful (profitable), it was rewarded with legitimacy (Patten, 1992). For example, Deephouse and Carter (2005) argued that until relatively recently, business accrued legitimacy by converting inputs efficiently into goods and services with concomitant financial outcomes, returned to owners. During the 1960's and 1970's society's perceptions of business began changing and they began to demand that business address social issues inherently related to organisations (Patten, 1992). The way in which business goes about providing those financial returns, that is the impact on society and the environment, has gained attention. Such concerns "are increasingly being integrated into firms' strategic and operational decision-making processes" (Thomas and Lamm, 2012: 192), and are increasingly being termed 'sustainability'.

In understanding the concept of 'sustainability' an exploration of its origins is warranted. Despite a longer history in ecological contexts (Lele, 1991; Zink, 2005), it is widely accepted that the application of the term 'sustainability' in a business context derived from the definition of sustainable development (Gladwin, Kennelly

and Krause, 1995; Banerjee, 2003; Hahn and Figge, 2011) which became prominent in global economics following the publication of the United Nations World Commission in Environment and Development report (UNWCED, 1987) entitled *Our Common Future*. The report included what is often referred to as the Brundtland definition of sustainable development which has been paraphrased as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Blowfield and Murray, 2011: 61). While the Brundtland definition was intended more as a challenge to government and aid policy development, it has been widely referred to in debates about the role of business (Blowfield and Murray, 2011). There has been criticism of its use and applicability in this context. For example, Banerjee (2003) argued that "the Brundtland definition is not really a definition; it is a slogan, and slogans, however pretty, do not make theory" (p. 151-152), while Lele (1991) suggested that it represented "politically expedient fuzziness" (p. 607) making it a poor basis on which to understand and operationalise sustainability in business. The term 'corporate sustainability'[2] is used most commonly to describe sustainability in a business environment, despite its meaning remaining vague, ambiguous, undefined, and often contradictory (Fergus and Rowney, 2005): "to some extent the term has become a cliché … applied to almost anything remotely related to the business processes, the society in which those processes operate, and the environment in which both processes and society are embedded" (Fergus and Rowney, 2005: 19). The key challenge has been translating from the societal-level concept of sustainable

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[2] Some authors and companies use the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) to reflect these concepts. While it may be argued that there are differences between sustainability and CSR, such differences are outwith the scope of this thesis and so for the purposes of this research they are considered substitutes.

development to the organisational-level concept of corporate sustainability (Gladwin et al., 1995; Banerjee, 2003; Bansal, 2005; Aras and Crowther, 2008; Hahn and Figge, 2011) which represents a cross-over from a macro global-level development concept based on normative principles, to a micro organisational-level business concept (Aras and Crowther, 2008; Hahn and Figge, 2011). Moreover, proponents of normative based sustainable development faced a dilemma that affects any program of political action and social change, between the urge to take strong stands on fundamental concerns and the need to gain wide acceptance and support (Lele, 1991). In order to gain that support, the business case for corporate sustainability was highlighted and in some cases championed. Academic and civil society proponents "frequently employ normative overtones and assumptions, but sometimes balance their arguments – according to the commentator, the context or the audience – with a more instrumental 'business case'" (Wheeler, Colbert and Freeman, 2003: 2). As such, the business case for sustainability was promoted to get buy-in from business, while the global benefits became positive side effects – rather than the original focus: "Thus it is safe to assume that even proponents and sympathetic practitioners risk becoming confused" (Wheeler et al., 2003: 2). It can be concluded that while there is no standardised definition of sustainability, broadly it represents the notion of organisation's reducing negative effects and increasing positive impacts on society, usually associated with social and environmental factors (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). However, it also requires balancing these with economic factors (Hahn and Figge, 2011). Beyond this, actual 'sustainability strategy' will be organisation-specific. Given the focus of this study is on the process of legitimising

an organisational strategy and not on comparing actual sustainability strategies, this broad definition is appropriate.

Many argue that the majority of sustainability literature now reflects the business case for sustainability and embraces a win-win-win paradigm (Holliday, Schmidheiny and Watts, 2002; Steger, Ionescu-Somers and Salzmann, 2007; Hahn, Figge, Pinkse and Preuss, 2010). According to this paradigm "economic, environmental and social aspects of corporate sustainability are - at least partly - in harmony with each other and management should seek to identify those cases in which economic, environmental and social corporate objectives can be achieved simultaneously" (Hahn et al., 2010: 218). However, critics argue that the complexity and interplay of the three facets of sustainability cannot be considered in isolation and that "trade-offs and conflicts between [these] aspects in corporate management and performance represent the rule rather than the exception" (Hahn et al., 2010: 218). These developments are reflected in the definitions of the term corporate sustainability such as "meeting the needs of an organisation's direct and indirect stakeholders (shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities etc.) without compromising its ability to also meet the needs of future stakeholders" (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002), and "a business approach that creates long-term shareholder value by embracing opportunities and managing risk from economic, environmental and social dimensions" (Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes, 2011). These definitions represent a relatively significant move away from the original normative concept of sustainable development. Indeed, Hahn and Figge (2011) argue that "the majority of the current approaches in research on corporate sustainability are inconsistent with the notion of sustainable development" (p. 325).

As such, while the concept of sustainability had its origins in a normative, moral concept, the literature suggests that a market, business-case based concept has emerged. This shift is supported in Bronn and Vidaver-Cohen's (2009) distinction between a strategic perspective and a moral perspective in relation to businesses adopting social initiatives. However, within the strategic perspective they further distinguish between instrumental motives and institutional motives. In particular they argue that there has been a move from instrumental motives for engaging in social initiatives, such as improving revenue or protecting existing profit levels, towards institutional motives, where companies engage in social initiatives due to institutional pressures, such as customer expectations or public scrutiny: "this new 'social conscience' among companies around the globe suggests that managers no longer see social engagement as ancillary to economic performance but rather as an integral component of corporate strategy on which they will be judged by their constituents" (Bronn and Vidaver-Cohen, 2009: 95). This ambiguity is mirrored elsewhere. Some see the trend towards sustainability as a defensive response to external forces such as stakeholder or regulatory pressures (Sharma, 2000), others regard it as proactive rent-seeking in pursuit of productivity gains, lower production costs, markets for new products or services, and enhanced brand equity (Porter and van de Linde, 1995), and others as a manifestation of the ethical values of founders and CEOs (Banerjee, 2001; Bansal and Roth, 2000). However, sceptics of this latter perspective have questioned whether the trend reflects a genuine shift in executive attitudes toward acceptance of an expanded set of fiduciary responsibilities, arguing that it is primarily a reactive strategy intended to deflect societal demands for greater accountability (Ramus and Montiel, 2005). Thomas and Lamm (2012) argue that

sustainability offers more than a simple portfolio of alternative actions to be evaluated within the framework of existing schemas; "it contradicts and challenges these schemas by proposing a new way of thinking about organizations … in other words, a new schema" (p. 193). That is, sustainability represents a strategy which reorients the aims and actions of an organisation.

This current research is not the first to consider the link between legitimacy and sustainability. Thomas and Lamm's (2012) research into managerial decision-making is based on the premise that "pre-existing schemas help to determine whether we believe an organizational innovation such as sustainability is legitimate" (Thomas and Lamm, 2012: 193), while Pava and Krausz (1997) develop a model which suggests that there is often a trade-off between criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of corporate projects for institutionalising social responsibility, and Claasen and Roloff's (2012) study addresses the question of whether CSR contributes to organisational legitimacy. However, none of these studies considers how legitimising takes place or the actions of the individual sustainability manager in this process. Castello and Lozano (2011) suggest that "understanding this legitimization process might also shed some light on how managers are currently making sense of the firm's new role in the globalized society" (p. 12) while Thomas and Lamm (2012) argue that "understanding how sustainability strategies and initiatives come to be perceived as legitimate by managers and executives is a fundamental step toward facilitating their adoption and effective implementation since attitudes such as perceived legitimacy can influence an individual's intention to act" (pp. 191-192). While this reflects a focus on legitimacy judgements made by the audience, it can be

assumed that such an understanding would include exploration of legitimising processes by individual practitioners.

This section has explored the notion of sustainability and demonstrated that it broadly represents the efforts of organisations to increase positive impacts and reduce negative effects in social and environmental areas. However, it has also outlined the emerging perspective of the social contract between business and society and how this is increasingly influencing both societies' perceptions of what is legitimate, and business's perception of their role in society (Shocker and Sethi, 1974). It has also demonstrated that sustainability often represents a novel organisational strategy which challenges the status quo and existing schema of the organisation (Thomas and Lamm, 2012). Given this, and given the lack of existing literature into the process of legitimising sustainability strategy to inform the current research objectives, it is useful to consider wider literatures within the business and management fields which may contribute to understanding the process of legitimising in a novel context. The next section examines contributions from the entrepreneurship field as well as theoretical development of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work as individual-level change-based processes which may inform understanding of individuals legitimising a novel sustainability strategy.

2.4 Legitimising in Novel Contexts

While the process of legitimising sustainability specifically has not received attention in the literature, there is evidence of the process of legitimising in other novel

contexts. By incorporating these into this review, a more rounded understanding of existing knowledge regarding the process of legitimising can be developed. Legitimacy has been widely studied in relation to entrepreneurs and new ventures, largely because it can be used strategically to increase resources and achieve growth, which is precisely what they usually lack (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). Moreover, research from the entrepreneurship field often focuses on the role of the individual actor and the issues they face in establishing legitimacy in a novel market or context (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994). As legitimacy is a crucial element in the creation and survival of new organisational forms (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) an "entrepreneur must engineer consent, using powers of persuasion and influence to overcome the skepticism and resistance of guardians of the status quo'" (Dees and Starr, 1992: 96). New organisational forms do not routinely emerge to fill latent resource opportunities: they have to acquire legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). An emerging stream of research suggests that successful entrepreneurs are not passive participants in their cultural context but, rather, are skilled cultural managers who use culture strategically to deal with the low level of credibility and legitimacy that stems from a lack of supporters and performance history (Zott and Huy, 2007). Entrepreneurs must "frame the unknown in such a way that it becomes believable" to others (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994: 651). Proponents of new organisational forms, must become "skilled cultural operators who shape interpretations of the nature and potential of their new venture to those who may supply needed resources" (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001: 549).

The entrepreneurship field provides conceptual development of the CSM legitimising strategy model, with two authors applying it in their studies. Zimmerman and Zeitz

(2002) argue that "a new venture can use conformance, selection, manipulation, and creation strategies to build legitimacy in any combination, concurrently or sequentially as fits the situation" (p. 427). Reflecting on Suchman (1995), they identify two kinds of actions (although do not preclude the existence of others) that can be taken to acquire legitimacy for the new venture: attempts to change the new venture, such as by creating a new structure, managerial team, and/or business model, and attempts to change its environment and other organisations operating within its environment, such as the strategic use of issue advertising and lobbying for change in regulations (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). In one of the first explicit recognitions of concurrent use of legitimising strategies, they suggest that the venture may first conform in order to acquire regulatory legitimacy and then try to manipulate in order to acquire normative legitimacy, or it may conform and manipulate concurrently. This is significant in the context of this current study. However, even with this development, Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) argue that "legitimacy is viewed retrospectively – that is, the survival of the organization indicates that legitimacy is present. However, studying the survival of new ventures retrospectively does not illuminate *how* new ventures acquire the legitimacy they need to survive" (p. 414, emphasis added). This supports the extension of the current study beyond just analysing legitimising strategies of conformance, selection and manipulation, to include attention to underlying individual actions. Williams Middleton (2013) studies how nascent entrepreneurs gain legitimacy through social interaction with key stakeholders. Using the CSM legitimising strategy model, she finds that conforming and selecting strategies appear to be more prevalent, particularly at the earlier part of the incubation period of the new business, while

manipulation seems to take place later. Interestingly, she identified that conforming and selecting appeared to be built into the structural aspects of the nascent entrepreneurial stage, both as processes that the entrepreneurs engage in, but also in how externals (in this case, mentor-like figures responsible for guiding the small groups of entrepreneurs in working together) encourage the individuals to negotiate rights and duties with each other and with others. She argues that underlying Suchman's (1995) generalised definition lies "a complex concept implying that legitimacy will function differently depending upon the context of intended use" (p. 5).

In addition to this focus, there is particular attention from this field into the conformance legitimising strategy. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) argue that in the early stages, legitimacy appears to be based less on technical superiority than on the entrepreneur's ability to construct an accommodation with existing cultural schemas, while novel organisational forms are most likely to become legitimated when they fit into the "pre-existing cultural beliefs, meanings, and typifications of an organisational community" (Ruef, 2000: 661). However, a number of authors take this further to explore exactly how conformance is achieved. Entrepreneurs may adjust their accounts in line with the audience to make the unfamiliar familiar (Martens, Jennings and Jennings, 2007), to disguise the radical elements (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994) or to align one's mission, identity and resources with key constituents (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). They may frame the new venture (often through metaphor and analogy) in terms that are understandable and thus legitimate (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Studies in this area find that entrepreneurs employ symbolic devices that connect new ideas to 'established cultural accounts' (Meyer

and Scott, 1983). Zott and Huy's (2007) study of entrepreneurs suggests that successful entrepreneurs bolster their venture's legitimacy by conducting symbolic actions that convey personal credibility, professional organising (e.g. appropriate offices), organisational achievement (e.g. fully functioning products/services), and the quality of stakeholder relations (e.g. prestigious stakeholders). Symbols suggest "categorizations that help people frame social situations or interpret ambiguous ones (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997), and they are important for entrepreneurs, who often work in highly uncertain contexts" (Zott and Huy, 2007: 73). Such activities are said to be reassuring to potential resource holders, and play a significant role in gaining legitimacy (O'Neil and Ucbasaran, 2011; Zott and Huy, 2007). Moreover, "some entrepreneurs appeared more skillful and imaginative than others in performing symbolic actions. They were acutely aware of the advantages of using symbols to overcome the various liabilities of creating a business" (Zott and Huy, 2007: 83).

However, this focus on conformance also raises an interesting paradox. Entrepreneurs often confront problems associated with lack of legitimacy because of the novelty and uniqueness of their ventures (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). A new venture needs legitimacy to access resources, and often gains legitimacy by conforming to existing norms. However, a new venture also often sells itself as offering something different, and so may challenge existing norms. According to the theory above which advocates conformance, such divergence should limit or prevent the new venture from accessing resources. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) argue that in constructing a legitimate identity for their enterprises, entrepreneurs strive for 'optimal

distinctiveness' (Brewer, 1991): to balance the need for strategic distinctiveness against that of normative appropriateness (Glynn and Abzug, 1998). This paradox is likely to hold true for individuals charged with legitimising a novel organisational strategy.

Focusing on the individual in this process, Suddaby et al. (2013) argue that researchers must attend to the micro-behaviour through which institutionalisation occurs. It is tempting, given the contributions from the entrepreneurship literature, to turn to institutional entrepreneurship to inform the role of the individual in institutional change. Acts of institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) involve actors "creating norms, values, beliefs, expectations, models, patterns of behavior, networks, or frames of reference consistent with an organization's identity and current practice, and then getting others to accept these norms, values and so forth" (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002: 425). Institutional entrepreneurs are individuals who take on leadership roles in institutional change efforts (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009), using what Fligstein (2001) called 'social skill' to induce others to cooperate in the pursuit of change: "institutional entrepreneurs creatively manipulate social relationships by importing and exporting cultural symbols and practices from one institutional order to another" (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008: 115). Institutional entrepreneurs must carefully craft organisational language and patterns of behaviours to extract the values, beliefs and ideas that are currently fashionable (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Because of their critical role in initiating change and persuading others to support change, Dacin, Goodstein and Scott (2002) call institutional entrepreneurs 'agents of legitimacy' (p. 47). That is, institutional

entrepreneurs use influence to persuade others of the illegitimacy of existing social arrangements and of the legitimacy of alternatives, thereby recruiting others to join them in institutional change efforts (Tost, 2011). It is widely held that institutional entrepreneurs must identify openings within their organisational field and identify opportunities within existing organising and operating processes in order to carve out a niche for their innovation (Fligstein, 1997). Tost (2011) argues that individuals will be most effective as institutional entrepreneurs if the targets of their influence are in the evaluative mode, if the targets hold the institutional entrepreneur in high esteem, or if the institutional entrepreneur can create "circumstances in which the potential followers will experience jolts or institutional contradictions that are personally relevant" (p. 705).

However, it is also argued that institutional entrepreneurship focuses on more explicit and overt efforts at producing new structures, practices, or regimes (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006), social transformation producing new logics (Thornton, 2002), or widespread adoption of innovation challenging the taken-for-granted status quo (Hinings and Greenwood, 1988), often associated with overt agency or power (Lawrence et al., 2011). In contrast, institutional work addresses a more nuanced, subtle, and day-to-day approach to influencing the institutional order undertaken by individuals with more complex agency attributes (Suddaby et al., 2013). For example, in their work in areas of extreme poverty, Marti and Mair (2009) distinguish their actors from those who are powerful and organised. They argue that actors who are "powerless, disenfranchised, and under-resourced, who seemingly have no choice other than compliance, are also doing important institutional work" (p. 101). Moreover, they rely on strategies that are more

experimental and nonaggressive, challenging denigrating myths and traditions, building provisional institutions, and navigating across institutional logics. Lawrence et al. (2011) argue that institutional work involves "physical or mental effort aimed at effecting an institution or set of institutions" (p. 53). The process of legitimising can be seen as one such effort. Institutional work addresses the "efforts of individuals … to cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play, and which give them their roles, relationships, resources, and routines" (Lawrence et al., 2011: 53). It departs from traditional institutional theory which views social actors as bystanders to a larger social dynamic (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) as well as from the 'heroic' depiction of institutional entrepreneurs who engage in an uphill battle for change (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004; Drori and Honig, 2013). Institutional work views actors as "neither cultural puppets nor superhuman agents" (Suddaby et al., 2013: 333), but focuses on ways in which they negotiate their institutional environment through "intelligent situated action" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 219). That is, it suggests "neither determinism nor heroism and is potentially sensitive to both the oppressiveness of social, cultural, and material structures, and the potential for emancipation from some of those structures some of the time" (Lawrence et al., 2011: 56). These ideas of 'intelligent situated action' and 'micro-behaviour' incorporate the process of legitimising, recognizing this process as specific, intentional, and strategic actions taken by individuals within their organisational context with the aim of gaining legitimacy for their sustainability strategy potentially by changing the institutional environment. Indeed, the CSM legitimising strategy model considers precisely such potential behaviours. Drori and

Honig (2013) argue that "understanding internal legitimacy calls for bringing the concept and ideas of institutional work to the fore" (p. 367). This is because the concepts of agency and intentionality are central components to both institutional work and legitimising (Lawrence et al., 2009; Drori and Honig, 2013).

2.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the literature relevant in addressing the research objective of uncovering the processes individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within the organisation. While there is a lack of research specifically addressing the process of internal legitimising, the CSM legitimising strategy model goes some way to depict three legitimising strategies of conform, select, and manipulate. However, there is a widespread lack of attention to the specific individual actions which underlie these strategies. In addition to this, while the progression of legitimising has been acknowledged, it has not received attention either empirically or theoretically. Nevertheless, the importance of legitimising an organisational strategy was demonstrated, and the applicability of this in a sustainability context outlined. Sustainability reflects an altered social contract for the organisation and thus provides fertile grounds to consider the legitimising processes and choices enacted by individuals. This thesis now turns to address issues of methodology, and in particular to develop specific research questions and data collection and analysis designs to address the research objectives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the research objectives and associated literatures. This study is examining the processes an individual undertakes to legitimise sustainability to other members of the organisation. While some limited literature exists in this area, it can be considered an emerging area of scholarship. These factors contribute to decisions regarding the research design and methodology. However, when approaching the task of research design, a methodical and comprehensive approach ensures all relevant research issues, options, and contextual elements are incorporated into subsequent choices. As such, this chapter first presents a research design framework to depict the way in which the researcher approached the research objectives. By populating each aspect of the framework throughout the rest of the chapter the researcher aims to both communicate detail regarding research design choices, and to demonstrate the appropriateness of such choices to achieve the research objectives.

3.1 Developing a Research Design Framework

This section presents the research design framework adopted for this study. A research design framework is primarily an aid to research design development. It is an "integrated statement of and justification for the more technical decisions involved in planning a research project" (Blaikie, 2000: 21). This ensures not only that all important aspects are present at the research design stage, but also that they are not forgotten during the research implementation stage. It is also a useful tool for understanding and demonstrating the links between and among the different

components of research design (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Finally, it is communication tool, used in this thesis report to demonstrate the researcher's incorporation of all relevant aspects of research design into a professional research plan. The research design framework is summarised in Figure 3.1.

ETHICS		
CONTEXT →	**CORE ELEMENTS** →	**CHOICES**

CONTEXT	**CORE ELEMENTS**	**CHOICES**
Motives: - Personal - Academic - Social	Topic/Problem	**Research Strategies**: 1. Inductive 2. Deductive 3. Abductive 4. Retroductive
	Question/Objective	**Questions**: 1. What/Why/How
Restrictions: - Feasibility - Audience	Strategy	**Data**: - Primary/Secondary/Tertiary - Qualitative/Quantitative
	Concept/Theory/Model	
Philosophy: - Ontology - Epistemology	Data Source/Collection	**Population**: - Probability/Non-probability - Single/Multi-stage
	Data Analysis	**Timing**: 1. Cross-sectional 2. Longitudinal 3. Historical
Literature: - Theories - Models - Empirical		**Analysis**: - Qualitative/quantitative - Method

Figure 3.1: Research Design Framework
(Source: Adapted from Blaikie, 2000: 33)

The research design framework depicted above comprises three main research issues – context, core elements, choices – all underpinned by the fundamental issue of ethics which should be incorporated in all three stages. Researchers must begin by considering the context of the research, including motives, restrictions, philosophy and literature. Understanding these issues then enables the core elements to be uncovered including the topics, questions, and contributing theory. These may be considered the options available to the researcher. Finally, choices must be made in relation to these options. By depicting these stages visually, the researcher can communicate the progression of research. Moreover, while some of these issues may remain tacit in some research reports - for example, journal articles with space restrictions - making them explicit in the context of a thesis report demonstrates the researcher's ability to grasp the fundamental issues essential to quality social science research. This chapter will now populate and discuss each aspect of the research design framework, starting with ethics.

3.2 Populating the Research Design Framework

3.2.1 Ethics

While this proposed research design does not include elements that require deep ethical considerations – such as may be the case when conducting social scientific experiments, or when working with vulnerable respondents including children or those with diminished capacity – it is still necessary to consider the ethical implications of the research and to make these explicit. Far from being an after-thought, consideration of ethical issues should form a central and overarching element of a research design framework (Lindorff, 2007; Booth, Colomb and

Williams, 2008).   Moreover, it has become the researcher's obligation to convince their various stakeholders that the work being carried out is of value, and undertaken with principles of integrity.   Throughout each component of the research design framework ethical considerations were included, in particular in components including contact with participants.   The researcher ensured that interviewees felt freely able to involve themselves in the research (or not), and were provided with sufficient information as to what was expected of them and with how their data would be utilised (Mason, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2007). The researcher was also careful to ensure that, after the data was collected, it was only used in the ways agreed. In general, all aspects of the research were approached with issues of integrity and consideration for others as central components.

3.2.2 Context

The Context element of the research design framework includes what may be considered either drivers or pre-existing factors around which the research must be moulded. However, more broadly it allows for a reflexive element to be introduced as the researcher considers how her thinking and approach developed and evolved prior to bedding down specific research questions. The four contextual factors in the research design framework are motives, restrictions, philosophy, and literature. As the literature has already been addressed in the previous chapter, this section will explore motives, restrictions, and philosophy.

Motives

It is useful to briefly address research motives via a reflexivity exercise in order to identify the researcher's underlying motives. This may be a potential area of bias: if a researcher has specific or preconceived underlying intentions, this may compromise the research study. These may remain tacit, at the subconscious level of the researcher (Hertz, 1997). However, by identifying and paying attention to the presence of motives, such potential bias can be mitigated. Furthermore, by stating the researcher's background, personal motives, and goals for undertaking the research in advance audiences are better informed to make their own judgements. In order to appropriately reveal, locate, and circumvent potential bias, the researcher acknowledges that her perspective is shaped by – and may be limited by – past experience (Reinharz, 1997). This is of particular note in relation to the sustainability aspect of this research which can represent an emotive and normatively-charged area of study (Gladwin et al., 1995). The researcher has positive emotions relating to 'sustainability', and personal opinions relating to how businesses 'should' behave. While this is noted and raised, the researcher was particularly careful to avoid this becoming an issue either consciously or subconsciously in research design, data collection, or data analysis. However, it is acknowledged that underlying personal, academic, and applied motives driving this research may play an influencing role, for example in affecting how questions are asked or how the data is interpreted and analysed (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). By being transparent and explicitly aware of these factors, potential bias can be mitigated.

Restrictions

The second element of the Context component of the research design framework relates to research restrictions including audience and feasibility. This element is distinct from the 'limitations' of the actual data sampling, collection and analysis, which are identified in a subsequent section of this chapter. Rather, this component encourages researchers to make explicit, in advance of designing research, the restrictions which may exist in undertaking such research (Blaikie, 2000). This may include funding received which directs certain research designs, audience expectations especially as regards politically sensitive topics, or more simple feasibility issues relating to time restrictions or access to necessary software (Booth et al., 2008). Such restrictions may have implications for research design choices. However, given this research formed part of a doctoral research programme, no such restrictions were identified. In particular, the research topic was freely chosen and was not determined by other audiences or political restrictions from groups such as Universities or funding bodies. As such there was no need to take their expectations into consideration. Moreover, the doctoral programme provided sufficient time, and the university provided appropriate software access, such that these considerations were not significant restrictions on the research design.

Philosophy

All social scientific research rests – whether explicitly acknowledged or not – on underlying assumptions about the basis of knowledge. The research design framework refers to this debate as 'philosophy' and focuses on ontological and epistemological approaches to social enquiry. Social scientific research comprises

different assumptions which address basic issues of knowledge, truth, progress, reality, causality, imagination, and values (Bryman, 2008). In contrast with natural sciences research, where knowledge is viewed as 'objective', social sciences research is often regarded as 'subjective'. As such, while developing knowledge from a natural sciences perspective assumes that 'truth' can be described by scientific explanations which apply to all situations, in social sciences the element of freewill is assumed to influence explanations and predictions of the social objects under investigation (Weber, 1997 [1947]). When attempting to generate meaning in social sciences, researchers must be aware that social objects make decisions about their actions which may be influenced by social, institutional and historical processes (Schoenberger, 1991). This complicates the ability to both develop knowledge and to ensure that the knowledge obtained is the best explanation possible.

Within social scientific research these factors are explained and resolved by referencing the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions. Ontology is defined as a theoretical consideration concerning what is 'real', while epistemology addresses what can be 'counted' as 'knowledge' or 'fact' (Crotty, 1998). That is, ontology is concerned with what is the nature of social reality, and epistemology is concerned with how this can be known (Crotty, 1998). While ontology and epistemology are often addressed separately, assumptions about what is real have implications for how knowledge can be obtained, and vice versa (Williams and May, 1996) and so it is difficult to discuss these assumptions separately (Crotty, 1998).

Philosophies of research are traditionally divided into positivism and interpretivism. Positivists view social science akin to natural science - a 'truth' exists and it is the researcher's role to discover that truth. Interpretivists believe that there is no 'truth' independent of an individual's perspective. That is, processes, events, and phenomena do not exist other than in an individual's perception of these events (Blaikie, 2007). Critical realism is often seen as a middle way between positivism and interpretivism introducing a more nuanced version of realist ontology (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013). In line with positivists, critical realists assume that the ultimate objects of scientific enquiry exist and act independently of scientists and their activity. However, critical realism also observes that social arrangements are the products of material but unobservable structures of relations (Bhaskar, 1978). As such, critical realism does not aim to uncover general laws, but to understand and explain the underlying mechanisms, which are not usually observable (Bhaskar, 1978), necessitating the examination of processes that go beyond surface appearances (Bryman, 2008). Critical realists "use perceptions of empirical events [those that can be observed or experienced] to identify the mechanisms that give rise to those events" (Volkoff, Strong and Elmes, 2007: 835). That is, an ontological focus on what produces events or experiences, rather than the events or experiences themselves.

Critical realists believe that even though there is one reality it does not follow that researchers have immediate access to it, or that they are able to observe and realize its every aspect (Zachariadis et al., 2013). As such, critical realists approach research by searching for the reality that underlies situations, events, or observations, while

remaining cognisant of the fact that their ability to actually reach that 'truth' is impeded. This research adopts a critical realist perspective to the investigation of processes of legitimising. Put simply, the researcher is interested in the underlying reality of the process of legitimising, but accepts that her ability that reality is impeded. By further exploring the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research philosophy, its appropriateness will become apparent. Moreover, by then introducing the associated research strategy of retroduction, the foundation will be laid to build a research design capable of addressing the research objectives.

Critical realism combines a 'depth realist' ontology with an associated 'neo-realist' epistemology (Blaikie, 2007). Ontologically, a critical realist perspective suggests a realist world view which recognises that knowledge is typically limited by perceptions and experiences (Tsang and Kwan, 1999). That is, it extends positivism to argue that "reality consists not only of events that are experienced but also of events that occur whether experienced or not, and of structures and mechanisms that produce these events" (Blaikie, 2007: 151). Within the depth realist ontology, reality consists of three levels: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar, 1978). Lopez (2003) describes these as: "the empirical (those events which we are able to capture empirically), the actual (those events that do happen though they may go unnoticed), and the real, which includes the previous two as well as the realm of potential events that the interaction of different types of causal mechanisms may produce" (p. 77). Put another way, the 'empirical' are the experiences of the social actor, the 'actual' are the events as they actually happened (not necessarily as they were experienced), and the 'real' are the generative mechanisms (structural and social

contexts) that naturally exist (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013). This has been described as a stratified open system ontology (Cruikshank, 2011). It draws a distinction between the realm of observable events and the realm of underlying causal laws which are not directly observable. It also argues that the underlying causal laws interact in contingent ways to produce change at the level of observable events (Cruickshank, 2011). The aim of science based on this ontology is to explain observable phenomena with reference to underlying structures and mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1978). That is, to develop knowledge by establishing theories to explain the workings of causal mechanisms that operate in the stratified open system (Cruickhank, 2011). Given that the research topic comprises an investigation at an individual level of analysis within a business context in 'real life' situations, the critical realist point of view is an appropriate approach to address the inherent challenge which lies in seeking to say something meaningful about a complex generally 'disorderly' situation (Robson, 2002). Moreover, this ontological position informs the research strategy of retroduction explained below, as it reflects the researcher's search for underlying mechanisms and approach to extending existing theory.

The depth realist ontology prevalent in critical realism is augmented by a neo-realist epistemology which focuses on locating the structures or mechanisms that have produced the pattern or relationship that has been observed. In neo-realism "a scientific theory is a description of structures and mechanisms which causally generate the observable phenomena, a description of which enables us to explain them" (Keat and Urry, 1975: 5). As such, neo-realism rejects empiricism in that establishing regularities of structures or mechanisms is only the beginning of the

process. Such structures or mechanisms are only *tendencies*. For these tendencies to be enacted the *circumstances* must be favourable (Blaikie, 2007). That is, while the principle aim of critical realism is to understand actual processes and events which result from complex interactions of causal mechanisms in the domain of the real (Ayers, 2011), mechanisms retain potential to yield effects even if that potential is not activated. As such, even when mechanisms are activated, their effects may be counteracted by other mechanisms, and thus not observable. The extent to which causal mechanisms are activated, not activated, or counteracted is not assured, but is contingent on complex interactions among causal mechanisms (Ayers, 2011). As such, critical realism adopts a view of reality as an open and complex system where other mechanisms and conditions also exist (Zachariadis et al., 2013). This point has important implications for a critical realists' pursuit of generalisability. Critical realists posit that because empirical events are manifestations of the mechanisms that caused them, it cannot be assumed that where a relationship between events is observed these mechanisms *necessarily* follow or can be attributed with causality (Tsoukas, 1989). This is because "the same relationship may appear but not involve exactly the same mechanisms, or may not appear, but this does not imply that the specific mechanisms were absent because they might have been counterbalanced by the presence of other mechanisms" (Zachariadis et al., 2013: 861). Within critical realism, "generalizations are valid when we are confident that similar or other events that arise (or may arise) in other contexts are caused by the same generative mechanisms that led to the actual events in our research domain" (Zachariadis et al., 2013: 861). It is important to note that the critical realists are not focussed on proving causality (that C caused E), but on understanding the process and conditions

under which C could have cause E, whether it actually did or not (Sayer, 1992). This is relevant in the context of the outcome and process distinction in this thesis. The research objectives focused on the process of legitimising, and make no empirical investigation of the outcome of legitimacy (although see discussion section regarding sustainability integration categorisation). Such a focus ensures the researcher remains ontologically and epistemologically consistent. That is, the ontological and epistemological positions characterized under the critical realism banner require an acceptance of an underlying reality which is not directly accessible, and the search for structures or mechanisms to explain tendencies or potentials, rather than to prove causality. Put more directly, the researcher believes that patterns of legitimising can reflect underlying tendencies associated with this process and has developed research objectives and questions to uncover such patterns.

3.2.3 Choices

In addition to the Context components, the research design framework comprises Core Elements and associated Choices (refer to Figure 3.1). While the Core Elements cover more general options and the Choices are more specific, to avoid repetition, this section will explore these using the Choices categories. The first two choices relate to the research strategy and the research questions which both evolve from considerations of research philosophy and research objectives. These will be explored below. Following this two dedicated sections will address the issues associated with data collection and analysis given the significance and technical complexity of these choices.

Research Strategies

Four research strategies are available to researchers when approaching a research design: the more traditional deductive and inductive strategies and the more recently revived abductive and retroductive strategies (Blaikie, 2007). The traditional research strategies of deduction and induction are based on contrasting styles of reasoning. Deduction moves from the general – or the theory – and tests this within a specific context. Induction takes data from a specific context and develops theory (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Importantly, despite their differences, both induction and deduction are linear in nature, moving logically from one idea to another. However, deficiencies in these traditional research strategies have been raised, leading to the reclamation of two alternative forms of reasoning which have existed for centuries (Pierce, 1934): retroduction and abduction. Importantly, both these forms of reasoning are based on more cyclical or spiral processes.

The research objectives and existing literature suggest that both deduction and induction would be problematic for the current study. While this research takes place in a relatively fertile area of legitimacy theory, two novel aspects of the research exist: its focus on the internal organisational environment, and its focus on the process of legitimising. These novel approaches to the legitimacy area make a dedicated deductive strategy problematic because the hypotheses or propositions would need to hinge on extrapolations or assumptions from the existing literature which neglects the specific process of internal legitimising. As such, literature from legitimacy theory at the organisational level, rather than the intra-organisational level, would need to be used to develop hypotheses or propositions. This may affect

the reliability of these propositions as well as, importantly, limit the possibility of the data 'speaking' to unexpected or unpredicted angles, areas or aspects.

While deduction can prove or disprove theory, induction is useful for theory extension and development. However, a dedicated inductive strategy also seems problematic, because while the specific focus on internal legitimising is novel, there is some relevant theory in the area of legitimising, albeit largely at a conceptual stage of development. Adopting a 'blank slate' approach reflective of inductive work precludes the proactive use and incorporation of extant models which may assist with the research objectives of uncovering underlying mechanisms and processes. The retroductive approach addresses both of these concerns. In addition to this, in the context of a critical realist perspective, 'simple' choices such as a deductive or inductive research strategy are problematic. This is because the complexity associated with uncovering mechanisms requires a similarly more complex non-linear research strategy.

Retroduction is the research strategy most closely associated with a critical realist perspective (Bhaskar, 1978). Retroduction as a form of reasoning was explored by Pierce (1934) and revived as a research strategy by Harré (1961, 1970, 1972) and later Bhaskar (1978). Retroduction, can be contrasted to other research strategies such as deduction or induction, as not simply developing specific claims from general premises nor general claims from specific premises (Downward and Mearman, 2007), but the "mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them"

(Sayer, 1992: 107). That is, retroduction is used to explain how processes work (Ayers, 2011). Retroduction relies on the 'logic of discovery' (Blaikie, 2007) which is referred to by scholars as creative imagination (Hempel, 1966), intuition (Medawer, 1969), guesswork (Feynman, 1967), or the free creation of our minds (Popper, 1972). It involves the use of existing theory or models, applied to a context not to 'test' them, but to develop and extend them so that better reflect the underlying mechanisms of the empirical observation.

Retroduction "[is] not a random process of casting around for ideas: it [is] methodical and thoughtful" (Blaikie, 2007: 59). To explain observable phenomena, researchers must discover appropriate structures and mechanisms. As these structures and mechanisms are unavailable to observation a model of them may be used. If this model were proved correct, the phenomena would be explained (this is akin to deduction). By applying the model however, the aim is to then determine further consequences based on the empirical reality. Researchers are aiming to identify "how such connections occur, to abstract from context-dependent data to capture the not-directly-observable causal powers and structures that generate observable phenomena and events" (Leca and Naccache, 2006: 635). These further consequences emerge from the data in a more inductive manner (Bhaskar, 1979). The relevance of these contending or extending mechanisms must then be investigated, their features established, and the model revised (Blaikie, 2007). Bhaskar (1979) conceived this a 'peeling the layers off the proverbial onion' (Blaikie, 2007): as one set of structures and mechanisms is postulated, tested, and 'revealed', others at a 'lower' level go through the same process.

Retroduction is closely linked to the use interviews as a source of data. This is because of the importance of the analysis of lay accounts in critical realism. Lay accounts are the perspectives provided by those actors who are a part of the empirical event. Archer (1995) explains that critical realism views society as "inseparable from its human components because the very existence of society depends in some way upon our activities" (p. 1). As such, a central tenet in critical realism is that social phenomena can be explained through revealing the mechanisms that produce those phenomena (Collier, 1994). Harré and Secord (1972) demonstrate the importance of these accounts to retroductive reasoning:

> *At the heart of the explanation of social behaviour is the identification of the meanings that underlie it. Part of the approach to discovering them involves the obtaining of accounts – the actor's own statements about why he [sic] performed the acts in question, what social meanings he gave to the action of himself and others. These must be collected and analysed, often leading to the discovery of the rules that underlie the behaviour (pp. 9-10)*

It is also important to note that this analysis enables the researcher to move from the empirical to the actual to the real. That is, from lay accounts to sociological conceptualisations (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013). This is a key part of retroductive reasoning, and what was referred to earlier as 'the logic of discovery' (Blaikie, 2007). However, such progression must not become 'sociological imperialism' (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013), but must be transparent, logical, and defendable. Such

issues are addressed in detail in the data analysis section of this chapter with specific examples of this logic of discovery which forms the heart of retroductive reasoning to uncover underlying mechanisms and processes.

Questions

As stated in the first chapter, the overarching research objective is to uncover the processes that individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within the organisation. This objective is consistent with the critical realist approach which aims to access an underlying reality, while being aware of impediments to such access. Moreover, it reflects the focus on uncovering the process which may inform patterns, rather than proving causality. In employing the retroductive research strategy, existing models can be used to understand the empirical context. They are then be revised or extended as indicated by the data. The literature review demonstrated why the CSM legitimising strategy model is considered the most appropriate model in the existing literature depicting the process of legitimising. As such, this research will begin by examining the existence of the legitimising strategies proposed in this model as processes for legitimising sustainability within the organisation.

Research Question 1: What legitimising strategies are used in the process of legitimising sustainability?

Importantly, while much extant literature touches on the interrelationship between these strategies, no empirical evidence exists to demonstrate such interrelationships.

By way of extending the CSM legitimising strategy model, this will then be explored.

Research Question 2: How do legitimising strategies interrelate, both concurrently and temporally?

In further extending this model, the research must go beyond the posited legitimising strategies and uncover the specific actions individuals employ when enacting these strategies. This is in keeping with the retroductive research strategy and employs the logic of discovery, akin to inductive analysis.

Research Questions 3: What legitimising actions underlie the legitimising process?

Given the aim of retroductive reasoning is to develop a model which better reflects the underlying mechanisms of empirical events, it is important to link these two research findings by examining the relationship between these legitimising strategies and the underlying actions.

Research Question 4: How do legitimising strategies and legitimising actions interrelate?

Collecting data to answer each of these four research questions will enable the researcher to address the objective of uncovering the processes that individuals

undertake in legitimising sustainability within the organisation. It is to this issue of data collection that this thesis now turns.

3.3 Data Collection

Having established the research philosophy of critical realism, the research strategy of retroduction, and the research questions outlined in the previous section it is necessary to develop a data collection approach that is able to appropriately and comprehensively address these questions. In particular, the collection methods must produce trustworthy and rigorous data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This section explores technical issues associated with data sources and sampling, piloting of the data collection tool of semi-structured interviewing, and the process of primary data collection. It then turns to limitations associated with the data collection methodology as well as describing how the researcher mitigated these limitations.

3.3.1 Data Collection Methodology

Understanding the process of legitimising requires examining accounts from those undertaking the legitimising process themselves, making the individual the unit of analysis. A qualitative research design was used incorporating semi-structured interviews. This is in keeping with the retroductive reasoning and the importance of lay accounts of empirical events from actors involved in those events. This section will describe issues of sampling, piloting, and the primary interviews themselves.

Sample

The sampling strategy chosen was neither statistical nor purely subjective, but theoretically grounded and purposive (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2005). Respondents were chosen based on their appropriateness to address theoretical concepts under investigation and to meet the study's research aims (Davidsson, 2008) and so were personally involved in the process of legitimising sustainability within the organisation. To ensure sufficient seniority and so sufficient experience of legitimising sustainability, individuals were identified who held a 'Head of Sustainability' position or equivalent. In two cases a more junior person was put forward in place of the 'Head'. Interviews were conducted and, on reflection, it was felt that their views contained useful and valid information and so were included in the analysis. There were no restrictions on geography, industry, or company size, although given the senior position targeted very small companies were unlikely to be included because they were unlikely to have such a resource. Potential respondents were identified through the researcher's professional network, LinkedIN connections, and LinkedIn searches of relevant job titles. While use of the researcher's professional networks may introduce a selection bias, none of the respondents were known personally or had extensive connections to the researcher.

All potential respondents were emailed requesting participation. The emails indicated that the broad aim of the study was to explore corporate sustainability, but did not provide further detail. They were also informed that interviews would be anonymous and non-attributable. A template of the email which was sent to prospective candidates is presented in Appendix 1. A total of 122 potential

participants were emailed, with a final sample of 51 practitioners interviewed. Appendix 2 provides a summary of all respondents with their title, location, and industry, as well as allocated respondent number.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviewing typically involves the researcher asking questions and receiving responses from the participant(s) (Robson, 2002). Given the research objectives and types of respondents, the semi-structured questionnaire was the preferred approach. An unstructured interview approach was rejected because it was deemed overly informal, with limited ability for the researcher to guide the conversation. There is a danger that it could lead to difficulties in comparing results and issues with data reliability, interpretation, and analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). While a fully structured discussion provides a clear and efficient use of time and focus on pre-arranged topics, it presents a lack of flexibility for both respondent and researcher. Consequently, the semi-structured questionnaire was the preferred approach as a flexible 'middle-way'. Semi-structured interviews were selected to ensure direct discussion of relevant topics and to achieve equivalent data (Eisenhardt, 1989), but also to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 1). It allows both respondents and researcher a certain amount of leeway and freedom to take the discussion in directions they choose (Schoenberger, 1991). Semi-structured interviews present a guideline to ensure that key areas are discussed, while concurrently remaining sufficiently flexible to allow modifications based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most

interesting and appropriate. This also has the advantage of matching the respondents' time constraints, as well as additionally better meeting their expectations of an interview discussion. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are recommended for exploring more complicated topics, where different interpretations or issues under study may exist, or where the researcher is studying issues of change and complexity (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). The semi-structured nature of this data collection allows for changes in question wording, omission or addition or questions, explanation by the interviewer, and differing explanations by the interviewee. This flexibility serves to allow better insight to emerge (Schoenberger, 1991).

Interviews involved conversations with non-directive questions, rather than directed questions derived from theory (Harris, 2000; Schreier, 2012). The interview schedule was designed to explore and unravel the issues and the thinking of the interviewees themselves in as non-directive a way as possible (Yin, 1994; Harris, 2000), and allow unforeseen themes to emerge. An interview schedule template is presented in Appendix 3. Other researchers addressing similar research topics used a similar research design. Claasen and Roloff (2012) conducted 41 semi-structured stakeholder interviews to explore whether CSR contributes to organisational legitimacy, while O'Dwyer et al. (2011) conducted 14 semi-structured interviews in order to explore attempts at securing legitimacy of sustainability assurance statements with different stakeholders.

Pilot Interviews

Three pilot interviews were conducted in April 2012, nine months prior to the start of primary data collection. These interviews took place face to face with Heads of Sustainability at three large UK supermarkets. The purpose of these interviews was to tease out some of the theoretical concepts being explored in an applied environment (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Primarily this was a 'sense-check' to ensure that data relating to the concepts being explored could be effectively collected through interviews with Heads of Sustainability. It also provided a valuable opportunity to test interview questions, as well as provide the primary researcher with interview experience especially as regards exploratory questions beyond the interview schedule, very relevant in a semi-structured interview context. None of the data from the pilot interviews was included in the final sample, and none of these interviewees were re-interviewed in the primary data collection phase preventing possible contamination from those pilot interviewees who were already aware of the interview focus (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

Primary Data Collection

Primary data interviews were conducted face to face where possible, or by telephone where not, between January and April 2013. At the beginning of each interview, interviewees were asked if it was permissible to record the interview. It was explained that this was being used to enhance the accuracy of the interview record, to allow more scope for probing by the interviewer during the interview, and to contribute to more detailed subsequent analysis. All interviewees but two responded

positively and these were recorded on an MP3 player. In those interviews where permission was not granted, extensive notes were taken.

At the beginning of each interview, interviewees were assured that the study was being undertaken independently and for academic research purposes only, and were reminded that all data collected would be anonymised and non-attributable. Where appropriate and welcome, time was taken at the beginning of each interview to establish a rapport with each interviewee by discussing unrelated topics. However, if the researcher felt that the interviewee was keen to get started, this was done promptly. This ensured that the interviewee was at ease with the process either because they wanted the time to establish rapport, or because they wanted to focus on the task at hand. While a semi-structured interview schedule was used, the sequence in which issues were addressed varied throughout the different interviews (O'Dwyer et al., 2011). Detailed notes were taken throughout all interviews and, after each interview finished, reflections and issues for probing future interviews were noted (O'Dwyer et al., 2011) adhering to the '24-hour rule' to ensure valid recall (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). The amount of data collected from each participant varied because of different areas of interest, extent of answers, and interest or depth of prior thought on the topics, as well as the fact that some respondents had only reserved a limited time slot for the interview. Average length of the interview was approximately 50 minutes with the shortest interview lasting 20 minutes and the longest 75 minutes. Respondents were labelled 1-51 to preserve personal and firm anonymity. Recorded interviews were transcribed in full by the researcher. These transcriptions, along with the notes from the two interviews not recorded, were then imported into Nvivo.

3.3.2 Potential Data Collection Limitations

While this methodology holds a number of strengths, there are also limitations. It is an appropriate methodology for generating insight and expanding understanding because it provides a depth of data generated through the semi-structured interview, and a breadth of respondents with a high sample size for such qualitative work. Moreover, it is appropriate given it investigates constructs that are multidimensional and are difficult to measure in their full-complexity (Claasen and Roloff, 2012). However, a number of specific limitations exist. These include issues of sample choice, various aspects of response bias, the cross-sectional nature of the research, and the important consideration of reliability and validity. These limitations will be explored in turn.

Sample Choice

The sample includes only practitioners, that is, those undertaking the legitimising process. An alternative research strategy could have developed a 'matched-sample' approach, for example matching the practitioner undertaking the legitimising process, with the decision-maker and/or the employees, to whom they are trying to legitimise sustainability. This would provide a perspective not only of the practitioners' view of the legitimising process, but also the perspective of the 'legitimisee' (for want of a better term) and, with appropriate metrics developed, potentially provided results of the subsequent outcome of legitimacy. While this is a valid research design, it focuses on an extended research question, namely the effectiveness of the process undertaken. The research objectives of this study focus

on understanding the specific process of legitimising in the context of sustainability. Future research may address the question of effectiveness, and indeed this would be a valuable contribution. But in the interest of staying focussed on making a specific contribution to the notable gap in the legitimacy literature on the process of legitimising, only legitimisers were included in the sample. Given the foundational nature of this research into the novel construct of internal legitimising, such a specific focus is appropriate.

Response Bias

A second notable limitation of this research design is faced by all researchers undertaking qualitative research involving interview participants: potential response bias. Responses are based on an individual's own perceptions or interpretations. These are likely to be influenced by their own understanding of the constructs under study, by past experiences, and by their own ability to explain their processes and actions, or lack of conscious awareness of their processes (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). Interviewees may choose not to reveal or discuss an aspect of the topic that the researcher is pursuing (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). This may be an active choice, or a subconscious concealment and may happen for a number of different reasons. The most common responses biases which may have occurred in this research are explored below, together with detail about how this potential bias was mitigated by the researcher.

One bias may occur where the respondent provides an answer they perceive as socially desirable (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The outcome of this may be that "the

interviewee provides a partial 'picture' of the situation that casts himself or herself in a 'socially desirable' role…" (Saunders et al., 2007: 318). There are two potential manifestations of this in the current research. Given the respondents are employees of a company, they may feel the need to 'toe the company line' as regards their opinions and comments (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). This was primarily mitigated through individuals being assured that interviews were anonymous and non-attributable, either to the individual or to the company. Secondly, given this research was taking place within the normatively-charged area of sustainability (Gladwin et al., 1995) interviewees may feel the need to overplay the normative aspects of how they legitimise sustainability, especially if they have strong personal beliefs about sustainability issues. In this research context, it is likely that this bias is linked to another bias related to acquiescence, where respondents provide answers they think the interviewer wants to hear (Bryman and Bell, 2007). These biases were mitigated by providing limited information to the interviewees in advance regarding the specific nature of research. As such, while the interviewee was aware that the research related to corporate sustainability, they weren't aware that the researcher was specifically interested in how they personally legitimised sustainability. This meant that they were less likely to enter the interview with preconceived notions about the 'message' that they wanted to deliver. In addition to this, the researcher used non-judgemental questions and a neutral tone when conducting the interview (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993), and avoided projecting personal views (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). However, this must be mediated by the fact that more active approaches to interviewing often get the interviewee to be more open and discussant (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). The semi-structured non-directive nature of the

interview used open questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002) enabling it to progress as a 'conversation' rather than an 'interrogation'. As such, developing a dialogue was important. The researcher used her judgement to walk this line between dialogue in active interviewing and mitigating response biases.

A related, but distinct bias may be termed mistaken attribution. This is related to acquiescence or social desirability, in that the respondent overplays a certain aspect of legitimising, but is distinct as it refers more commonly to subconsciously mistaking their depiction of this process. It may occur where interviewees report what they believe they have been doing to legitimise sustainability, rather than what they actually have been doing in practice (Dean and Sharfman, 1993; Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). Without observation-based research to determine actual practices, this is difficult to overcome. However, attempts were made at mitigating this by including specific questions to 'test' responses. As an example, individuals were asked how the financial crisis affected their legtimising processes, or asked to explain the specific steps for sustainability strategy approval. This allowed the researcher to identify potential inconsistencies relating to the interviewee's responses and their actual behaviour and actions when legitimising sustainability.

The final form of bias relates to post-rationalization, common where interviewees are asked to provide retrospective accounts of historical incidents. While this can create errors in interviewee recall of historical events (Glick et al., 1990), it can also lead to interviewees adding their own judgement or interpretation into the narratives in an attempt at post-rationalization (Flynn and Du, 2012). While bias is more concerning in research attempting to establish longitudinal relationships, it is mentioned here

because even in this cross-sectional research (which itself is critiqued below), interviewees were asked to recall how they legitimised sustainability in the past. Mitigation of this bias was addressed by asking for detail from historical accounts, and for contextual factors associated with past behaviours to improve recall.

Cross Sectional

As mentioned above, a potential limitation of the research design is its cross-sectional approach with all interviews conducted at one point in time (Bryman, 2008). The dynamic nature of the concept of legitimising and the context of sustainability indicates a longitudinal study may yield useful results (Ruspini, 2000). However, given the foundational nature of this research it was decided to focus on one point in time and use interviewee recall to determine prior processes and interviewee categorisation to determine progression. A longitudinal research design provides a very tempting option to augment the current research results in the future, especially given the findings related to temporal progression.

Reliability and Validity

Related to issues of bias, the two mainstays of social research quality relate to reliability and validity. In qualitative research, reliability is concerned with whether alternative researchers would reveal similar information (Schoenberger, 1991; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Validity concerns whether or not the data measures what it is supposed to measure: how closely it resembles 'true' reality (Schoenberger, 1991). There is a debate over whether reliability and validity are entirely compatible goals (Schoenberger, 1991) particularly in a qualitative context (Briggs, 1986). That

is, if an interview schedule and sample is designed such that it is highly reliable – standardised questions are used so that results could be duplicated by other researchers – this could impact the results validity – data may not reflect the 'true' reality, particularly because comprehensive and detailed elucidation of the individual's perspective may be inaccessible (Schoenberger, 1991). Indeed, as Sykes (1991) notes "The main reason for the potential superiority of qualitative approaches for obtaining information is that the flexible and responsive interaction which is possible between interviewer and respondent(s) allows meanings to be probed, topics to be covered from a variety of angles and questions to be made clear to respondents" (p. 8). This observation implicitly explores the potential incompatibility of reliability and validity. This debate has more fundamental roots, asking whether qualitative social science research should be expected to meet the more quantitative measures such as reliability and validity (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Zachariadis et al., 2013). Some have proposed that such data should be evaluated based on 'trustworthiness', 'rigorousness', and 'quality' (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Welsh, 2002). While this may be more than a simple semantic debate, given the majority of literature on qualitative methods continues to use the terms reliability and validity these will be used here, while remaining cognisant of potential incompatibilities.

Semi-structured interviews have been charged with questions regarding validity and reliability of the information obtained (Schoenberger, 1991; Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). In particular, the lack of standardisation of semi-structured interviews raises concerns about reliability, while the ability of the researcher to gain access to

participants' knowledge and experiences and then infer meaning has raised questions of validity (Saunders et al., 2007). These are both data collection and data analysis concerns (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). Addressing the reliability concerns, it is argued that in research designs such as this, findings are not necessarily intended to be repeatable since they reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation which may be subject to change (Saunders et al., 2007). The value of these methods is derived from the flexibility that is available to explore these complex and changing situations (Schoenberger, 1991). Moreover, because of the more in-depth and personal nature of qualitative research "it would not make much sense to repeat your data collection at a later point in time … [and] also, because context is so important … it would not even be possible to exactly repeat a data collection process" (Schreier, 2012: 26). While issues of validity are closely linked to a number of response bias issues that have already been addressed, they also arise within the analysis process in relation to coding frames and researchers inferring meaning from raw data (Angen, 2000). These issues will be explored in the data analysis section which follows.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis used a modified version of content analysis to code interview transcripts, which was supported through the use of Nvivo software. Issues associated with these choices are now outlined.

3.4.1 Use of Software

All transcribed interviews (and the two interviews that were noted but not transcribed) were imported into Nvivo computer software. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as Nvivo is a tool developed to assist data analysis allowing researchers to combine themes and further arrange and organise them into hierarchical structures (Schreier, 2012). An important debate has emerged regarding the use of CAQDAS (Welsh, 2002). Proponents argue that CAQDAS facilitates an accurate and transparent data analysis process that aids organisation, categorization and searching functions (Smyth, 2006). This allows for in-depth exploration of data including comparison between transcriptions to identify dominant and subsidiary themes (Schreier, 2012), a more flexible, iterative approach to data analysis (Richardson, 2006), and contributes to a study's confirmability, dependability, and auditability (Smyth, 2006). CAQDAS has been linked to benefits of speed, rigour, and consistency (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira and Santos, 2013; Neri and Kroll, 2003), and a reduction in operational activities (Oliveira et al., 2013). However, critics have cautioned that software may 'guide' researchers in a particular direction (Seidel, 1991) or may distance the researcher from the data (Barry, 1998; Fielding and Lee, 1998) (see Gibbs, Friese and Mangabeira, 2002 for further summary of these critiques). Moreover, it has been noted that such software represents a tool, not a method of analysis, and users must be aware that their own analytical limitations and biases will not be addressed by use of CAQDAS (Welsh, 2002). The researcher used the functionality of Nvivo to assist in the organisation of coding, and determining coding hierarchies and relationships. However, it should be noted that while CAQDAS assisted in the operationalisation of this, the coding and

subsequent logic of discovery was a function of her own thought processes and interaction with the data.

3.4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data guided by Schreier (2012) and modified to suit the research parameters (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Content analysis is a methodology that facilitates the reduction of large volumes of textual data into much fewer content categories (Sonpar et al., 2010) and is one of the most widely used techniques for analysing qualitative data (Oliveira et al., 2013). Moreover, it is consistent with the research objectives and ontological underpinnings which aim to uncover the legitimising process undertaken by individuals. This is because it focuses on the individual being interviewed and ensures that their perspective forms the central 'data'. As such, it is essential in understanding the underlying 'truth' to the extent that it can be uncovered. There are three important characteristics of qualitative data analysis: it is a systematic method, it is flexible, and it reduces data. This research employed thematic content analysis, focussed on themes and frequencies (as distinct from lexical approaches focussed on the nature and richness of vocabulary, and syntactic focussed on tenses and modes) (Oliveira et al., 2013). Qualitative content analysis is structured around the research questions, which specify the angle from which to examine the data, however if other important aspects arise during the analysis, the coding frame can be modified to include these as well (Schreier, 2012). One of the benefits of qualitative content analysis is that it focuses only on selected aspects of the data. This is useful when dealing with qualitative research that can produce a large quantity of rich data (in total, interview

transcripts ran to almost 300,000 words and 450 pages). A further major advantage of content analysis is that the use of structured techniques to analyse data facilitates reliable coding (Sonpar et al., 2010). Returning to the issue of validity referenced in the previous section, the qualitative content analysis method addresses validity by allowing coding frames to be part data-driven (Schreier, 2012). Moreover, this is in keeping with a retroductive research strategy which comprises some deductive elements and some inductive elements of data inquisition. Specific details of coding and analysis procedures employed for each research question are presented in the results chapter.

3.4.3 Analysis Considerations

There were some difficulties associated with coding, especially regarding the context of sustainability which needed to be considered and resolved prior to undertaking the analysis. The fact that each organisation had a different sustainability context, could have presented a difficult in relation to coding. A majority of the interviewees depicted a context where sustainability was a relatively novel strategy within their organisation, which continued to prioritise other aims such as profitability and economic returns. However, this was not so in all cases. This created an analytical complexity in relation to coding the CSM legitimising strategy model. Conformance exists where an individual legitimises a strategy by conforming to the demands and expectations of the existing social structure or environment. Selection involves some level of conformity to the environment but allows the individual to select among the multiple environments in which it operates, in order to find existing amicable venues in which to legitimise 'non-conformance' aspects. Manipulation involves making

changes in the environment to achieve consistency between the organisation and its environment by actively promulgating new explanations of social reality. As such, in this research, data would be coded 'conform' when it conforms to the existing organisational environment, 'select' when it finds an 'amicable venue' to legitimise non-conformance aspects, or 'manipulate' when it attempts to alter the existing organisational environment. This coding would work well for the majority of interviewees where the existing environment reflects economic predominance and where sustainability is a relatively novel concept. However, in some cases, the interviewee's depiction of their company suggested that sustainability may already form an integral part of the existing organisational environment. As such, the 'conform' strategy would be different depending on the existing environment within the organisation. Note that this would not be an issue for research examining 'external' legitimising, because the external environment which dominated society would be common across all organisation. However, in research on internal legitimising, the organisational environment may be different among different organisations.

A number of options were available to the researcher. Interviewees from organisations where sustainability was already integrated could have been excluded from the study. However, given that the analytical problems relate to the context of the research, and not the specific theory being studied – namely legitimacy theory – it would seem a shame to ignore a rich vein of data which could shed light on aspects of that theory. Dividing the sample was also possible, and indeed this was done for a subsequent research question. However, this would create inconsistent coding for

the CSM legitimising strategy model, where 'conform' would have two different meanings. The complexity from such an action needed to be weighed against the benefits gained. It was decided that there was not sufficient benefit. As such, a third option was considered and adopted: the researcher disregarded fact that sustainability was already integrated at least so far as coding the CSM legitimising strategy model. While this may bias the data or conceal potential analytical explanations, it does retain the integrity and consistency of the CSM model across all interviews and so contributes to the research objectives.

One final consideration for analysis related to the subject of the data. The researcher was especially cognisant to ensure all data coded was consistent with the focus of this research: both as regards 'internal' and 'legitimising'. Both aspects of this focus had to be deemed in evidence when data was coded. Much of the data referenced internal legitimacy (i.e. the outcome of legitimacy, rather than the process of legitimising, with an internal audience), external legitimacy (i.e. the outcome of legitimacy, rather than the process of legitimising, with an external audience), or external legitimising (i.e. the process of legitimising with an external audience). By remaining focussed on this, the researcher contributed to analysis reliability.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the methodology used to address the research objectives, using the research design framework (Figure 3.1) to provide comprehensive coverage of relevant issues. The research philosophy of critical realism reflects a middle point between positivism and interpretivism, where ontologically reality exists independent

of the researcher, but access to that reality is problematic. Conceiving this as the empirical, the actual, and the real, the researcher outlined the aim of using empirical observations to portray underlying mechanisms and structures which can be understood as 'the actual', which in turn represent the unobservable 'real'. Accessing these underlying mechanisms employs a retroductive research strategy which is common in process research and uses models and empirical observations to determine further observations of empirical reality, not for objectives of causality, but to identify underlying mechanisms and 'get closer' to the unobservable 'real'. Four research questions emerged which were consistent with the stated research objective of studying the process of legitimising, cognisant of the existing literature which included the CSM legitimising strategy model but lacked further theoretical development, and reflected the retroductive research strategy and critical realist philosophy focussed on underlying mechanisms. The data collection methodology that followed was also consistent with these research parameters. In particular, semi-structured interviews are appropriate to uncover the actors own accounts. Data analysis approaches were examined, with qualitative content analysis described addressing issues of validity (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). With issues of methodology now addressed, this thesis turns to the results chapter, which answers each of the four research questions in turn using evidence from the data.

Chapter 4: Results

4.0 Introduction

This thesis has outlined the research objectives of exploring the process of legitimising sustainability within the organisation, and provided specific detail of both the literature relevant to this objective and the research design which aims to meet it. In doing so, four research questions have been proposed with the method of answering each question through content analysis of interview data outlined. This chapter is structured around four sections to address each of the research questions. As the beginning of each section, specific issues of data coding and analysis are detailed in order to demonstrate validity. Following this, findings of each question are presented.

4.1 Legitimising Strategies

The first research question uses the CSM legitimising strategy model to explore different legitimising strategies used in the process of legitimising sustainability.

Research Question 1: What legitimising strategies are used in the process of legitimising sustainability?

4.1.1 Coding and Analysis

As outlined earlier, the CSM legitimising strategy model was used to structure the analysis of the first research question. Each transcript was read and coded by the researcher for evidence of conform, select, or manipulate legitimising strategies as referenced by interviewees. Table 4.1 depicts each of these legitimising strategies, a

definition from the literature (Suchman, 1995), and a sample of data that was coded into each category.

Conformance	Conformance involves legitimising by aiming for conformity with the demands and expectations of the existing social structure in which the organisation is currently positioned	*"we wouldn't do anything unless there was a business case to it … I've only pushed stuff that had a core economic benefit" (12)*
Selection	Selection involves some level of conformity to the environment but allows the organisation to select among the multiple environments in which it operates	*"what you really have to do is find receptors… [and then] … try to sell it into other businesses" (4)*
Manipulation	Manipulation involves making changes in the environment to achieve consistency between the organisation and its environment	*"fundamentally what we're doing is wrong, we need to change what we're doing, this is how we're going to do it" (17)*

Table 4.1: Legitimising strategies: definitions and data samples

This table provides summary evidence of data coded to each legitimising strategy to demonstrate coding and analysis procedures, and distinguish between each strategy. Full findings are presented below.

4.1.2 Findings

The data revealed evidence of all three legitimising strategies. Of the 51 respondents, all referenced elements of conformance, 43 referenced elements of selection, and 23 referenced elements of manipulation (See Table 4.2). Each of these

legitimising strategies will now be reported independently. Evidence of relationships between the strategies will be left to the second research question.

	No. of interviewees who referenced	Total episodes referenced
Conformance	51	143
Selection	43	100
Manipulation	23	52

Table 4.2: Legitimising Strategy References
(n = 51)

Conformance

Conformance was the most commonly coded legitimising strategy as all interviewees (51) referenced some element of conformance to the existing internal environment when legitimising sustainability, with a total of 143 episodes referenced. Recall the discussion in the method section regarding the issue of the differences in 'existing environments' across firms. Given the dominance of the environment which prioritised economic returns, and the need to standardise coding of legitimising strategies, all actions which showed signs of conforming to economic returns were coded 'conform'. While these results may be unsurprising given that "no manager can completely step outside of the belief system that renders the organization plausible to himself or herself, as well as to others" (Suchman, 1995: 585), identifying and understanding the way in which the conformance strategy is used is still important for a number of reasons.

First, it is important by way of addressing a gap in the literature. The intuitive logic and tacit acceptance of the dominance of the conformance strategy within the conceptual literature (Suchman, 1995) may be a contributing factor to the lack of

empirical evidence of the strategy or subsequent theoretical development. Such a gap deserves to be addressed if only for theoretical completeness and empirical rigour. However, there are more significant reasons to explore conformance. While individuals may adopt a conformance strategy, this does not necessarily mean legitimising will be successful. That is, even where individuals attempt to legitimise sustainability by conforming to the existing environment, it does not automatically mean that sustainability will gain legitimacy or will be adopted. While this study does not purport to answer questions on the success *per se* of legitimising strategies resulting in legitimacy (an alternative methodology is proposed in the conclusion to address such questions), understanding how a conformance strategy is used to legitimise sustainability forms a foundation for such future research. Thirdly, understanding the conformance legitimising strategy may uncover implications for sustainability. Such implications are explored in detail in the discussion section. The final reason to examine the conformance strategy is to explore its interrelationship with other legitimising strategies. This will provide a better understanding of the entire process of legitimising and signifies an important step forward in the theoretical development of this process. Empirical evidence from interviewees in relation to conformance as a legitimising strategy is now presented.

Evidence of conformance to an existing environment dominated by expectations of economic returns was widespread. Interviewees stated that 'money is king' (7)[3], and 'we wouldn't do anything unless there was a business case to it … I've only pushed stuff that had a core economic benefit' (12). One interviewee identified this as his primary challenge:

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[3] Bracketed numbers are used to indicate the anonymised respondent number.

> *"I think the number one challenge is that how do we turn either the positive that someone can gain out of our using our products OR minimising the negative, how do we turn that into euros?" (8)*

There is strong evidence in the data of economic returns being prioritised, and so influencing how individuals legitimise sustainability. The predominance of economics within the sustainability debate was clear from some interviewees: 'in the end everything has to have an economic benefit otherwise it's not sustainable' (2), and that it's 'the only way to sustainably do sustainability' (24). One interviewee observed that:

> *"even John Elkington [the founder of the triple bottom line] has now said it was a concept that really wasn't accurate because you have to still deliver on the economic bottom line" (19)*

Moreover, a number of interviewees highlight the importance of economic returns for ensuring the survivability of sustainability in the organisation, especially in difficult economic times:

> *"If it's just for the sake of doing sustainability, once the business gets under pressure the first thing that happens is it's going to get cuts" (24).*

> *"what happens a lot of times in large businesses is that it's maybe not integrated properly from a business point of view and pushed to the side when times are tough" (40)*

> *"if you're not careful people will say, [sustainability] nice to have, but actually not crucial, so you have to make it absolutely relevant for the business" (47)*

One interviewee refers to the previous director who was made redundant in the economic downturn:

> *"I don't think he quite kind of linked it into the main business agenda, so he was kind of seen to be peripheral" (12)*

This is despite the fact that senior decision-makers may see the limitations of a pure conformance strategy:

"even sitting now with … the CEO and FD, because they're now under the cosh with constraints with money, they do say 'oh it's a good idea but because of the money we'll never get it through'" (51)

Moreover, as one interviewee noted "at the end of the day we're run on short term profits and short termism is probably the single biggest barrier to the long term value of sustainability being seen" (32).

However, there was also evidence of subtleties in the approach to economic returns:

'If we don't make money, we're not in business and we don't have jobs … [but] … I don't say we do it at all costs in any way shape or form, that's not what I'm saying' (33)

The focus of the conformance strategy often revolves around sustainability as a cost or efficiency driver. One interviewee describes initially legitimising sustainability 'as a productivity initiative … that was really targeted at driving costs out of our system' (4), while another states 'cost is a big factor: it drives a lot … I think that resonates with a lot with people' (47), and another that 'the environmental efficiencies often lead to cost savings … which have a clear business benefit' (3). One interviewee from a grocery company argues that sustainability is now 'squarely on the agenda along with OH&S and Food Safety … because there is a recognition that sustainability can mean savings' (43). While cost savings usually represent a direct contribution to the bottom line, there are instances where capital investment is required to achieve longer-term cost reductions. Many (but not all) interviewees indicated that their organisations had not changed return on investment rates or payback periods for sustainability projects, making a conformance strategy necessary to get resourcing. One interviewee stated that, as with all other projects, sustainability projects 'must meet payback and RONA [return on net assets] hurdles' and that value must be calculated as 'dollars and cents at the end of the day' (29).

When funding projects, one interviewee competes for the same pool of capital as all other parts of the business, and is expected to meet the same payback requirements:

"That means that I have to focus on best value for money projects for our company, and if I don't then I'm not seen to be an economic rationalist" (43)

When asked if she was always expected to be seen as an economic rationalist she replied:

"I think so, it certainly helps ... given that we're a high volume, low margin business, the money talks. So, talking to the business about carbon footprint and energy and what have you, does not get any cut through. If I'm talking about cost savings, cost reductions, what that means in equivalent sales, then I seem to get some cut through, and I get the same results, so changing my language to suit the business has been key" (43)

One key driver of a conformance legitimising strategy related to the issue of ownership structures and owner expectations. An interviewee from a partnership firm stated 'the main partner objective is finance: how do you make the most money' (13), one from a publicly listed company explained that 'businesses are set up to make money and they're told to by the city and the shareholders [who] are by and large not driving companies towards more sustainable practices, they're driving profits' (12), while one from a franchise structure observed that 'because as you approach the end of a franchise … shareholders … start to basically batten down the hatches and not really invest towards the end of the franchise and … bleed the franchise to strip the assets as much as they can' (7). This is summarised by one interviewee who state that:

"companies are there to make money, you know whether you like it or not, we live in a capitalist system pretty much, and you know the most successful companies tend to reward people in line with their ability to make money" (50)

One of the biggest challenges for the conformance legitimising strategy relating to sustainability in particular is the ability to measure and monetise everything: 'being able to demonstrate clear value delivered by some of the positive sustainability impacts you can have' (29). New measurement tools are called for because 'it's difficult to measure the value or the impact of a sustainability measure in traditional business terms' (29). Developing metrics to prove a conformance strategy drove some initial sustainability initiatives with one interviewee explaining his initial focus on energy, water and waste metrics provided him with a necessary baseline to determine 'how we could potentially lower cost and increase profitability' (28). Interestingly, these factors appeared to lead one interviewee to have to 'create' a business case by 'putting your finger in wind [and] indicating the potential' (1). Moreover, the nature of elements of sustainability created challenges for conformance because 'some of the value which it creates is intangible, if you're looking for a hard number, it's a bit difficult to get to' (14). One interviewee, talking about brand and employee engagement benefits of projects, argues that:

> *"those are kind of soft benefits, so they need to be turned if possible, into a consumer or a customer benefit and then typically you should be able to measure it in financial terms, and that very often is very very tricky"*
> *(8)*

A consequence of reliance on conformance strategy is described by one interviewee as 'benefits realisation':

> *"it's not about the business case anymore, it's actually about the benefits realisation… it's not about actually selling sustainability, it's about showing that you've kept your promises. Because the promises at this stage and the business case is probably made 5-10 years ago, if not longer, you know so show me now what you've done, show me that you've actually changed employee engagement. Show me that you've developed customer relationships that you have contributed to some meaningful business outcomes' (32)*

This raises the threat that over-promising in relation to conformance legitimising may have longer term ramifications for the legitimising process, and potentially, legitimacy as an outcome. It is also the first indicator in these results of a temporal component to legitimising. Legitimising isn't a static choice at a point in time: it is a *process* with dynamic attributes and multiple, ever-changing influences and outcomes.

In conclusion, there is strong evidence of the conformance legitimising strategy in use. This can be seen in individual's widespread acceptance of economic predominance and willingness to adhere to those expectations in the process of legitimising. It should be noted however, that use of conformance as a legitimising strategy does not guarantee success. This was the case for a renewables project legitimised by conforming to the required rate of return but not funded 'because the Chief Technology Officer said network quality is our aim over the next three years' (23) and indicated that a CEO mandate would be required to focus attention and investment away from this aim. This suggests to a more complex interplay between strategies than simple reliance on conformance in legitimising a new strategy. This paper now turns to the selection legitimising strategy.

Selection

The examination of a selection legitimising strategy is particularly interesting given the internal focus of this study. Selection strategies are evident where "rather than simply conforming to the demands of a specific setting, managers … attempt to locate a more amicable venue, in which otherwise dubious activities appear unusually desirable, proper, or appropriate" (Suchman, 1995: 589). That is, it

acknowledges that multiple environments exist within an organisation, not just the dominant environment, and that these may provide amicable venues to legitimise 'non-conformance' aspects of sustainability. While conformance was a dominant legitimising strategy, limitations and obstacles to this strategy, especially as regards sustainability, were also apparent. The complexity of conformance in relation to sustainability was highlighted with a discussion of the choices and trade-offs individuals face:

> *"Environmental objectives and economic objectives clash. And economic objectives and social objectives clash, and environmental and social objectives clash. There's clashes between the pillars, or however you design sustainability ... [but] to do something that's environmentally amazing and economically stupid is just stupid. Equally to do something that's economically amazing and environmentally damaging is also stupid. So it's just inherently not sustainable" (42)*

> *"Daily one makes choices between sustainability and economics. And anybody who said they didn't either doesn't know, or they're a liar, or they're in a beautiful sweetspot in which they just don't come up against many of the harsh realities of life" (50)*

Such choices provide the context for selection as a legitimising strategy where non-conformance elements are pursued. The data shows 43 interviewees referencing selection strategies, with a total of 100 selection episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.2).

The selection strategy can be summed up by one interviewee who states 'what you really have to do is find receptors… [and then] … try to sell it into other businesses' (4). While selection strategies may be planned in advance, there was also evidence of opportunistic timing: taking advantage when 'amicable venues' arise unexpectedly:

> *"the best laid plans often don't get up, and I'm actually very opportunistic in how I bring things to fruition, so you can put a plan*

together, but usually the reality of the year is, then, something urgent
comes up, or a customer flags an interest to do something very specific,
and you basically then use that as an opportunity to get some success
inside the business." (32)

The concept of an 'amicable venue' in an internal organisational context can have a number of connotations as demonstrated in the data. Four main 'amicable venues' were uncovered as commonly used venues for selection legitimising strategies in which non-conformance aspects of sustainability are considered desirable or appropriate: groups, individual decision-makers, projects, and programmes. These are summarised in Table 4.3, and then explored in greater detail.

'Amicable Venue'	Definition
Group	Groups within an organisation may have a tacit or explicit predilection for sustainability. There was evidence of geographic locations and functional teams such as product designers, R&D, or operations teams.
Decision-maker	Selecting an individual decision-maker, including a CEO or another executive was also evident. This may happen in anticipation of selecting a group or project led by that person.
Project	Specific projects, often termed pilot projects were common venues for a selection strategy providing opportunities for sustainability innovation.
Programme	Similar to the selection of a project is the selection of a widespread programme such as a sustainable agriculture programme. These may include external elements, for example, supply chain, but their role in internal legitimising is relevant here.

Table 4.3: Selection 'amicable venues'

Group
Some interviewees identified a group within the organisation with tacit or

explicit predilection for non-conformance aspects of sustainability.

Groups included geographic locations or functional teams such as

product designers, HR, R&D, or operations. For example, respondent 19 identifies the R&D group as a key venue for legitimising non-conformance aspects because of their innovation and solution oriented-focus. She states that 85% of their R&D goes towards solutions that fit into their three long-term target areas for solving major problems of the world: food (both increasing production and decreasing waste), reducing dependency on fossil fuels, and protecting people and the environment.

Decision-maker
Some interviewees demonstrated evidence of selecting one specific decision-maker who they saw as conducive to non-conformance aspects of sustainability. One interviewee, who was then the Chief R&D Officer and is now Chief Sustainability Officer, stated that "I began to enrol our CEO, who I reported to at that time, in the idea that we could have a much bigger impact on our customers on our company and certainly on the world if we … looked a little bit differently at the way we did things and through this lens of sustainability" (9).

Project
A relatively common example of the selection legitimising strategy was through pilot projects, which provide opportunities for innovation associated with non-conformance aspects of sustainability. A property developer piloted a leading edge building which invested heavily in sustainable technologies. While there are hallmarks of conformance – and the building went on to attract tenants with 'the same level of vision that we saw' (36) in relation to sustainability – this interviewee describes

the motivation as: 'not specifically financial, it was done purely from the fact that it was the most responsible thing to do and it would keep ourselves at the forefront of the market [in relation to sustainability]' (36). Moreover, this development commenced just after the start of the economic downturn but the interviewee notes that: 'we had a long-term commitment to it … the decision could have been made to cut it off at ground level and not start the actual building but we decided to push on … even though we ran the risk of not being able to lease the building, we decided to push on' (36). This provides supporting evidence for the use of the selection legitimising strategy, and reliability that the interviewee's responses weren't simply biased to what he wanted the interviewer to hear.

Programme
Similar to the selection of a project, the selection of a programme was evident for legitimising non-conformance aspects of sustainability. A transport company interviewee identified a dedicated sustainable transport programme which embraced the idea that 'the products must also be produced in an environmental way, a sound way, and with good working conditions as well, so it really for me covers all of these aspects' (22). Another identified a community involvement programme which enables 'projects to set aside a proportion of their profit, to actually fund community involvement activities at their particular regional level' (38), and another identified formalised programmes to complement their three main business areas: training in industry-desired skills for young people,

investing local economies, and focusing on deprived areas (44). These examples show how programmes are selected to legitimise non-conformance aspects of sustainability.

An interesting pattern which emerged in the data related to individuals using multiple different types of selection strategies. This can be demonstrated through a deeper analysis of respondent 27, from a micro-electronics company. She identified that most geographic locations were not interested in sustainability: 'they just want to sell more televisions by discounting and running more TVs ads' (27). However the team in Europe were more interested so she developed a scenario analysis planning project where they were 'looking at new service models, really progressive stuff around product take back schemes, new business models around service provision …' (27) which in addition to providing an innovative business positioning were also 'the right thing to do in terms of moving sustainability forward' (27). To facilitate this she also identified an individual decision-maker, the Chief Technology Officer, who 'over the course of a couple of years I warmed up, I could see the opportunity, so I warmed him up got him involved … [in the project and] he began to see the potential as well … he was a person who'd like [Company] to be doing more on sustainability and he can see the skill set that it needs' (27). This demonstrates individuals integrating multiple selection strategies as part of a more sophisticated and complex legitimising process, and in particular highlights the importance of the individual practitioner in pursuing a selection strategy.

There was evidence of individuals using selection strategies differently with three different internal audiences: leadership, employees, and middle management.

Leadership was found to be important, often providing the space for a selection strategy to be pursued by facilitating the drivers, policy, or cultural framework which creates the amicable venues in the first place. However, they may also be an obstacle to such drivers. There was evidence of leadership as both a facilitator and an obstacle to a selection strategy. That said, even where non-conformance aspects of sustainability are 'being mandated from the CEO downwards, [taking] away some of the challenge with some people … some people have got no interest whatsoever in the topic' (49). This leads to the second internal audience: employees. Selection strategies go hand-in-hand with conducive employees: it is often conducive employees creating amicable venues that make selection strategies possible. Where conducive employees exist – in a geographic location, department, design team, operations team or elsewhere – the selection strategy can be used. Again however, employees can prove a challenge especially where 'there's a culture that has been ingrained for a long time it can be very difficult to introduce new ideas and new concepts to that' (29). Finally, middle management were often identified as gatekeepers, but that the challenge regarding this audience often relates to competition for attention as they face an increasing number of requirements and responsibilities internally. As such, their ability to process priorities is limited: "competition for management attention is always an issue because there's so many other more immediate, more quantifiable, and issues that have more attention focussed on them" (31).

Selection of amicable venues may happen in one instance, or may happen continually with different types of environments such as a product, a programme, a project, a geographical location. The empirical evidence also suggests that incremental

extensions of selection strategies may become, at some point, a tipping point to manipulation. This may occur when the entire organisation becomes the focus of the individual, rather than a specific department or product, or when the individual selects the 'amicable venue' but then proceeds to change it further to fit the sustainability aims. In this sense, selection may become a 'test run' for wider or more significant manipulation. Moreover, combining a number of different selection strategies may be seen as 'manipulation by stealth'. Analytically, the tipping point between selection and manipulation is opaque. Nevertheless, the evidence does suggest the role of selection, and in particular the role of a number of different selection strategies, as a contributory factor towards, or indeed a determining factor for, choosing a manipulation strategy. Individuals move to manipulation when there is a 'ground swell and enthusiasm' (39) within the environments which have been selected where 'everybody's talking about it so they might as well get on board' (43).

In conclusion, selection strategies play a key role in the legitimising process for sustainability. It should be noted however that while there is analytical clarity and comprehension of the process of strategically selecting amicable venues in order to legitimise sustainability, empirically this process is complex. There appear to be a number of overlaps between selection and manipulation: while they can be separated analytically – the former involves selecting an already conducive environment in which to promote sustainability and the latter involves manipulating the environment towards sustainability – empirically it is more opaque. This paper now examines evidence of the manipulation strategy.

Manipulation

While this research and the literature support the conclusion that most organisations gain legitimacy primarily through conformance and selection (Suchman, 1995) for some these strategies will not suffice and "in this case, managers must go beyond simply selecting among existing cultural beliefs: they must actively promulgate *new* explanations of social reality" (p. 591). However, such proactive cultural manipulation is "less controllable, less common, and, consequently, far less understood than either conformity or environmental selection" (Suchman, 1995: 591). As such, it is important that this research explores this under-explained legitimising strategy in greater depth. Moreover, while manipulation may be less common, successful manipulation has wider ramifications for the organisation and positions legitimising strategy within the change-management field.

Manipulation legitimising strategies exist where individuals attempt to change the existing environment in favour of sustainability. The data shows 23 interviewees referencing manipulation strategies, with a total of 52 episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.2). The most common evidence of manipulation was found in the establishment of organisation-wide sustainability councils, widespread engagement and training programmes, and recruitment policies and strategies. One interviewee talks about the global sustainability council including representatives from the 12 core businesses and geographic locations as well as a 'representative from corporate communications, public policy, legal, environmental compliance that participate' to form a 'relatively lean group [with] … the key internal stakeholders' (4). Another describes the manipulation strategy he has pursued since joining his company three years ago in attempting to embed sustainability practices into the organisation:

> *"So what I did from a corporate objective is bring across all of our senior executive and get them across the whole sustainability agenda, and then to go back into each of their areas, whether it be risk and governance, whether it be HR and employee well-being, or supply chain procurement ... to make sure that those things were maintained or at least understood" (36)*

Evidence of manipulation can also be seen through proactive recruitment strategies such as one interviewee who describes:

> *"Recruit on Attitude, so if people have the wrong attitude, including you know not taking [sustainability] seriously, they don't get a job in the first place, or if they get a job and they don't live our values then they usually leave quite quickly" (18)*

Employee engagement and training programmes also target widespread change by allowing 'employees [to] learn about sustainability and what the company is doing on sustainability … through an e-learning game' (11). This is supported by another interviewee who states that:

> *"unless everybody in the organisation understands what sustainability is, then your ability to have an intelligent conversations at every level ... is limited, so about 80% of our 55,000 staff have been through sustainability e-learning" (16)*

Interestingly, both of these individuals show no other signs of manipulation, and only limited signs of selection. As such, it may be that these strategies represent the first forays into manipulation.

One interviewee highlights the importance of his department being co-located with HR as a facilitator of change because:

> *"it's about engagement with people, and they're the ones who have the skillset and touch everybody through, their pay packet, or through their terms and conditions or though anything" (15)*

The importance of the individual practitioner in attempting a manipulation strategy was evident with one interviewee only half-joking when he refers to his 'tremendous

power of persuasion' (9), another describing the 'few enlightened individuals …

[himself included, who drove principles] … that we use in our work that guide us for

the longer term' (8), while another recounting a description of her from a board

member as 'the voice of their conscious' (7). Leadership is also a significant factor

facilitating manipulation as a legitimising strategy. Almost all individuals who

identified using manipulation as a legitimising strategy had the support, and often the

pre-emptive drive, from their leadership. One leader was described as believing

'fundamentally what we're doing is wrong, we need to change what we're doing, this

is how we're going to do it' (17), and another that the organisation has 'a new CEO,

he's set a really ambitious agenda, and he's really revitalised the culture within

[Company]' (48).

Moreover, while unchanged return on investment policy was discussed in relation to

a conformance strategy, other interviewees had their policies adjusted – by

leadership – to reflect the longer time horizons of sustainability 'an internal rate of

return ... lower than what our commercial partners have to achieve in their projects'

(10) signalling a change to the existing environment:

> *"there was a bit of repositioning that needed to happen in terms of some*
> *of the finance areas, in terms of what is an acceptable payback period,*
> *perhaps moving away from some of the more traditional expectations of*
> *a fairly rapid payback period" (49)*

Challenges for manipulation relate to the scale of the task, and in particular required

time and resourcing: 'we've got so much work to do, that actually whether or not we

are able to undertake that scale of work is still kind of the question' (48), and another

explaining that 'there's 12-13 of us in the sustainability group, and we've got

advocates and practitioners so we've got about 500-600 people involved, but still

that's out of 100,000. We need 10,000 to be really effective' (15). However, other challenges relate to institutional expectations when 'you are trapped in the perspective of a year by year economic cycle' (48), as well as resistance to change:

> *"I mean the hurdle is always that you're asking an entrenched opinion to be changed ... there's huge change management, so I guess the fundamental challenge is that the burden of proof is almost always on us, so we have to prove the, we have to undo the, what is conventional, the burden never is on those who just say well it's always been done like this" (2)*

In conclusion, a manipulation legitimising strategy sees the individual attempt to change the internal environment so that sustainability becomes taken for granted. Evidence of this was found in organisation-wide councils, recruitment policies, and training and engagement. However, as discussed earlier, the difference between selection and manipulation may be difficult to distinguish. This feeds into the discussion of the overlap and interplay between legitimising strategies with the mutually exclusive explanation of each legitimising strategy proving problematic. As such, the next research question turns its attention to the interplay and overlap between strategies which can be found in the data.

4.2 Legitimising Strategy Interrelationships

The second research question addresses the interrelationships between the legitimising strategies, and in particular evidence of how they are used in combination and whether there is evidence of temporal progression.

Research Question 2: How do legitimising strategies interrelate, both concurrently and temporally?

4.2.1 Coding and Analysis

Following on from the first research question, to identify concurrent use of strategies, evidence from research question 1 was used, with each respondent categorised based on which strategies they employed. All possible categories are listed in Table 4.4.

C-only	Conformance only
S-only	Selection only
M-only	Manipulation only
CS	Conformance and Selection
CM	Conformance and Manipulation
SM	Selection and Manipulation
CSM	Conformance, Selection, and Manipulation

Table 4.4: Possible Strategy Combination Categories for Respondents

Examining the temporal relationship was more problematic and required a more complex analytical approach. The research design was cross-sectional and, although evidence of legitimising progression was referenced by some interviewees, issues of recall bias and lack of data meant that relying solely on this evidence was problematic. Nevertheless, given the sample of 51 respondents were all at different stages of sustainability integration, this presented a means of categorising respondents. In doing so, the researcher could infer how different combinations of legitimising strategies were used over time. Level of sustainability integration was divided into three categories: limited, intermediate, and extensive. Three criteria were established, *a priori,* in relation to sustainability integration: time since introduction, reporting line for head of sustainability (HoS), and formalisation of sustainability strategy. The detail of how each criterion was defined for each level is depicted in Table 4.5.

Level of sustainability integration	Time since introduction	Reporting line of HoS	Formalisation and integration of strategy
Limited	0-9 years	Low-level manager	None, strategy in early development phase, sustainability treated as 'add-on'
Intermediate	10-20 years	Mid-level manager	Formal strategy exists and shows some signs of integration
Extensive	20+ years	Senior manager	Strategy formalised with Board level approval, used in daily operations and ongoing strategic development

Table 4.5: Criteria for categorisation of level of integration

It should be noted that none of the criteria are absolute and they were used as guides towards categorisation. All evidence was considered in totality, rather than any one category dominating. For example, where the timing suggested that sustainability was introduced into the organisation 10 years ago, yet other evidence suggested it still showed limited signs of integration, the company was coded 'Limited'. Moreover, a precautionary principle was adopted as regards the 'Extensive' category: where there was some evidence of formalisation but it was inconclusive as to the level, the company was categorised as 'Intermediate'.

Transcripts were reviewed, in particular in relation to questions about the history and integration of sustainability within the organisation. This review was conducted blind to all other coding to prevent bias. Each respondent was categorised based on the level of sustainability integration evident in their organisation: limited, intermediate, and extensive. An example of a respondent coded into each of the three categories (limited, intermediate, and extensive) with the evidence for each criteria is provided in Table 4.6. Full data supporting the categorisation of each respondent is provided in Appendix 4.

No.	Categorised as:	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS	Other evidence of level of integration
34	Limited	0-9	SH&E Director who reports to Head of Group Operations and Supply Chain, who reports to the CEO	Some strategy with attempts to implement but evidence of being marginalised and not given priority, resourcing, or attention.
14	Intermediate	10-20	Global Head of Sustainability, who reports to another, who reports to CEO	Formal policy in place and integrated in places (eg. mills), but difficulties getting traction elsewhere (eg. products).
2	Extensive	20+	CEO	Investment decisions require Head of Sustainability sign off, strong link to founder vision has remained with extensive sustainability integration

Table 4.6: Sample coding of limited, intermediate, extensive respondents

This table provides evidence of how respondents were categorised into limited, intermediate, and extensive categories. These categorisations were then applied to the concurrent strategy combinations to provide evidence of temporal progression of legitimising.

4.2.2 Findings – concurrent use

This first part of this question examined concurrent use of legitimising strategies. Only categories C-only, CS, CM, and CSM, were evident in the sample. Table 4.7 shows the breakdown of the 51 respondents into these categories.

	Total
C-only	5
CS	23
CM	3
CSM	20
Total	**51**

Table 4.7: Respondents Categorised by Strategies

One thing immediately apparent is that only 5 respondents used just one legitimising strategy (all using C-only). This means that 46 respondents used multiple legitimising strategies, supporting the idea that a wider legitimising process is more complex that a simple choice among three legitimising strategies.

In addition to the 5 conformance-only (C-only) respondents, there were 23 conformance and selection (CS) respondents, 3 conformance and manipulation respondents (CM), and 20 conformance, selection and manipulation respondents (CSM). These grouping will now be explored in detail with examples provided for each from the data.

Conformance-only

Five respondents reported only conformance legitimising strategies. A review of these respondents suggests that they lack existing 'amicable venues' required for selection strategies to be pursued and leadership support which has been associated with manipulation strategies in the data. Respondents 1 and 7 are both from the rail industry – one rail infrastructure and one a train operating company – and both point out that the industry is traditional, fearful of change, and having very little or only very recent interest in sustainability. Respondent 13 is from a Professional Services firm, where his role is to develop sustainability services as an additional income

stream and finds no 'amicable venues' within the firm or leadership support for non-conformance aspect or change management opportunities. Respondents 19 and 31 are both from organisations who do not appear to take sustainability seriously, and as one respondent answered when asked why they had a sustainability department answered 'just to keep their nose clean' (31). In all these instances, it is likely that the individuals were unable to identify existing aspects of the organisation – programmes, teams, departments, products, or projects – in which to legitimise sustainability with a non-conformance strategy. Moreover, they lacked leadership support and backing to attempt change.

Conformance and Selection

CS respondents make-up the largest group (23) and exhibit the use of the conformance strategy as well as the use of one, or multiple, episodes of the selection strategy in which they identify 'amicable venues' within their organisation to legitimise 'non-conformance' aspects of sustainability. Two CS respondents are examined here as exemplars of this category.

Respondent 14 is from a paper-based consumer goods company. He describes decisions being influenced by the requirement to meet 'quarterly, half-yearly and yearly results' (14) and how he got 'environmental' products approved and launched because of the consumer demand providing a revenue stream, demonstrating legitimising through conformance. However, he also describes legitimising sustainability by selecting the paper mills as a location for energy efficiency drives and other sustainability initiatives, because of their history of seeking efficient solutions and amenability to such endeavours.

Respondent 12 is from a house-building company, which just survived the economic downturn, and is only now willing to consider the inclusion of non-economic considerations. As such, conformance legitimising is this respondent's most common strategy, but he also references a project he has selected in which to legitimise non-conformance aspects. 'Zero Carbon by 2016' focuses on the fabric of houses. There are instances in which lower carbon materials solutions can increase short-term costs, and possibly the price of a house, but reduce their long term running costs, or improve the liveability of the house. This is the first selection legitimising strategy this respondent is pursuing.

Conformance and Manipulation

The CM group has just 3 respondents using conformance and manipulation. That is, they legitimised sustainability by conforming to existing expectations in the environment while at the same time attempting to change or manipulate the environment. This supposed paradox is uncovered again in the CSM group where all strategies are used. Examining the circumstances of all three members of the CM grouping may shed light both on the aspects of this combination of strategies as well as this apparent paradox.

Two of the CM respondents (respondents 42 and 46) appear to follow the pattern of the C-only grouping and lack access to 'amicable venues' within their organisations which are necessary for a selection strategy to be used. However, they do have the support of leadership, unlike the C-only grouping. Respondent 42 is from a quarrying and heavy construction industry and, while he has the support of the CEO

which allows him to attempt a manipulation legitimising strategy, he faces an internal environment which is not supportive of sustainability. As such, no 'amicable venues' such as teams, projects, or programmes exist in which he could legitimise sustainability. Similarly, respondent 46 lacks access to amicable venues, although for different reasons. Coming from an energy company, this respondent has been recently employed with the specific aim of changing the sustainability strategy to make it more widely integrated into the business strategy. This explains both his focus on manipulation, as well as on conformance trying to fit into the existing strategy in some ways, and change it in others. His recent introduction may be an explanation for lack of selection strategy, as he may not – yet – be aware of amicable venues in which to legitimise aspects of sustainability. Moreover, his focus on new strategy development, rather than implementation, may make him less focussed on such aspects. As such, lack of access to amicable venues may explain these members of the CM grouping and in particular their lack of selection strategies. However, the third member holds different attributes. This respondent is from an organisation which has invoked complementary aims of profit and sustainability since its inception 150 years ago. It is possible in this instance, that selection was not evident because the culture already widely accepts sustainability and so manipulation is made easier and doesn't require 'test runs' or stealth introductions (see the discussion of selection as manipulation by stealth or as a test run leading to a tipping point for manipulation).

Conformance, Selection, and Manipulation

The final and second largest grouping with 20 respondents used all three strategies. This portrays the complexity of the legitimising for individuals attempting such a process. Two respondents are presented here as exemplars of this group.

Respondent 9 is from a US-based building materials manufacturer. He is the former Chief R&D officer (now Chief Sustainability Officer) who, in 2002, saw sustainability issues as being important and started legitimising sustainability within his organisation. First he argued and then demonstrated the business opportunity associated with the sustainability attributes of their products, representing a conformance legitimising strategy. Then he enrolled the then-CEO, who was already personally interested in sustainability, in wider non-conformance aspects of sustainability for the organisation, related to seeing the bigger picture of the business's place in the world as well as place within a future business landscape. This selection strategy, contributed to a second selection strategy where he targeted specific product ranges to address specific sustainability-oriented sectors of their emerging customer-based; specifically, LEED certified buildings. While this may be classed a selection strategy, there are elements of conformance in relation to long-term revenues. These issues are further addressed in research question 4 under the heading of micro-reframing as a legitimising action. From a manipulation perspective, this respondent changed the perception of sustainability and in particular energy use and intensity by establishing a formal networking group across the organisation with virtual meetings monthly to report on innovations within a plant that could be shared across other plants. This changed the focus away from outputs and towards efficiency of outputs, in particular in relation to environmental metrics.

Respondent 38 is from an Australian-based infrastructure construction organisation. He was employed by a newly-appointed CEO to integrate sustainability within their operations and strategy. Because of this, he legitimised sustainability initially by appealing to what the 'old guard' were focussed on: reduced costs, efficiency, and increased revenue.

> *"I think that it's sometimes difficult to get agreement to pursue a particular activity if we can't show a very clear business benefit, in terms of either a return to the bottom line, or an alignment with a short term strategic requirement. So, but most, we're trying, because there are I guess a number of individuals in senior positions who might not be there yet in terms of their understanding or their own journeys in sustainability, that we need to always demonstrate very clear benefits of the particular activity that we're pursuing. So I'm always looking to develop estimates of cost savings, of reductions in overhead, enhanced profitability through pursuing particular activities." (38)*

However, in addition, this respondent has demonstrated evidence of selection strategies, having identified venues in which non-conformance aspects of sustainability would be accepted. For example, an infrastructure project on an island has been tagged a 'pilot sustainability project' which has enabled people to think differently about solutions to different issues and encouraged 'a different mindset'. In addition to this, he has also shown some signs of engaging in manipulation in order to change the organisation. One plank of their three-pronged strategy relates to developing infrastructure projects that 'actually help transform society into a more sustainable society' and introducing metrics across the organisation based on this, as well as targeted recruitment – and dismissal – to change the senior management team towards a more sustainability-oriented mindset.

4.2.3 Findings – temporal progression

There is preliminary evidence of a temporal component for interviewees' sustainability journey: 'we're still at the start of the journey and to think where we were six years ago, to where we are now, it's huge, so there is light at the end of the tunnel' (41), and 'it's early days still, the system is very much stacked against this longer term comprehensive view' (2). In order to infer temporal progression of legitimising each respondent was categorised based on limited, intermediate, and extensive integration of sustainability (detail of this was provided above). Summary results are shown in Table 4.8.

	Total
Limited	11
Intermediate	30
Extensive	10
Total	**51**

Table 4.8: Respondents in Integration Categories

Eleven (11) respondents were categorised as having limited sustainability integration, 30 as having intermediate integration, and 10 as having extensive sustainability integration.   The dominance of the 'intermediate' category is immediately evident.   This confirms that sustainability, as a strategy, is neither entirely new to business, nor has become universally accepted and integrated. Overlaying these integration categories with the categories of strategy combinations produces the figures in Table 4.9.

	Limited	Intermediate	Extensive	Total
C-only	5	0	0	5
CS	6	17	0	23
CM	0	2	1	3
CSM	0	11	9	20
Total	**11**	**30**	**10**	**51**

Table 4.9: Integration Categories and Strategy Combinations

The results reveal that all 5 C-only respondents have limited sustainability integration. That is, no C-only respondents have intermediate or extensive integration. No causal evidence was directly collected and so it is difficult to say if the use of only conformance legitimising caused limited integration, or if limited integration allows for only conformance legitimising. However analysis of the other data provides further evidence towards a conclusion.

The CS grouping is split between limited and intermediate integration with the majority (17) showing intermediate signs of integration. Moreover, of all the intermediate respondents – 30 in total – the CS group makes up the majority, with just 11 and 2 respondents in the CSM and CM groups respectively. This suggests an important relationship between CS and intermediate integration. One explanation for this can be constructed by linking this result to the previous result relating to C-only. Where sustainability has limited integration, a conformance strategy is used. Where that integration is increased and reaches an intermediate level, selection is used in addition to conformance. Again, causality is not proved: is selection *leading to* intermediate integration, or does reaching intermediate integration *allow* selection to be used? The evidence of the 6 respondents from the CS category with limited integration is important. It implies that it *is* possible, with a limited level of integration to add a selection strategy. This suggests the likely direction of causality is of selection on intermediate integration. That is, where selection is added to conformance in the circumstance of limited sustainability integration, integration increases and reaches intermediate levels.

The CM category is split between intermediate and extensive integration with 2 and 1 respondent respectively. Notably, one CM respondent was identified as having complementary profit and sustainability aims since its founding 150 years ago and so no need for a selection strategy. This interviewee displays extensive integration. The other two CM respondents appeared to have with no access to selection strategies as no 'amicable venues' existed. They both displayed only intermediate levels of integration. This further supports a distinction within the CM grouping.

The final category, CSM, is split between intermediate and extensive integration, with 11 and 9 respondents respectively. A number of points can be raised from these two results. First, all respondents with extensive integration use manipulation. One (1) is in the CM category, and the remaining 9 are in the CSM category. This points to the importance of manipulation in increasing integration of sustainability to reach 'extensive' levels. However, it is also important to note that more respondents categorised as CSM have intermediate integration (11) than extensive integration (9). This suggests that manipulation, while important in achieving extensive integration, does not guarantee such increased integration.

Given the apparent importance of the manipulation strategy in the CSM grouping and for extensive integration, further analysis is warranted. The researcher divided the CSM grouping into those with intermediate versus those with extensive integration, and then considered the number of manipulation episodes per respondent (see Table 4.10).

No.	Integration	No. of Manipulation Episodes
4	Intermediate	1
11	Intermediate	1
18	Intermediate	1
19	Intermediate	1
32	Intermediate	1
49	Intermediate	1
51	Intermediate	1
15	Intermediate	2
33	Intermediate	2
35	Intermediate	2
38	Intermediate	3
Average		**1.5**
3	Extensive	2
6	Extensive	2
36	Extensive	2
48	Extensive	2
9	Extensive	3
10	Extensive	3
40	Extensive	3
2	Extensive	4
17	Extensive	9
Average		**3.3**

Table 4.10: Respondents, Integration Category, and Manipulation Episode Counts

The average number of 'manipulation' episodes referenced by those in the intermediate category was 1.5 episodes. The average number of 'manipulation' episodes referenced by those in the extensive category was 3.3 episodes. As such, CSM respondents in the extensive group used manipulation more often than CSM respondents in the intermediate group. Taking into account the indications of causality already discussed, it is likely that increased use of manipulation contributes to achieving more extensive integration of sustainability.

Overall, these results support the idea that there is a temporal component to the sustainability strategy legitimising process. When sustainability is new to an organisation and has limited integration, a conformance strategy is used. Selection is then added to this and the combination of conformance and selection legitimising contributes to sustainability becoming more integrated and reaching intermediate levels. Manipulation is then added, and as this is used more often in more instances, contributes to sustainability reaching extensive integration. For those without access to selection options, manipulation may be added directly to conformance without any selection being attempted. This progression will form the basis of a generalised legitimising pathway to be presented in the Discussion chapter.

4.2.4 Other Issues

Two further issues have not yet been addressed by the research but deserve mention. One relates to legitimising actioned by multiple individuals, and the other linking process to outcomes. Both are explored below.

This research has focussed on the strategies of one individual within the organisation, and how they legitimise sustainability to other members of the organisation. However, given the temporal component introduced here, and in particular the complexity of the legitimising task, there is evidence the task of legitimising is not pursued by one individual alone. Heads of Sustainability come and go, and yet the legitimising task remains. Moreover, most, if not all, of those interviewed have teams of individuals working for them. As such, it would be remiss to continue without noting and briefly exploring the combination of different individuals and

their roles in legitimising sustainability over time. The example provided by respondent 17 provides an apt demonstration of these points.

Respondent 17 is a Sustainability Manager from a carpet company. He identifies the beginning of legitimising sustainability 20 years ago when the CEO set the company on a "road to sustainability" because "from his own personal point of view, it was about doing better [as a company], by doing good". However, the CEO's first challenge was addressing questions such as: "Is this a viable model? Are [we], bearing in mind that we're a B2B, relatively small sphere of influence, are [we] the right company to go down this route and kind of start this revolution? … What's the return on investment of sustainability? … What's the cost? What's it going to cost us?" Because of this "it very much started with a reduction in waste from a business point of view, and I think the running total from waste, sort of avoidance costs, is around about $440 million, since we started. So there is a business case for what we do". This shows evidence of the individual (in this case, historically, the then-CEO) adopting a conformance strategy. Selection strategies ensued, for example the payback policy has been loosened "because of what we've proven, sort of over a period of time" allowing longer term investments. Manipulation then followed with respondent 17 reporting more episodes of manipulation than any other individual (9 episodes). Some of these reference actions he has undertaken individually within his role, some reference actions of others within the organisation in particular the CEO. This company has been categorised as having extensive sustainability integration, and indeed evidence suggests that of all those involved in this study, this company seems to have the highest level of sustainability integration. This can be demonstrated with the following anecdote. On discussing the recent death of the

CEO who had initiated the sustainability agenda, the respondent quotes the new CEO who was asked if the company would "forget the sustainability stuff, go back to the work you were doing". The new CEO replied "we've done it for so long now that to go back to what we were doing, it probably wouldn't be as successful as we are … we'd probably lose 85% of our people". There are two points to make here. First, this example shows the legitimising process over time and the role of a number of individuals. Second, this final comment suggests that with extensive integration and taken-for-grantedness, the legitimising process of sustainability has been successful, and sustainability has achieved 'legitimacy'. A different respondent describes this phenomenon: "So you know we've managed to create enough of a momentum in the workforce and enough of a level of expectation from people that is just sort of self-perpetuates really" (42). This is addressed in the next point.

The second point that must be addressed relates to the question of process versus and outcome. This research is exploring the *process* of legitimising, but makes no claims to be measuring the *outcome* of legitimacy. However, it may be plausible to compare level of integration with the outcome of legitimacy. That is, sustainability moves from limited to intermediate to extensive levels of integration as it becomes more legitimate to individuals within the organisation as is implied in the example above. Such a conclusion, were it to be made, would, therefore, be evidence of the success of legitimising processes in achieving legitimacy. While these conjectures are interesting and useful to note, caution must be applied for two reasons. First, level of sustainability integration can be, relatively, objectively determined by applying the criteria listed in the method systematically to the data from the interviews (subject of course to issues such as response bias, all detailed in the

method section).   However, at no point does this data stray into *either* asking respondents whether organisational members consider sustainability legitimate *or* asking organisational members themselves. As such, assuming such a correlation – between increasing integration and increasing legitimacy – is made on assumptions only. This leads to the second point of caution. While extensive integration *may* to be correlated with opinions of legitimacy, it is also possible that a strategy may be extensively integrated into an organisation while at the same time *not* achieving widespread legitimacy.   For example, a new CEO may require organisational members to include criteria of sustainability in all budget requests, decision-making processes, policy reviews, capital allocation decisions and the like. Members may comply with such a command, allowing sustainability to reach 'extensive' integration. However, the organisation members still may not consider sustainability legitimate as part of the organisational strategy and operations.   While such a scenario flags caution for correlating integration and legitimacy, it does not weaken the examination of legitimising strategies and integration. This is because choices of legitimising strategies and outcomes of legitimacy are different constructs. Moreover, in the narrative recounted above relating to respondent 17, the respondent faces a challenge to gain legitimacy necessitating legitimising choices just as they do in other scenarios. Indeed, the mere fact that multiple legitimising strategies are still being used even in organisation with extensive integration suggests that the legitimising challenge remains and widespread legitimacy has not been achieved. Nevertheless, implications associated with this point will be explored in the discussion chapter.

The data presented above demonstrates that while multiple legitimising strategies are pursued by the respondents, conformance may be functioning as a foundational strategy for all legitimising. That is, while selection and manipulation may build on a foundation of conformance, they do not replace it. Furthermore, selection strategies require amicable venues to already exist within the organisation, and the manipulation strategy appears to require leadership support. Moreover, the temporal component has emerged from the data as an important factor in the legitimising process. With limited integration C-only strategies dominate, but selection may be added. This may increase integration to intermediate levels. The addition of manipulation may then increase integration to extensive level, although the results suggest that this is neither automatic, immediate, nor guaranteed. While the results of the first two research questions have contributed to a deeper understanding of legitimising strategies, they do not examine the actual individual behaviours or actions which comprise the legitimising process. It is to this area that this paper now turns.

4.3 Legitimising Actions

The previous research questions have explored legitimising strategies in detail: evidence of the three strategies, their overlaps, and their temporal expression. It has become clear in this analysis that while these strategies depict types of legitimising, they do not uncover the actual actions which comprise the process of legitimising. That is, conformance, selection, and manipulation may be understood as umbrella strategies rather than specific behaviours or actions. By analysing the data to uncover legitimising actions two thing can be achieved. First, the actions which are

most commonly used by individuals within a legitimising process can be identified, explored, and understood. Second, this data can then be overlaid onto the legitimising strategies to determine whether and how different actions are used for different legitimising strategies and strategy combinations.

Research Question 3: What legitimising actions underlie the legitimising process?

4.3.1 Coding and Analysis

Research question 3 moves beyond legitimising strategies and attempts to uncover the actions that underlie the legitimising process. In doing so, it requires a more inductive approach to analysis. All transcripts were re-coded blind to all prior coding. The researcher inductively created a list of first-order codes relating to evidence of actions underlying the process of legitimising sustainability. Once this was complete, the researcher then fully re-coded each transcript to ensure consistency of coding. This is particularly important to ensure that when codes are inductively added from later transcripts relevant data references from earlier transcripts are also coded. This addresses issues of stability of analysis and increases the reliability of the results (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990; Oliveira et al., 2013). From these first-order codes techniques of axial coding were used to develop categories systematically and organise them according to relationships between codes (Oliveira et al., 2013). In doing so, second-order codes were established, based on consistent and logical groupings of first-order codes. Finally, these second-order codes were condensed to third-order action categories (eg. Walsh and Bartunek, 2011). Two action categories were identified through this process:

framing and developing coalitions of support. Tables 4.11 and 4.12 depict the progression from data, through first and second order coding, to the action categories.

Data samples	First-order	Second-order	Third-order
	Inductive categories	**Action**	**Action Category**
"... it's about being sustainable, reducing the impacts of your products and business, but still growing as a business and having profit." (17)	Statements changing focus of sustainability from economic returns alone	Micro-Reframing	**FRAMING**
"If you only look at value in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, then it doesn't make sense. If you look at value in a much wider context ... Economically it's not worth doing, but it actually delivers you engagement" (15)	Statements about changing how actors understand 'economic returns'		
"Whilst there is the pressure around revenue and profit, it is equally balanced with contribution to society within Japan, so it is not traded-off which is ... unique" (40)	Statements placing sustainability into accepted historical context of company	Contextualisation	
"there's been droughts in this area for ... 2 of the last 7 years ... it's likely there will be another drought ... how are we trying to embed more efficiency around water?" (19)	Statements comparing sustainability to accepted external issue		
"Some of the conversations are around convincing about the business case ... [some] are about partnerships that can be achieved ... we are very much still in the stage where we treat most conversations are all about a case-by-case level" (24)	Changing statements depending on internal department audience	Differentiate and Personalise	
"the CEO of our Spanish business feels very passionate about young people and does a lot of volunteering with young people, and so you know that may be a lens through which we look at some of the issues" (48)	Tailoring statements for individual's preferences		
"I don't think bleating on about it is the right thing to do and you know polar bears on ice flows and all this sort of thing it doesn't really work for them" (7)	Statements rejecting association with 'controversial' issues	Disassociation	
"We had a previous guy who would go on and on about industrial ecology ... which isn't the right approach to talk to our senior business leaders ... because it's too woolly ... coming at it from that too philosophical approach" (15)	Evidence of avoiding certain words of phrases		
"A three legged stool is a very stable thing. Even when the length of each of the legs isn't the same. But if one leg gets too short it falls over." (18)	Evidence of stories or images used	Analogy	

Table 4.11: Data samples with First, Second and Third Order coding: Framing

Data samples	First-order	Second-order	Third-order
	Inductive categories	**Action**	**Action Category**
"the fact that this is being mandated from the CEO downwards, takes away some of the challenge with some people" (49)	Evidence of using leader's support in communications	Leveraging Sponsorship	**DEVELOPING COALITIONS OF SUPPORT**
"I don't have any problems with getting approval, because we have our chief operating officer's buy-in from the start [because I] made sure that she was involved in the committee from the outset" (37)	Evidence of involving leadership in initiatives		
"we have internal programmes to try to generate new ideas, we have our in-house innovation centre, so encourage people to come up with ideas, we have rewards for that" (33)	Evidence of targeting employees through different engagement strategies	Enhancing Employee Engagement	
"We have an employee engagement process which runs annually as well and we ask questions across the organisation about attitudes to sustainability, how important it is, whether people understand the benefits" (38)	Evidence formalising in staff surveys		
"We also have one green champion in every single one of our stores, and we communicate with that green champion every month" (26)	Evidence of formalising in staff structures		
"you have to talk to the right people to get things done and you have to persuade the right people" (47)	Evidence of strategic networking with key people	Networking	
'it needs to be constantly reinforced' (41)	Evidence of continually repeating the message	Continually Promoting	

Table 4.12: Data samples with First, Second and Third Order coding: Developing Coalitions of Support

These tables provide evidence of how action categories emerged from the data and contribute to judgements of validity as regards the data analysis process. The full findings relating to each of these action categories are now presented.

4.3.2 Findings

The data reveals two broad action categories which underlie the legitimising process. The first concerns the way in which the individual frames the concept of sustainability. The second relates to individuals developing coalitions of support within the organisation. Framing was slightly more prevalent as a legitimising action than coalitions of support, being mentioned by 49 interviewees compared to 40 interviewees (Table 4.13). This trend continued with total number of episodes mentioned with 165 and 110 episodes respectively. This suggests that individuals spend more time working on the message and understanding of sustainability, than on developing supportive coalitions within the organisation. Each of these actions will now be explored in detail.

	Number of interviewees who referenced	Total episodes referenced
Framing	49	165
Developing Coalitions of Support	40	110

Table 4.13: Framing and Developing Coalitions of Support References

Framing

Framing portrays how an individual wants sustainability to be understood, including boundaries for what is and isn't included. One interviewee observes that framing is "about how you communicate and talk to people and explain the stories, and you get them thinking, 'yes, this is something that can benefit them'" (15). Of the 51

interviewees, 49 referenced some element of framing, with a total of 165 episodes referenced. This demonstrates its importance in the legitimising process. The importance of framing sustainability appropriately for the context as a legitimising action was clear for one interviewee who had gone to great lengths to concoct an appropriate frame:

> *"we have battled for a year now to bring it [their sustainability proposition] to life in a way which is understandable, and kind of meaningful. I've spent a lot of time with creative agencies, so to consider like a branded platform, you know like M&S Plan A, or like Unilever Sustainable Living Plan…" (35)*

The category of framing can be broken down into five commonly identified actions including micro-reframing, differentiating and personalising, disassociation, contextualisation, and analogy. Table 4.14 provides a summary of both the numbers of interviewees who referenced these framing actions, as well as the total episodes referenced. All of these will be explored in turn.

	Number of interviewees who referenced	Total episodes referenced
Micro-Reframing	32	45
Contextualisation	26	45
Differentiate and Personalise	25	31
Disassociation	23	37
Analogy	7	7
Total	**49**	**165**

Table 4.14: Legitimising Actions: Framing

Micro-Reframing

As was discussed in the conformance legitimising strategy, individuals often demonstrated how sustainability contributed to the existing focus on economic returns. However, a close examination of the actual actions underlying the

legitimising process reveals individuals engaging in 'micro-reframing'. This was the most commonly used framing actions with 32 respondents reporting a total of 45 micro-reframing episodes (See Table 4.14). Micro-reframing involves *reframing* the understanding of the existing environment in micro ways, rather than overtly changing it. As such, it is difficult to determine whether such micro-reframing episodes should be considered 'conformance' or 'manipulation'. Such reframing may be termed micro-manipulation. Such dualism demonstrates the complexity of the legitimising process and hints at the limitations of the CSM legitimising strategy model which considers each strategy separately. Two types of micro-reframing were most commonly evident in the data and are discussed below.

From a perspective of economic predominance, sustainability may be understood as a tool to contribute to economic returns, in the way that other 'tools' such as marketing or quality are approached. There was evidence of this perspective where sustainability acts as a direct tool to economic returns:

> *"We have financial objectives that we need to reach and we use*
> *sustainability and other things to ensure that we get there, so I think it is*
> *an instrument that we can use to our advantage, as and when it is seen to*
> *be sensible, and you can turn it up and turn it down." (42)*

However, there was also evidence of individual's reframing this focus to understand sustainability as important in its own right and actionable *provided* it meets economic returns.

> *"... it's about being sustainable, reducing the impacts of your products*
> *and business, but still growing as a business and having profit." (17)*

Note that both frames acknowledge the necessity of economic returns and may be understood as a conformance approach to legitimising, but the traditional frame focuses on economic returns *in spite of* overall sustainability considerations, while

the micro-reframing focuses on sustainability *provided* it can meet economic returns.

Sustainability acts as a tool for economic returns in the former, and an important

issue in its own right in the latter. The subtly of this distinction can be observed in

the following quote:

> *"The challenge a sustainability professional has is … to make sure that it's not about stripping cost out for cost sake, it is about applying the sustainability lens to become more sustainable and save costs, and you've got to be very clear about it. It's sustainability, it's not a cost saving exercise. And if you can do that, the two generally come together though: you can have both." (26)*

The second micro-reframing episode related to the interpretation of 'economic

returns'. The traditional frame focussed on short term quantifiable returns including

short-term profits, quantified IRRs, or quantifiable immediate risk mitigation or

reputation gains:

> *"it's come back to cost, so any project must be able to hit the bottom line, which I've always believed in anyway: it has to save money on the bottom line." (33)*

However, this understanding of 'economic returns' was reframed by others to focus

on longer-term potentially unquantifiable returns, including contribution to longer

term market positioning or business strength, as well as factors that are less

quantifiable such as engagement and investment in innovation.

> *"If you only look at value in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, then it doesn't make sense. If you look at value in a much wider context … Economically it's not worth doing, but it actually delivers you engagement, that you wouldn't get otherwise" (15)*

> *"It's an investment in many cases, just like R&D is. The best thing you could do for today's shareholders is quit spending $2 billion on R&D and give it to those shareholders. But we're not going to be in business very long. So we've as a company made a decision that there's a certain amount of money we're going to invest that is going to go towards creating the next generation of products so that we are a successful company in the future. So it's the same way in sustainability, it's a set of*

investments that we're going to make ... so that we will be a successful company into the future" (19)

Contextualisation

The second most common framing action was contextualisation. This action was referenced by 26 individuals, 6 less than micro-reframing, but with the same total number of episodes referenced as micro-reframing (45) (refer back to Table 4.14). Contextualisation relates to leveraging an aspect of the organisation's internal or external context in order to develop a framing appropriate for legitimising sustainability internally. Two types of contextualisation were most common: historical/cultural and issue-based. These were equal in terms total references.

There was evidence of individuals contextualising the issue of sustainability within the historical or cultural circumstance of the company. This framed sustainability as something in accordance with the founding principles or cultural heritage of the company: 'in many ways it's been part of the ethos of the company for a long time' (3), and 'it's been codified in our creedo since the 1940s' (10). One interviewee quotes the company's founder saying a century ago 'I won't sell the future for momentary profit' (6). Others invoke the legend of the founder with references to being 'founded 125 years ago, by a man with a social conscious' (18), and the founder having 'a very lofty vision and he was able to articulate the purpose of the company being to foster better communication among mankind' (32), and finally 'basically back in 1936 when he started the company he built it on principles of the triple bottom line' (51). Links with cultural heritage of the country-of-origin were also evident as actions for framing sustainability:

"Whilst there is the pressure around revenue and profit, it is equally balanced with contribution to society within Japan, so it is not traded-off which is ... unique" (40)

"There's a very strong Swiss culture ... and in Switzerland maybe due to the quality of the landscape ... there has always been concern for environment" (5)

The second type of contextualisation saw individuals leverage external issues in order to legitimise sustainability internally. This has been termed issue-based contextualisation. Individuals identified 'four major mega trends, namely climate change, urbanisation, demographic change, and globalisation' (6), argued that the 'whole infrastructure is being severely disrupted by climate change, or changing weather in the UK' (1), and pointed out that 'we can see that there's all these big trends that are going to hit us, and we need to get more up to speed on [them]' (14). One respondent trying to legitimise environmental sustainability with reference to water used the following framing:

"there's been droughts in this area for ... 2 of the last 7 years ... it's likely there will be another drought in this area in the near future: how are we trying to embed more efficiency around water?" (19)

The population issue was invoked by four different respondents raising the issue of the projected 9 billion people on the planet by 2050. One outlined how he framed the importance of sustainability in this context:

'if you're making products for 9 billion people, where are you going to get the material to put in those products, what's going to happen to the materials after use, where's the waste going to go, what's going to happen to it?' (3)

Differentiating and Personalising

The third most common framing action related not to the type of framing, but to the individual practitioner adopting different frames for different audiences. This has

been termed differentiating and personalising legitimising frames. Almost half of the interviewees (25) spoke of altering how they framed sustainability depending on the person or department they were addressing, with a total of 31 episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.14). Differentiation and personalisation was used proactively, strategically and intentionally as an action in legitimising sustainability. References included generally choosing different language or focus, or specifically personalising messages to 'the individual business or the individual site' (19), or even to an (often influential) individual to make them 'feel like they are achieving their personal and professional ambitions' (48). This is summarised by one interviewee:

> *"I think it's actually different for different people. Sometimes people are just really driven by a really positive story about how many people they're going to save ... some people just want to know well does this fit with strategy, does this deliver savings, does this deliver business benefits." (14)*

Individuals took the interests and limitations of different internal audiences into account when legitimising sustainability. For example, given the constrained time and attention of middle management and their P&L responsibilities, the way to 'get on the radar' of these middle management gatekeepers was to demonstrate how sustainability contributed to their financial targets: 'if I'm talking about cost savings, cost reductions, what that means in equivalent sales, then I seem to get some cut through' (43). However, employees, who do not have such responsibilities, are less likely to be interested in these factors. In these instances, there is evidence of leveraging employees' attitudes but making desired actions reasonable and practical:

> *"the average guy who works in a factory, he doesn't want to destroy the environment or be unfair to his colleagues or harm them ... what I try to articulate is the message about ... very simple, practical things at an operational level ... To try and break it down in a much more practical basis." (33)*

This sense of appealing to different motivations when legitimising sustainability was defined by one interviewee as the heart of what it means to be a sustainability leader:

> *"if you're in a senior level in sustainability in industry ... you're a bit of a chameleon, you know you don't change what you believe for other people, but you need to understand what motivates other people to be able to actually understand how you need to work with them to motivate them." (50)*

This appears especially relevant for sustainability because of the ongoing complexity of the concept allowing for different interpretations. There was a sense that one of the strengths of sustainability, from the perspective of legitimising it internally, was its inherent flexibility. There is often criticism leveled at sustainability for being unclear and encompassing everything. However from the perspective of legitimising sustainability its broad nature allowed practitioners to appeal to different internal motivations:

> *"That's the wonderful thing about sustainability, you can internally see what levers move people and work those depending, like our CFO at the time who is now our CEO was kind of more focussed on risk mitigation ... I think there's you know a little bit of everything for, depending on what kind of peoples' focus and what turns them on." (9)*

Disassociation

Disassociation was the fourth most common framing action, only just behind differentiating and personalising, in terms of number of interviews who referenced the action (23), but with more episodes referenced in total (37) (refer back to Table 4.14). This suggests that those who use disassociation as an action for legitimising sustainability use it often. This action involves the individual disassociating themselves from some aspect of sustainability, which they believe is limiting or obstructing their ability to gain legitimacy.

The most common type of disassociation was evident where individuals sought to

disassociate themselves and sustainability from 'deep green' aspects, implying these

would inhibit their ability to legitimise sustainability:

> *"I don't think bleating on about it is the right thing to do and you know polar bears on ice flows and all this sort of thing it doesn't really work for them" (7)*

> *"so then it becomes … a business conversation, not, oh here come the tree huggers, want to make my factories furry and cuddly" (15)*

One respondent talks about the challenges of being introduced in a business

presentation, as 'the tree hugger':

> *"So it is the battle to get into the business, to get over the obstacle of, we're not just here to hug trees, you know we do have a role to play in the future of the business" (51)*

One interviewee advocates the avoidance of the word 'sustainability' entirely, for

fear it invokes questions about the ability of his strategies to meet business

objectives:

> *"we try to not actually have these conversations under the theme of a sustainability objective, because in our view all our initiatives should be business objectives driven, and of course they can create an impact from a sustainability perspective" (24)*

He is not alone in his avoidance of certain terms for fear of their 'non-profit'

connotations. Another interviewee questioned his predecessor's use of the term

'industrial ecology' arguing that it 'isn't the right approach to talk to our senior

business leaders… [because] … it's too woolly' (15), while another stated that 'it's

actually up to the sustainability people to change their language to make sure it

connects with the business' (40).

This disassociation goes as far as influencing the type of person who should be

appointed to a sustainability position:

> *"the position has to be staffed with … fundamentally business people and not just very pedantic … green missionaries" (2)*

> *"You get a lot more traction from a business perspective by coming at this from as a business person. And so there's a degree of credibility having come out of one of our sales units and delivery units. To be able to say, look I'm not coming at this from a deep green ecological perspective, I'm coming at this from a business perspective." (49)*

Analogy

The final framing action was used by only 7 respondents, with only 7 references in total: each referenced analogy just once (refer back to Table 4.14). However, it is not its prolific use which makes this an important and interesting framing action in the process of legitimising, but its pattern of use. Analogy uses stories or images to draw comparisons and induce the audience to understand sustainability in a different way. One stated that she used 'stories to really embed it [sustainability] in their thinking' (11). All 7 respondents who used analogy also engaged in manipulation as a legitimising strategy. While this result should rightly be reported in research question 4 to follow, it is noted here so that the potential significance of analogy as an action is not overlooked.

Three examples of analogy as an action for framing sustainability are reported here. One interviewee used the analogy of a three legged stool – referencing the triple bottom line – to legitimise the balance aspect of sustainability:

> *"A three legged stool is a very stable thing. Even when the length of each of the legs isn't the same. But if one leg gets too short it falls over." (18)*

Another invokes the challenge of achieving 'Mission Zero' by 'climbing Mount Sustainability' which comprises:

"the seven fronts [which] broke Mission Zero down into achievable kind of chunks, with energy, water, waste, transport ... So we could always link everything that we could do, back through those seven fronts to Mission Zero" (17)

A final example is that of a pyramid as an analogy to frame sustainability, which is known as the '[Company] Society Pyramid" (anonymised for confidentiality). This builds from a foundation of compliance, to a second layer called sustainability:

"...we have to protect the future in order to be able to operate in 150 years let's say ... then the top layer of the pyramid is creating shared value with the three focus areas that I have identified [nutrition, water, and rural development]" (5)

It should be noted that these final two examples are of an analogy – or framing – which was developed by someone other than the respondent in this research. However, the respondent is using these analogies proactively and regularly as a way of framing sustainability in the process of legitimising. This issue of the multiple players involved in legitimising sustainability was explored in research question 2.

Developing Coalitions of Support

The second category of actions underlying the process of legitimising related to developing coalitions of support. These actions related to the types of people the respondent was trying to 'bring on board' and their approach to doing this. Table 4.15 provides a summary of both the number of interviewees who referenced developing coalitions of support, as well as the total episodes referenced. Of the total sample of 51 respondents, 40 referenced developing coalitions of support, with a total of 110 episodes referenced. The category of developing coalitions of support can be broken down into four actions: leveraging sponsorship, enhancing employee

engagement, networking, and continually promoting. All of these will be explored in turn.

	Number of interviewees who referenced	Total episodes referenced
Leveraging Sponsorship	31	47
Enhancing Employee Engagement	18	26
Networking	14	19
Continually Promoting	13	18
Total	**40**	**110**

Table 4.15: Legitimising Actions: Developing Coalitions of Support

Leveraging Sponsorship

The most common action within this category was leveraging sponsorship with 31 respondents referencing a total of 47 episodes (see Table 4.15). Leveraging the sponsorship, support, or endorsement of leadership proved a regular action for legitimising sustainability within the organisation.   The owner's inherent commitment to sustainability was invoked when legitimising sustainability to others: 'the owners themselves have a desire to not do harm to the environment, to do what is right, to be sustainable minded' (28).   Others referenced executive level commitment and how this was leveraged to develop coalitions of support as 'the fact that this is being mandated from the CEO downwards, takes away some of the challenge with some people' (49), and 'you also need that leadership from the top as well, that this is something that is part of our corporate objectives, and therefore people can buy into it' (26).   This appears to be particularly important when sustainability is first introduced:

> *'it was a management board decision to establish the department and to give sustainability issues a priority to establish resources and so forth … and I think it benefited us very much in the beginning that we were independent so to speak and we were under the direct authority of the CEO' (20)*

One respondent describes their new CEO as 'younger, more dynamic and of that ilk' (15) referring to sustainability, and the respondent leverages this interest by arguing to others that 'you know you're not going to want to annoy your CEO by not delivering on something he's asked you to do' (15). The buy-in from senior management was strategically engineered by one individual in order to then use it as an action for legitimising sustainability:

> *"I don't have any problems with getting approval, because we have our chief operating officer's buy-in from the start [because I] made sure that she was involved in the committee from the outset" (37)*

The importance of leveraging sponsorship can be seen in one respondent's description of the lasting impact she has been able to leverage from the strong sustainability commitment of the company president in the 1990's:

> *'I think a lot of the work that we've been able to do, the great work we've been able to do, over the past 20 years is the legacy of his leadership' (32)*

Enhancing Employee Engagement

The second most common action within developing coalitions of support related to enhancing employee engagement. This was referenced by 18 interviewees, with a total of 26 episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.15). This action involves 'running staff engagement and behavioural change workshops' (13) and 'engagement and awareness raising and having the data around and making people feel that they can actually make a difference' (15). Three specific aspects to this action have been

identified. The first related to having a formalised programme of champions through the organisation:

> *"We also have one green champion in every single one of our stores, and we communicate with that green champion every month, and we give them stuff they need to be aware of if asked about what we are doing" (26)*

This is taken to significant levels by one individual whose organisation has a formal internal sustainability ambassador programme which forms part of the legitimising process for sustainability. He describes it as follows:

> *"Everybody who joins goes through level 1 of the ambassador programme ... about understanding where we've come from as a business, what we're trying to achieve and how we're going to get there, so basic principles of sustainability. Level 2 is taking it a bit further in that you start looking at sustainability in specific departments ... and level 3 is ... where you get into this ambassador element ... you have to come up with an idea, for the business, within your area, so something that you can influence, and ... you get graded on sustainability elements of that idea: is it possible, where does it come from, what kind of level of sustainability is it? And then the final step to become an ambassador plus is to ... implement that idea. ... Some of our sales people will have it on their business cards, you know John Smith, Sales Manager and underneath that, [Company] Ambassador, so it's thought of as quite an honour" (17)*

The second aspect to this action relates to engagement through competition within the organisation. A number of individuals identified this as a way of engaging internal actors in sustainability and gaining legitimacy for it:

> *"we have internal programmes to try to generate new ideas, we have our in-house innovation centre, so encourage people to come up with ideas, we have rewards for that" (33)*

Finally, engagement is seen as a way of getting feedback from employees. This serves two purposes. First, it is an input into differentiating and personalising framing:

> *"So it's important to us to also know from our employees what's important to them and from the individual plants what are they working on and how can everybody contribute."* (11)

It is also an indicator of the importance of sustainability in its own right: formalising the issue into staff engagement and feedback surveys forms part of the process of legitimising the issue.

> *"We have an employee engagement process which runs annually as well and we ask questions across the organisation about attitudes to sustainability, how important it is, whether people understand the benefits"* (38)

One individual relates the process of engagement as a combination of all three elements – formalised champions, competitions and feedback from staff engagement surveys:

> *"We've included and measured this in our staff engagement surveys. We've also set up green teams in our locations for people to be champions. We actually have awards for people who've done things not only in the office but at home .... We give people an opportunity to suggest initiatives and we have some small funding for them to get to tap into if they put up a business case"* (40)

It should be noted that where actions for legitimising sustainability are being used as levers for change, these must be supported by implemented initiatives, in order to successfully change beliefs and behaviours from internal actors:

> *"if you can get some suggestions from shop floor staff and then implement it ... they see that management are paying attention to what they're saying and then it snowballs and becomes a real change"* (34)

Networking

The data showed individuals establishing and maintaining internal networks and alliances, both formal and informal. This was referenced by 14 interviewees with a total of 18 episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.15). In a formal sense this included sustainability councils, steering groups, or networks, often functioning

across global and/or departmental boundaries. Some interviewees strategically influenced membership of these groups to make them most effective. One interviewee describes the importance of networking strategically in his pursuit of legitimacy by:

> "being a bit cunning on my side, rather than try and convince the world, I take out the two decision makers and say - what do you think?" (51)

Networking is about people who 'build the alliances' (2), and 'getting people on side ... negotiation, influencing, trying to win people round effectively' (14). This can happen over a long time frame with one individual developing an alliance 'over the course of a couple of years' with the Chief Technology Officer. One respondent described this as:

> "you have to talk to the right people to get things done and you have to persuade the right people. So it would be, the VP of the supply chain plus the leadership team, plus the VP of marketing, or you know sometimes the European management team depending on how high profile it is" (47)

In this sense building alliances is wider than just in top management:

> "It's important for me to align not only with the CEO, but with the head of procurement and the head of business decisions and the head of HR, to work on initiatives that make sense for the company" (11)

One interviewee saw networking as central to her role of legitimising sustainability:

> "we spend a lot of time out working and networking with people ... I spend times in the different regions. You know go to Asia, go to Europe, go to Latin America, to ... bring the messages to the people - we get a lot of new employees there" (19)

Continually Promoting

The final action within this category evident in legitimising sustainability related to continually promoting sustainability, linked to the persistence of individuals. This has been categorised within the 'developing coalitions of support' section as the

evidence suggests that persistence is important to developing these coalitions. It was referenced by 13 respondents with a total of 18 episodes referenced (refer back to Table 4.15). Continually promoting sustainability was important given the dynamics of the organisation, the power of the status quo, the competition for attention for different issues, and the difficulty of any change management type endeavours where you have to 'repeat, repeat, repeat the message all of the time for it just to start to sink in' (26), 'it's continual education, and it's small success in areas' (28), and 'it needs to be constantly reinforced' (41). Continually promoting sustainability was linked to the entire survivability of sustainability within the organisation:

> *"if my whole department disappeared ... the company would probably shift back to a lot of business as usual, so you do need that constant pressure" (2)*

Interestingly, some reference this as a cause of frustration in the legitimising process because 'you think you've got it sorted, and that person leaves, and you have to go and convince someone else' (15), and 'it requires a significant amount of [persistence and energy] from a personal point of view to continue to push this forward' (40). One individual has faced a particularly difficult situation when legitimising sustainability because of a setback when the leadership team changed:

> *"you feel that you're constantly banging on and on about it, and I feel after 5 years of being here, I should have to be doing this now, I thought we'd sort of won them over and they understood what we were doing and all of a sudden this change of regime you're having to inform all these new people again" (7)*

In conclusion, this research question has identified the legitimising actions which underlie the legitimising process, which were divided into two action categories: framing and developing coalitions of support. The final research question now

overlays these legitimising actions with the legitimising strategy combinations to investigate potential interrelationships.

4.4 Legitimising Strategies and Legitimising Actions

The final research question explores how legitimising strategies interrelate with legitimising actions.

Research Question 4: How do legitimising strategies and legitimising actions interrelate?

4.4.1 Coding and Analysis

The final research question combines the results from the previous three research questions in order to analyse the relationship between strategies and actions. Evidence of the use of combinations of legitimising strategies is overlaid by evidence of use of legitimising actions. These findings are now presented.

4.4.2 Findings

Table 4.16 provides a breakdown of total number of actions used by different categories of respondents. By then considering the total number of respondents in each category, average number of actions per respondent for each category is depicted.

	Total no. of actions	No. of respondents	Average no. of actions per respondent
C-only	15	5	3.0
CS	93	23	4.0
CM	17	3	5.7
CSM	150	20	7.5
Total	**275**	**51**	**5.4**

Table 4.16: Legitimising Strategy Combinations and Actions

Recall that in the C-only category respondents are using only one legitimising strategy: conformance. In both the CS and CM categories respondents are using two legitimising strategies, while in the CSM category respondents are using all three categories. As such, this data demonstrates that, as the number of legitimising strategies increases, so do the number of actions used by individuals. Those using just one legitimising strategy (C-only) use 3.0 actions on average. Of those using two legitimising strategies, CS respondents use an average of 4.0 legitimising actions and CM respondents use an average of 5.7. This suggests that manipulation may be more complex legitimising strategy than selection, requiring more actions. Finally, those using three legitimising strategies (CSM) use an average of 7.5 actions.

Table 4.17 breaks these legitimising actions down into the two action categories: framing and developing coalitions of support.

	Total Framing Episodes	Total Coalitions of Support Episodes	No. of respondents	Average Framing episodes per respondent	Average Coalitions of Support episodes per respondent
C-only	10	5	5	2.0	1.0
CS	53	40	23	2.3	1.7
CM	11	6	3	3.7	2.0
CSM	91	59	20	4.6	3.0
Total	**165**	**110**	**51**	**3.2**	**2.2**

Table 4.17: Legitimising Strategy Combinations with Action Categories

In general, these results support the conclusions above that as the complexity of strategy combinations increase, so too do the number of actions. Of particular note is the limited number of actions used by C-only individuals, especially as regards coalitions of support (1.0), compared to the other categories (1.7, 2.0 and 3.0 respectively). This may indicate both a less complex legitimising process, as well as a 'focus' of legitimising actions on areas more likely to yield outcomes: framing, rather than developing coalitions of support. Analysing these results in greater depth, the framing and coalitions of support action categories can be broken down into the individual actions which comprise them and then be compared to strategy combinations. Table 4.18 depicts these results as totals and averages per respondent.

	No. of respondents		Framing					Coalitions of Support			
			Analogy	Disassoci-ation	Contextualis-ation	Micro-Reframing	Differentiate & Personalise	Leverage Sponsorship	Network	Continually Promote	Enhance Employee Engagement
C-only	5	Total	0	2	2	4	2	2	0	2	1
		Average	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.2
CS	23	Total	0	13	13	15	12	15	8	7	10
		Average	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.4
CM	3	Total	1	1	3	3	3	4	1	1	0
		Average	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.0	1.0	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.0
CSM	20	Total	6	21	27	23	14	26	10	8	15
		Average	0.3	1.1	1.1	1.2	0.7	1.3	0.5	0.4	0.8
Total	**51**	Total	**7**	**37**	**45**	**45**	**31**	**47**	**19**	**18**	**26**
		Average	**0.1**	**0.7**	**0.9**	**0.9**	**0.6**	**0.9**	**0.4**	**0.4**	**0.5**

TABLE 4.18: Breakdown of total and average actions referenced against legitimising strategy combinations

Table 4.18 provides a breakdown on each of the nine legitimising actions with evidence of how often they are used by each category of strategy combination respondents. Moreover, by then providing the average use of each action per respondent, this table enables the researcher to compare the relative use of different actions. The bottom row also indicates the most commonly used actions on average across all categories. Micro-reframing, contextualisation, and leveraging sponsorship were, overall, the most commonly used actions being used on average 0.9 times by each respondent. This was followed by disassociation (0.7 times), differentiating and personalising (0.6 times), and enhancing employee engagement (0.5 times). Networking and continually promoting were both used the same on average (0.4 times), with analogy the least used (0.1) times. Depicting these results by grouping them into similar categories provides a more useful visual representation of the differences in use of actions. The following categorisation is adopted to group the different numerical results:

- Very often used: Actions used by respondents 1 or more times on average

- Often used: Actions used by respondents 0.5-0.9 times on average

- Sometimes used: Actions used by respondents 0.1-0.4 times on average

Table 4.19 provides a summary of these results.

	Very often used	Often used	Sometimes used
C-only		• Micro-reframing	• Disassociation • Contextualisation • Differentiate and Personalise • Leveraging Sponsorship • Continually Promote • Enhancing Employee Engagement
CS		• Micro-reframing • Disassociation • Contextualisation • Differentiate and Personalise • Leveraging Sponsorship	• Enhancing Employee Engagement • Continually Promote • Networking
CM	• Micro-reframing • Contextualisation • Differentiate and Personalise • Leveraging Sponsorship		• Analogy • Disassociation • Networking • Continually Promote
CSM	• Micro-reframing • Disassociation • Contextualisation • Leveraging Sponsorship	• Differentiate and Personalise • Networking • Enhancing Employee Engagement	• Analogy • Continually Promote

Table 4.19: Most commonly used actions

A number of interesting points can be made regarding the patterns of use of these legitimising actions. Micro-reframing is an important legitimising action being either 'often' or 'very often' used across all categories of respondents. This is the only action which reflects this pattern of use, suggesting it plays a fundamental role

in the process of legitimising. Of particular note is the fact that micro-reframing is the only action 'often' used in the C-only category. Given the previous results which suggest C-only may be the start of a progression of legitimising strategies, this suggests that micro-reframing may be important as an initial or primary legitimising action. The implications of this will be expanded in the discussion chapter.

Contextualisation and leveraging sponsorship move from being sometimes used in C-only, to often used in CS, to very often used in both CS and CSM. Combining this with prior results which depicted these different categories as a temporal progression, this suggests that both actions are increasingly used and relied on as individuals increase the number and complexity of legitimising strategy combinations, and as they increasingly integrate the sustainability strategy. It is interesting to note that when manipulation is added as a legitimising strategy both actions as well as micro-reframing are all increased in use. This is true whether the progression is from C-only directly to CM, or via CS to CSM. Examining leveraging sponsorship further, the results show that there is a particular importance in the role of leadership and the use of the manipulation strategy. All but one of the individuals who identified using manipulation as a legitimising strategy had the support, and often the pre-emptive drive, from leadership. This suggests that individuals may be given the space to pursue a manipulation legitimising strategy by leadership, and then leverage this as a key action in the process of legitimising.

One further action reflects a similar pattern and should be included in the identification of key actions. Disassociation was used sometimes by C-only

respondents, often by CS respondents, and very often by CSM respondents. This is a similar pattern to contextualisation and leveraging sponsorship. Where this action diverges is in relation to CM respondents, where it was used only sometimes. While it should be remembered that the CM grouping included just 3 respondents and so conclusions should be tentative, this result may also point to the importance of disassociation as an action associated with the selection strategy. Speculating on reasons for this, it is possible that C-only individuals have no need to disassociate themselves from 'deep green' aspects of sustainability because they aren't introducing this to their audience in the first place, while those introducing manipulation in addition to conformance may be further down the integration path (as evidenced in the previous results), and so are happy to retain such associations as and when they assist the manipulation approach to legitimising. As such, disassociation may become an action related to the selection legitimising strategy where individuals proactively juggle amicable and – potentially – non-amicable venues.

The importance of these four actions – micro-reframing, contextualisation, leveraging sponsorship and disassociation – will be depicted in the generalised legitimising framework proposed in the discussion. It should be noted that of these four actions, three are from the framing action category. This again demonstrates the important role of framing in the process of legitimising, a result which will be further examined in the discussion chapter.

Among the other legitimising actions there are some further useful insights. The action labelled differentiate and personalise depicts an interesting pattern. It moves from being sometimes used by C-only respondents, to often used by CS respondents and very often used by CM respondents. However, it is depicted as only often used by CSM respondents. This is the only action that is reported more, on average, for the CM category than the CSM category, although it should be noted that the CM category has just 3 respondents. However, it represents an interesting result as regards the pattern of this action in the process of legitimising and may represent the fact that it is not as useful with the additional complexity of combining three legitimising strategies. Enhancing employee engagement is only sometimes used by C-only and CS respondents, but then often used by CSM respondents. This suggests that it becomes an important part of a manipulation legitimising strategy, which is consistent with the idea of manipulation being about changing perceptions and environments. The fact that this action is absent entirely from the CM category should also be noted, although again this is possible linked to the fact that there were only 3 CM respondents. Continually promoting was an action consistently reported across all categories as being sometimes used. This suggests it is a standard action for legitimising sustainability irrespective of the type of complexity of legitimising strategy combinations. Networking was not identified by any C-only respondents, but used sometimes by CS and CM respondents, and often by CSM respondents. This provides support for the importance of networking as an action associated with both selection and manipulation strategies. Finally, while analogy was the least used legitimising action, it is interesting to note that of the seven respondents who used analogy, all also engaged in manipulation as a legitimising strategy. This was

already referenced in the previous research question. The result indicates the importance of analogy as a useful action when attempting to change existing environments.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The results chapter has addressed all research questions. While exploring the three legitimising strategies in detail, it also demonstrated the importance of considering their interplay, and temporal components, concluding that legitimising strategies progress along a legitimising pathway with conformance as a foundation, selection added if and when amicable venues become available, and manipulation added thereafter. Moreover, this progression is linked to the progression from limited to extensive levels of sustainability integration. Legitimising actions were also identified with five actions identified in the framing category and four in the developing coalitions of support category. Actions are used more often in association with selection and manipulation strategies, and there is an increased use as the complexity of strategy combinations increases. These results will now be contextualised within the extant literature in the discussion chapter with a novel generalised legitimising pathway proposed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter considers the results reported in the preceding chapter. After first briefly restating the research objectives and design, a generalised legitimising pathway is developed based on the findings incorporating legitimising strategy combinations and progression, as well as legitimising actions. This section then deconstructs this pathway in order to better understand it as a whole and justify its components. In particular, it discusses the foundational-nature of the conformance strategy, the risks of not moving beyond conformance-only, as well as the importance of combined strategies in particular the subtle role of the selection strategy and the essential nature of the manipulation strategy. The legitimising actions are then examined including both the action categories (framing and developing coalitions of support) as they relate to the wider pathway, as well as aspects of individual actions. The potential comparison of sustainability integration and legitimacy outcomes is addressed, raising the issue of audience. Finally, comments are made about the strategic/institutional nexus in relation to internal legitimising.

5.1 Research Objective and Design

This research investigated the process that individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within an organisation: a process referred to as internal legitimising. Organisational strategy must gain legitimacy from organisational members in order to facilitate acceptance and implementation (Flynn and Du, 2012). Moreover, it is the role of the individual to undertake that process of legitimising. While the

outcome of organisational strategy legitimacy has achieved some attention in the literature, the process of attaining such legitimacy has been largely neglected (Drori and Honig, 2013). In particular, there is a paucity of empirical investigation into this process construct. This research interviewed 51 Heads of Sustainability to understand the process of legitimising the sustainability strategy. In so doing, it looked for evidence of the CSM legitimising process model, as well as how legitimising strategies interrelate. It also looked beyond these strategies to the specific individual actions which underlie the legitimising process.

5.2 Generalised Legitimising Pathway

Overall, the results reported in the previous chapter provide evidence of legitimising strategy combinations being prevalent in the process of legitimising. The importance of the temporal component and the fundamental nature of a 'process' based theory means that a static model or framework was not considered appropriate to depict the progression of legitimising evident in the results. To reflect these important aspects a generalised legitimising pathway is presented which incorporates these temporal components, and the cumulative and sequential nature of legitimising strategy combinations. In working towards this generalised pathway, the two legitimising strategy progressions found in this research are depicted in Figure 5.1.
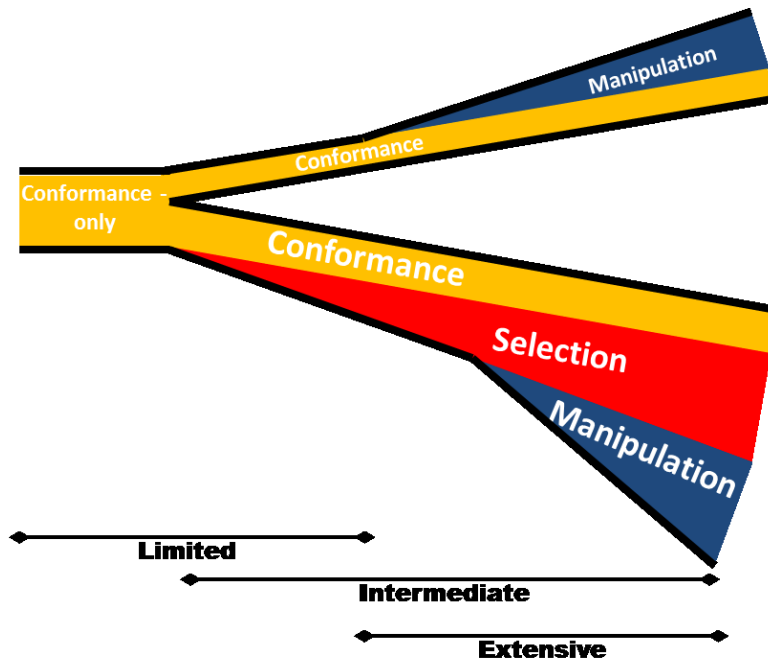
Figure 5.1: Legitimising strategy progressions evident in the research
(Source: Author)

Figure 5.1 comprises legitimising strategy combinations, as well as sustainability integration categories to support the temporal component. When sustainability is new to an organisation and has limited integration, a conformance strategy (C-only) is used. Selection is then added to this and the combination of conformance and selection (CS) legitimising contributes to sustainability becoming more integrated and reaching intermediate levels. Manipulation is then added (CSM), and as this is used more often it contributes to sustainability reaching extensive integration. However, for those without access to selection options, manipulation may be added directly to conformance without any selection being attempted (CM). In sum, one pathway progresses from conformance to add selection and then to add manipulation (C-only to CS to CSM). The other pathway progresses from conformance straight to add manipulation (C-only to CM).

However, when developing a generalised legitimising pathway, it should be considered that the progression resulting in the CM strategy combination comprises just three respondents in the data. Moreover, the data suggested that this was not a favoured pathway, but merely represented the reality for individuals who lack access to amicable venues in which to institute the selection strategy. As such, when developing a generalised legitimising pathway, the CM pathway is excluded and the most plausible and appropriate legitimising strategy progression is depicted in Figure 5.2.
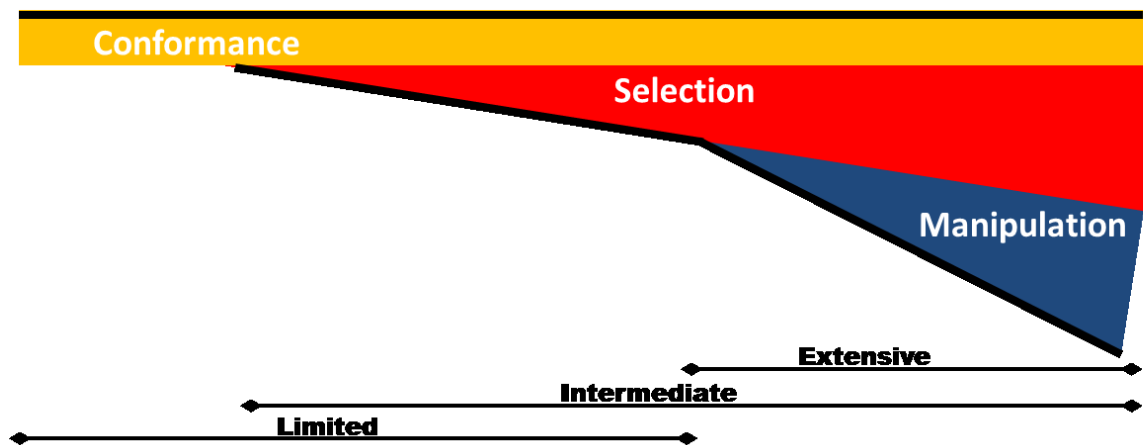
Figure 5.2: Generalised legitimising strategy progression
(Source: Author)

This depicts the progression of legitimising from conformance-only to add selection and then to add manipulation by way of advancing from limited, through intermediate, to extensive sustainability integration. By overlaying the legitimising actions associated with each stage of the progression, a generalised legitimising pathway can be established. This is depicted in Figure 5.3.
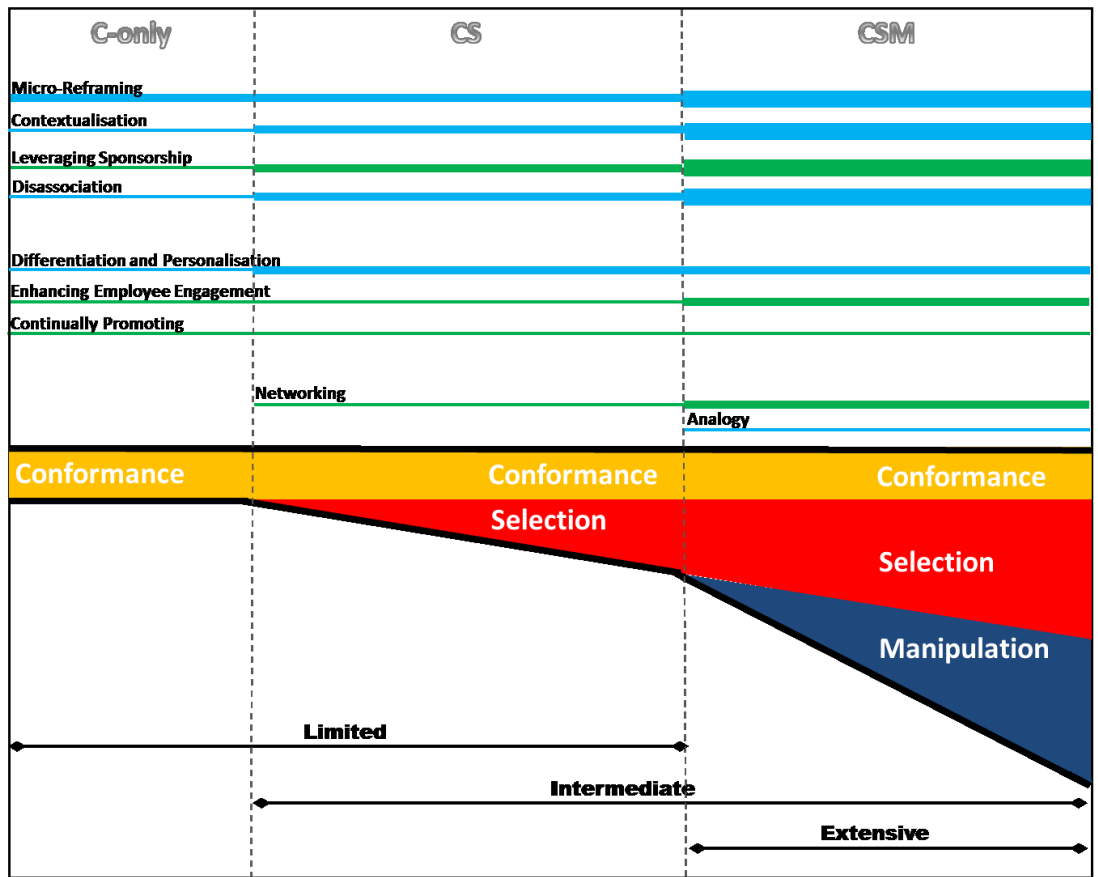
Figure 5.3: Generalised Legitimising Pathway
(Source: Author)

Adding the actions to legitimising progression produces the generalised legitimising pathway. Legitimising strategies progress from C-only, to CS, to CSM. That is, from a foundation of conformation, selection is first added, and then manipulation is added. Individuals engage in four important actions throughout the generalised legitimising pathway: micro-reframing, contextualisation, leveraging sponsorship, and disassociation. These become increasingly important as individuals move along the legitimising pathway until they are all often used in the CSM stage. Among the other actions, differentiating and personalising and enhancing employee engagement are used all the way along the pathway and also depict increasing use. Continually promoting is used steadily along the pathway. Networking is introduced at the CS stage, and analogy is introduced at the CSM stage. This chapter will now deconstruct some aspects of this generalised legitimising pathway.

5.3 Exploring the Legitimising Pathway

The preceding section presented a novel generalised legitimising pathway comprising both legitimising strategy progression and associated legitimising actions. A number of factors associated with this pathway are now explored by way of contextualising it within the existing literature and demonstrating the contribution of this research.

5.3.1 Importance of Conformance

It is clear from the results that conformance forms an important foundational legitimising strategy within the entire legitimising process. While the ongoing foundational nature of conformance has never been explicitly stated or mapped onto

a legitimising framework, there is widespread evidence for this result in the existing legitimacy literature supporting this empirical result (Tost, 2011; Aies and Weiss, 2012). Moreover, the existing literature provides explanations for this reliance on conformance. Broadly speaking, conformance is used because it permeates acceptance and prevents challenge or questioning. Tost (2011) states that: "to the extent to which a new entity conforms to the expectations carved by existing institutions, that new entity is not subjected to active evaluations but, instead, is passively accepted and unquestioned" (p. 693). Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) describe 'myths of rationality' which act as signals: "that the organization is properly constituted; committed to the proper scripts, rules, norms, values, and models; able to use appropriate means: and pursuing acceptable ends" (p. 416). This can be linked to the isomorphism debate where isomorphism legitimates because it leads to the absence of questions or challenges (Deephouse, 1996). From the perspective of the individual, conformance provides the individual with the ability to become an 'insider' (Aies and Weiss, 2012) thereby boosting the chances of subsequently introducing new ideas or perspectives: newcomers must 'fit in' and respect the current environment before they can legitimately initiate change (Markowitz et al., 2012). Another related construct which informs understanding of explanations for conformance legitimising is issue crafting. This construct refers to the use of language by individuals to intentionally portray issues in ways that differ from their private understanding (Sonenshein, 2006). That is, it focuses on crafting language to make an issue fit with a nominated 'appropriate' frame. While not directly relevant in the current research, which did not distinguish or investigate private versus public perspectives, it is their framing of legitimising which is relevant here and supports

the foundational nature of conformance. Issue crafting attempts to legitimise by constructing public justifications that portray issues as being congruent with an audience's meaning system (Creed, Scully and Austin, 2002). This, it is argued, means that it is more likely that decision makers will pay attention to their issues (Ocasio, 1997), and that their statement will be viewed as trustworthy (Elsbach and Elofson, 2000). The issue of attention was clear in the results, especially as regards time-poor middle managers, and is supported in other literature relating to over-extended managers both in terms of information and tasks (Cho and Hambrick, 2006; Kannan-Narasimhan, 2014). Zelditch (2001) delves more deeply into the fundamental workings of the legitimising process, arguing that it "connects the unaccepted or unacceptable with accepted norms, values, beliefs, practices, or procedures: it is an instance of them, logically derives from them, is instrumental to them, or is correlate with them" (p. 7). Colloquially, 'new wine is always poured into old bottles' (Zelditch, 2001). This is supported by Suchman (1995) who states that "no manager can completely step outside of the belief system that renders the organization plausible to himself or herself, as well as to others" (p. 585).

The above argues that by legitimising using a conformance strategy, either sustainability or the individual (or both) will 'fit in' to existing expectations and this facilitates acceptance. One final point deserves attention in relation to conformance as a foundational strategy. This relates to the generalised legitimising pathway which views the legitimising process as a progression through different combinations of legitimising strategies and using different legitimising actions. A conformance-only legitimising strategy may, on the face of it, appear relatively static. However, as depicted in the generalised legitimising pathway this may actually represent the

beginning of a wider legitimising process which will come to include other strategies, such as manipulation whereby environmental change is attempted. Thus, "being conformant to the environment may boost the chances of introducing new, organisation-transforming ideas as opposed to approaches stating (too) directly how things should be done better" (Aies and Weiss, 2012: 1081). That is, conformance may not be the static strategy it appears to be, but may be the first stage of change, and an advisable first step in legitimising a new strategy. That said, it is also necessary to address the importance of moving beyond conformance-only and the risks associated with not doing so. It is to these issues that this section now turns.

5.3.2 Risks of Conformance-Only

While the preceding section highlighted the importance of conformance as a primer for legitimising a new organisational strategy, as well as its ongoing role as the foundation for a wider legitimising process combining multiple strategies, this section explores the risks and wider implications of a conformance-only strategy. That is, while the previous section touted the virtues of conformance forming part of the legitimising process, this section addresses the risks associated with a conformance-only strategy. Specifically, three risks associated with a conformance legitimising strategy are explored and the importance of moving beyond conformance-only is addressed.

The first risk associated with a conformance strategy is that of over-promising. Claasen and Roloff (2012) found that by over-reporting achievements and under-reporting challenges, managers tend to raise stakeholder expectations to high, possibly unrealistic levels. In the process of conformance legitimising within the

context of expectations of economic returns, practitioners may raise expectations to unrealistic levels. That is, to legitimise sustainability they may claim it will provide strong economic returns. If this claim remains unfounded – either because the economic returns were over-promised in the first place or because they remain intangible and difficult to measure – the legitimacy of sustainability may be called into question. This was described by the interviewee who discussed benefits realization, and the fact that promises made regarding sustainability ten years ago were now being revisited to determine their accuracy. As such, if the legitimising process is based only on conformance to economic returns and these are unfounded, the legitimacy of sustainability loses its foundation. Interestingly, this links to the importance of the micro-reframing action, and in particular its role as a bridge between conformance and manipulation. By pursuing a legitimising strategy of conformance to economic returns but by 'reframing' these returns to using intangible and long-term metrics, practitioners may straddle the conformance and manipulation. This demonstrates the importance of moving beyond conformance-only.

The second implication of conformance-only legitimising relates to the make-up of the sustainability construct itself. While this research has explored the process of legitimising sustainability within the broader context of changing the environment (considered the ultimate aim of the manipulation strategy), it is essential to reflect on the fact that 'sustainability' is not a static construct. Moreover, it is likely that the chosen legitimising strategies in relation to sustainability may play a role in how the construct of sustainability is understood. Where conformance to economic returns is chosen, sustainability could be described as part of, but subordinate to economic returns. It can be assumed that individuals are identifying and developing only the

aspects of sustainability that provide economic returns: aspects which do not, are not pursued. That is, there is an economic predominance (Hahn and Figge, 2011). Aspects ignored are likely to include some of the 'broader' aspects of sustainability prominent in the 'social' and 'environmental' aspects of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997). Sustainability represents to many a link between business and society. As such, sustainability has aspects which have the potential to appeal to some people, beyond their economic returns credentials. With conformance-only legitimising, over time, these may be lost from the definition of sustainability. An example of this can be seen in relation to the disassociation action. This was most commonly used in disassociating the sustainability strategy away from deep green ideas and the like. The action carried the underlying message that aspects which one might think of as related to sustainability, are actually not related to it. This is a proactive attempt to redefine how those within the organisation 'see' sustainability. Individuals have opportunities to portray organisational life in ways that not only report, but also shape, reality (Boje, Oswick and Ford, 2004). When organisation members shape reality, they influence how others view and respond to important issues at work (Dutton and Jackson, 1987). It is important to remember that legitimising processes both delegitimate as well as legitimate: they create pressures for social change, yet they also create stability (Zelditch, 2001). It is likely that if conformance-only dominates it may contribute to the stability of the status quo, and the promulgation of business-as-usual. There is some evidence of this in the sustainability literature. Thomas and Lamm (2012) distinguish between weak and strong forms of sustainability. Weak forms of sustainability exist when profit maximisation remains the dominant imperative for business decisions, while strong

forms require businesses to operate individually and collectively in such a manner that the planet's carrying capacity is not exceeded: "profit-making would no longer be a company's primary objective, though it would remain a necessary constraint, essential to its ability to sustain operations and attract capital investment" (Thomas and Lamm, 2012: 194). The authors argue that an emphasis on weak forms can actually undermine progress toward achieving true long-term sustainability. However, "structural constraints will continue to prevent companies, particularly those legally obligated to report their quarterly financial performance to shareholders, from foregoing near-term profits in order to invest in organizational or technological innovations that offer less tangible benefits or generate positive externalities" (Thomas and Lamm, 2012: 194). As such, where conformance-only dominates this actually precludes achievement of long-term sustainability.

The implications for sustainability have been addressed here as regards the promulgation of the status quo as well as the alteration of the very construct of sustainability. A final implication of conformance-only is linked to this, but relates to the individual practitioner. Where sustainability practitioners pursue a conformance-only strategy their perspective on and attachment to the concept of sustainability may be altered. There is support for this from authors exploring legitimising within the entrepreneurship literature. They have argued that a commitment to conforming strategies may diminish identity construction with respect to the role of 'entrepreneur' (Williams Middleton, 2013). That is, where individuals are simply conforming to existing expectations they lose the sense of 'different-ness' or 'new-ness' associated with being an entrepreneur and so lose their sense of *being* an entrepreneur. This is the first indication of the choice of

legitimising strategies having a reflexive impact on the actual individual enacting these strategies. Extrapolating to the current context, conformance strategies may diminish the individual's identity towards 'sustainability'. Where the individual promulgates *only* economic returns arguments for sustainability through conformance, it may impact their own identity as a 'sustainability practitioner'. Certainly, at a minimum, there was evidence of individuals pursuing the Continually Promoting action reaching stages of frustration with constantly repeating the same arguments. It is possible that where conformance-only is pursued their perceptions of sustainability and identity towards sustainability may be impacted. Moreover, if individuals are in an environment where no other legitimising strategies are available, those with strong links to the broader aspects of sustainability may not stay in these roles or these organisations. This could further impact the construct of sustainability. However, by allowing individuals to move beyond conformance, broader aspects of sustainability may become or remain part of their identity. Williams Middleton (2013) concludes that legitimising strategies "contribute to construction of an entrepreneurial identity, which can then be applied to new processes of entrepreneurial emergence" (Williams Middleton, 2013: 22). As such, legitimising strategies may contribute to the construction of a sustainability identity, which can be applied to new processes of sustainability emergence. While the data did not explicitly explore such specific psychological constructs, drawing on identity and other psychological literature would provide interesting directions for future research.

5.3.3 Combining Legitimising Strategies

The previous two sections have addressed both the importance of conformance, and the importance of moving beyond conformance on the generalised legitimising pathway for an emerging organisational strategy. This section addresses the implications of combining legitimising strategies. Given the majority of interviewees combined two or more legitimising strategies this appears to be a common approach to the process of legitimising. Legitimising follows a pathway which reflects a cumulative process whereby the addition of later legitimising strategies does not replace earlier ones. Rather, the legitimising process comprises a complex, multi-layered, and dynamic interaction of multiple strategies. Even for those who were found to be pursuing only one strategy, this was potentially just a temporal anomaly given their level of sustainability integration. The generalised legitimising pathway suggests that they will aim to add selection or manipulation strategies in order to legitimise sustainability. As such, it is important to explore this idea of combining strategies more closely.

Again, drawing on the entrepreneurship literature, in constructing a legitimate identity for their enterprises entrepreneurs strive for 'optimal distinctiveness' (Brewer, 1991; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001): to balance the need for strategic distinctiveness against that of normative appropriateness (Glynn and Abzug, 1998). While entrepreneurs may adjust their accounts in line with the audience to make the unfamiliar familiar (Martens et al., 2007), to disguise the radical elements (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994) or to align one's mission, identity and resources with key constituents (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001), they must also promote their novel idea, business, product or opportunity. As such, they must "delicately balance their roles

as conformists and innovators" (Markowitz et al., 2012: 12). For example, Markowitz et al. (2012) argue that socially responsible investors must integrate themselves into the conventional mutual fund industry while framing themselves and their product as subversive or insurgent (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a, 2009b). Extrapolating to the sustainability context, sustainability practitioners must integrate themselves into conventional business, while framing themselves and their strategy as different if they are to move beyond conformance-only. That is, they must aim to achieve 'optimal distinctiveness' (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). This supports the evidence of combining strategies of conformance, selection, and/or manipulation in order to achieve such 'optimal distinctiveness' for sustainability. There is some supporting evidence for this in the sustainability literature. Castello and Lozano (2011) describe conformance as 'positivistic rationality', arguing that while sustainability laggards appear drawn to this approach, sustainability leaders (while still embracing the positivistic) are starting to employ dialectic rhetoric, concluding that they are searching for a new form of legitimacy which aims to improve the discursive quality between corporations and their stakeholders. That is, they are combining approaches to embrace dialectic rhetoric comparable to the combined strategies identified in this research.

Exploring elements of these combined strategies in more detail allows for a better understanding of their attributes. While conformance has received attention in the previous section, both selection and manipulation deserve further consideration. Selection was discussed in the context of the audience, in particular identifying an audience conducive to non-conformance elements of sustainability. However, given the evidence both of multiple selection strategies in use, as well as the role of

'successful' selection contributing to achieving intermediate integration, the addition of manipulation strategies, and the eventual achievement of extensive integration, a more subtle and nuanced role for selection can be considered. This subtle role of selection may be compared to the social movement literature and their examination of 'safe' spaces. While that literature focuses on safe spaces as venues for the oppressed to organise against oppressors (Gamson, 1996), in a less dramatic fashion it may also be considered relevant to the process of selection where individuals choose a 'safe space' (i.e. amicable venue) to introduce non-conformance aspects which may otherwise threaten overall legitimacy of sustainability if introduced at the wrong time or to the wrong audiences. Selection may be considered a 'test-run' for perspectives, within a 'conducive audience', and then go on to form the basis of a wider manipulation strategy. That is, practitioners 'test' a position within an amicable environment and get traction there, before tackling the more difficult task of manipulation. This makes selection an important pre-cursor to manipulation. Tentative evidence for selection forming this role can be found in the limited number of interviewees who report 'skipping' the selection step by combining conformance immediately with manipulation. Moreover, in each of these instances, a reason was proffered indicating either why there was a lack of amicable venues for selection, or a lack of access to such amicable venues by the individual. A second role for selection in relation to manipulation may be seen whereby a number of different selection strategies are combined forming an informal, disparate, organisation-wide strategy. This may be seen as 'manipulation by stealth'. That is, one individual selection strategy on its own does not set out to change the organisation, but by combining a number of strategies, such change emerges. Given the stated lack of

clarity regarding the empirical distinction between selection and manipulation, it may also be considered that incremental extensions of selection become, at some point, examples of manipulation. That is, there exists a tipping point where selection becomes manipulation. This conclusion is supported by other literature that suggests that where strategy introduced into specific parts of the organisation "turn out to be fruitful and first lessons have been learned, this may provide additional legitimacy and lead to a (automatic) diffusion across further parts of the organisation" (Aies and Weiss, 2012: 1082). Given the context of this research relates to specific actions by individuals, caution must be used in giving the sustainability strategy itself agency and implying it diffuses itself across the organisation. As such, the point regarding the importance of an initial selection strategy leading to wider diffusion is important. That is, selection eases the way towards manipulation by acting as a test-run and/or by functioning as manipulation by stealth.

The importance of the manipulation becomes obvious with the overlay of the strategy combinations with levels of sustainability integration. The links between manipulation and extensive integration, as well as the evidence of causality suggesting the manipulation legitimising contributes to extensive integration, demonstrate the importance of the manipulation strategy. Moreover, this strategy situates legitimising within the change management literature (Pettigrew, 1987; Hinings and Greenwood, 1988). Manipulation is, by definition, part of a change management process. Moreover, one could consider the manipulation process as one where "new levels of awareness are achieved by introducing ideas that resonate with the sentiments of the audience in ways that generate psychological closure or new

avenues of thinking" (Neilson and Rao, 1987: 527). Change agents persuade other organisation members to adopt practices that are not only new, but that break with the norms of their institutional environment (Amis, Slack and Hinings, 2004; Battilana et al., 2009). While conformance or selection may be easier strategies to adopt (Suchman, 1995; Aies and Weiss, 2012), these do not suffice when the existing environment prevents broader aspects of sustainability from being introduced, or when wider environmental change is the aim. These factors situate manipulation as the key legitimising strategy to achieve legitimacy for sustainability. However, such a conclusion rests on the assumption that extent of integration can be compared to the outcome of legitimacy. This assumption will be explored in the next section.

5.3.4 Incorporating Legitimising Actions

One of the fundamental questions being explored in this research relates to legitimising actions underlying the legitimising process. These were deemed particularly important because while Suchman's strategies were widely accepted as umbrella strategies, they lacked any specific attributes which reflected what actions individuals actually take in enacting these approaches. Process research which focuses on individuals must include attention to actions undertaken by those individuals in order to be considered valid and useful. Nine legitimising actions were identified. Interestingly, while some stronger associations were evident with different legitimising strategies, in general most actions were evident as least to some degree with most strategy combinations. Nevertheless, actions which were more strongly associated with different strategy combinations were mapped onto the generalised legitimising pathway. The actions identified in the results demonstrated

the complex and proactive nature of actions undertaken by individuals in the process of legitimising. While these have been referenced throughout this discussion chapter where they proved relevant to the topics covered, it is worth exploring some of these actions in detail.

The emergence of the framing action category is not surprising given the literature on the role of framing in the process of strategic change (Oliver, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark and Chittipeddi, 1994; Nutt, 1998; Kaplan, 2008), and as such it is useful to further examine framing actions and the literature. Cornelissen, Holt and Zundel (2011) argue that when a change from the status quo is presented, it is legitimised through inclusion in an extended or newly constructed category. Moreover "the categories that are invoked in acts of framing could either be conventional and established or constructed in an ad hoc manner" (Cornelissen et al., 2011: 1705). All of the elements of framing identified inductively in the data support this contention. Moreover, the way in which these are used in the progression of legitimising tells an interesting story. Micro-reframing, evidenced from the start of the legitimising process even where only conformance is being pursued, is the first indication of individuals extending a category of understanding. Interestingly, disassociation is particularly evident from the next stage where selection is added. This suggests one of two things. Either individuals are using selection legitimising for non-conformance to one audience as well as disassociation from these elements to a different audience, or they are simultaneously legitimising non-conformance elements and disassociating from these elements with the same audience. While the data is not clear on this, either way it supports the earlier

conclusion that the selection legitimising strategy plays a more important role then may be immediately apparent.

Moreover, the prevalence of framing actions employed as individuals engage in manipulation legitimising is evidence of its importance in overt strategic change. Cornelissen et al. (2011) argue that individuals within an organisation use framing during their speeches and conversations that connect or bridge categories of understanding in order to create legitimacy for a strategic change. Differentiation and personalisation, contextualisation, and the use of analogy were all associated particularly with the addition of the manipulation legitimising strategy. Framing is used to legitimise newly constructed categories of understanding which form integral parts of the sustainability strategy. Such framing provides structure to allow actors to comprehend the changing and unfamiliar situation (Gioia et al., 1994; Cornelissen, 2012), legitimises decisions or actions of others (Creed, Langstraat and Scully, 2002) and validates some accounts while discrediting or pre-empting others (Rindova, Becerra and Contardo, 2004; Cornelissen, 2012).

There are some other points to note about the framing actions. All of the framing actions, but in particular disassociation, contextualisation, and micro-reframing, speak to the idea of 'optimal distinctiveness' identified earlier from the entrepreneurship literature. While expectations of economic returns dominated the data, the results also indicated two nuances exist which reflect the legitimising action of micro-reframing. The first moved from the focus on economic returns with sustainability as a tool to achieve this, to the focus on sustainability while ensuring economic returns. The second reframed returns from short-term and quantifiable to

longer-term potentially unquantifiable. While the results considered these as nuances of conformance, another interpretation sees these small but subtle actions holding manipulation attributes. As such they may be classed as micro-manipulations. This is not to marginalize their potential impact. Weber, Heinz and DeSoucey (2008) point out individuals with reform agendas often "eschew tactics designed to catch wide attention and provoke confrontation with the mainstream" (p. 562). Moreover, such micro-manipulations respond to the paradox of fitting into the existing environment while attempting to change it. Furthermore, the literature has called for exploration of "micro-alterations that practitioners engage in through their everyday praxis" arguing that these can "produce cracks in the foundation of an institution and being to shift what was once taken for granted" (Suddaby et al., 2013: 337). Vaara and Whittington (2012) state that "the outcomes of small instances of praxis are found to be sometimes unexpectedly significant: not just a strategic decision or non-decision, but also the legitimation or delegitimation of particular actors, choices, or practices" (p. 298). Extrapolating this to the role of micro-reframing in legitimising sustainability, and the subsequent implications for the institutional environment of the business, this action represents a micro-alteration combining 'conformance' and 'manipulation' ideas. Moreover, successful micro-reframing, on an ongoing or larger scale, contributes to a shift in taken for granted assumptions that previously pervaded business, such as short-term returns. These results position the process of legitimising not just in the narrow legitimacy theory, but also in wider theories demonstrating the contribution it can make to understanding and theorizing institutional work, strategy-as-practice, and

organisational change (Pettigrew, 1987; Hinings and Greenwood, 1988; Suddaby et al., 2013).

As a legitimising action, contextualisation was divided into historical/cultural contextualisation and issue-based contextualisation. Historical/cultural contextualisation saw the individual leverage an aspect of the company's historical or cultural circumstance to align sustainability with it. Issue-based contextualisation saw individual's leverage external issues such as mega-trends to legitimise sustainability. Support for the former contextualisation was clear in Drori and Honig's (2013) case study which demonstrates that the legacy of the firm (for example, its vision, mission, values, technology and market) is shaped during its formative years, subsequently serving as a boundary condition for the development of legitimising (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002). For this reason, "legitimacy itself may become a source of contestation within the organization. Thus, the legitimacy of founding shapes the norms and practices that are seen as legitimate, and both constrains and facilitates the organization's strategic action throughout its life" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 368). Support can also be seen in Thomas and Lamm's (2012) exploration of the impact of culture on the prominence of different types of legitimacy. Researching from the perspective of the audience, they argue that "Legitimacy among employees who were socialized in less individualistic cultures might be expected to depend more heavily on perceptions of external attitudes of peers and top management and less on internal personal beliefs" (Thomas and Lamm, 2012: 196). While their conclusions *per se* are not directly relevant to the current study, they support the notion of historical/cultural contextualisation being relevant in the process of legitimising.

Furthermore, the differentiating and personalising action addresses the fact that individuals alter the framing to suit their audience. Such an observation in itself demonstrates the strategic actions of the individual. As such, it is linked to the idea of appealing to a specific audience perspective, as well as to the heterogeneous nature of the audience. There is support for this in the literature, for example from the issue-crafting context (Sonenshein, 2006) where it was observed that individuals may reframe issues publicly in ways that they think will resonate with specific audiences (Scully and Segel, 2002). Moreover, linking to the disassociation action, the issue-crafting context (Sonenshein, 2006) distinguishes between two domains of meaning: the normative and the economic. Economic embellishing and normative subtracting occurred during issue crafting particularly where individuals had relatively less power. Finally, despite its limited use, the fact that all episodes of analogy occurred as part of the manipulation legitimising strategy, points to its importance. Such proactive and specific framing as a part of legitimising is not uncommon in the literature. Meyer and Scott (1983) found entrepreneurs frame new ventures using metaphor and analogy to connect new ideas to 'established cultural accounts' (p. 201), which is especially important for work in uncertain contexts (Zott and Huy, 2007). Moreover, Neilson and Rao (1987) recognise "stories, proverbs, and tales are potent vehicles through which organizational members discreetly convey messages without compromising their sense of psychological safety and security" (p. 528). Finally, the role of leadership must be considered as central to individuals having such legitimising strategies available to them. As such, leveraging sponsorship is a key action supporting both selection and manipulation

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strategies. While middle management were referenced in their role as a gate keeper for action and implementation of sustainability, leadership may be considered gate keepers of thoughts and approaches. Leadership have the control over the conditions that make some ideas safe to discuss and others unsafe (Neilson and Rao, 1987). Again, from the social movement literature, free spaces are said to be often used to "build oppositional capacities that allow [the oppressed] to challenge defenders of the status quo" (Kellogg, 2009: 704). These free spaces can be established by leaders who 'allow' divergent thinking and approaches. The actions and attitudes of leaders may affect "what is said, how open people are in discussing the viability of competing frames of reference, and how particular frames of reference are applied to specific issues" (Neilson and Rao, 1987: 529).

Given the actions identified above, it is worth exploring two other aspects of literature associated with individual's actions. First, issue selling (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill and Lawrence, 2001) has been identified as moves by middle management to direct the attention of senior management to a specific issue as an early part of a more general change process. Dutton et al. (2001) identify categories of moves including packaging, involvement, and process-related moves, within their empirical sample of 82 accounts of issue-selling. They conclude that their research "contributes to understanding the processes through which a manager's initiatives can shape top management's attention" (p. 732) and from a broader perspective "begins to unravel and make sense of the micro-processes that compose strategic change" (p. 732). While there are overlaps between issue-selling and legitimising, and it appears obvious that issue-selling may contribute to the legitimising process, it should be noted that legitimising represents a broader concept than that of issue-

selling.   Firstly, this is as regards the audience for legitimising within the organisation including not just senior management, but also middle management and employees.   Moreover, legitimising implies a more proactive process than just 'directing attention'.   That is, issue-selling may form part of the micro-processes which contribute to legitimising, but it cannot be considered the same.   As such, while the issue selling literature may be useful to understand some of the actions identified within the process of legitimising, it cannot be said to inform comprehensively the wider understanding of the legitimising process.

Secondly, it is interesting to note the role of language in legitimising actions, especially as regards micro-reframing although also evident in other actions such as analogy and disassociation.   A number of authors support the focus on language when exploring micro-processes (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Sonenshein, 2006; Maguire and Hardy, 2009).   Meyerson's (2001) theory of tempered radicalism stresses the importance of using language that is familiar and legitimate to insiders when advocating change.   Maguire and Hardy (2009) analyse how language was used to de-legitimise a previously legitimate practice.   Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) explore a series of rhetorical strategies used to legitimise a proposed new organisational form.   Rhetoric, they argue, represents the art of persuasion and in particular 'new rhetoric' attempts to understand "how shifts or displacements of meaning occur in the context of social change" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005: 39).   A fundamental premise of rhetoric theory is that language that successfully rationalizes an action increases its chances of adoption (Green, 2004).   The skilful and strategic use of language is a key means of initiating and directing change

(Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), and as such should be considered important to the process of legitimising.

5.4 Sustainability Integration and the Outcome of Legitimacy

Within the results section, caution was recommended regarding the issue of 'extensive' sustainability integration, being equated to the outcome of legitimacy. However, it is worth exploring this in more detail. To do so, the issue of audience must be raised. This research has explicitly focussed on the process of legitimising by an individual practitioner. No attempt to research or test audience perceptions of legitimacy was made. However, it is plausible to make some judgements about audience in the context of this research, and indeed this is necessary when deconstructing the use of sustainability integration and its link to the outcome of legitimacy. The foundation of this analysis is the recognition that an 'audience' is not one homogeneous whole, but is heterogeneous. This is supported, for example, by evidence of the differentiating and personalising action forming part of the legitimising process which implies an audience with different perspectives, norms, and values. Moreover, the extensive evidence of the selection strategy demonstrates the existence of multiple 'amicable venues' for non-conformance legitimising, further supporting a heterogeneous audience. This section now addresses the implications of this, within the context of integration and the outcome of legitimacy.

When analysing the process of legitimising, it is necessary to distinguish between individual-level legitimacy and collective-level legitimacy (Tost, 2011). While legitimacy relies on some notion of 'consensus' (Zelditch, 2001) given it purports to represent congruence between organisational activities and norms of acceptable

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behaviour (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975), it is doubtful that any actual society or organisation is entirely consensual (Zelditch, 2001): "not everyone agrees with any one norm, value, belief, practice, or procedure. Even if they do, they do not agree with all of them. Even if they appear at least to acquiesce in all of them, acquiescence does not necessarily imply actual belief" (p. 9). As such, it is argued that consensus is required only at the collective level, not the individual level: "if an element of a pre-given social framework is valid, it is a resource sufficient for legitimation even if neither the actor offering the justification, nor the actor accepting it believes in it personally" (Zelditch, 2001: 10). Johnson et al. (2006) argue that even if the members of an organisation fail to share the same norms, values, and beliefs, their behaviours actually endorse the valid social order. This work has its foundations in Weber's (1978 [1925]) concept of validity. At a collective level, a social order is considered valid when two conditions are met: (1) the norms, beliefs, and values that guide the social order are perceived as legitimate by some people, and (2) even those people who do not perceive the order as legitimate at least know that others perceive it as legitimate and understand that it governs behaviour (Weber, 1978 [1925]). Individuals may act in accordance with the social order, even if they privately disagree (Johnson et al., 2006: 55). As such, legitimacy is indicated by actors' compliance with a social order as either a) a set of social obligations, or as b) a desirable model of action (Johnson et al., 2006). Dornbush and Scott (1975) were the first to articulate the rationale for classifying legitimising attitudes on the basis of their internal or external locus, by suggesting that legitimacy is conferred through a combination of propriety and validity. Propriety refers to an individual's own judgement of the extent to which an entity is appropriate for its social context, while

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validity refers to the extent to which there appears to be a general consensus within a collectivity that the entity is appropriate for its social context (Tost, 2011). As such, within organisations, actors often accept procedures as the way things are "either because they really do believe that these practices are proper, or because they believe that others believe this and anticipate formal or informal sanctions if they do not comply" (Johnson et al., 2006: 73). As such, validity is "a collectively influenced source of legitimization, which can be conferred either by authorization, when influential authoritative figures convey their support for an action or arrangement, or by endorsement, when members of an individual's relevant peer group endorse it" (Dornbush and Scott, 1975: 39). Therefore, organisational strategy can be "legitimate at the collective level (i.e., have validity) but may not be viewed as appropriate (i.e., as legitimate) by all individuals in the group" (Tost, 2011: 689).

In sum, it is necessary to explicitly acknowledge both the heterogeneous nature of the audience, as well as to deconstruct 'legitimacy' to the collective-level of validity and the individual-level of appropriateness. As such, from the perspective of the collective level, a strategy can be said to be legitimate where the audience accept and implement it because they are instructed to or fear consequences of not doing so, irrespective of their personal beliefs. This means that individual practitioners should be aware of which 'legitimacy' they are targeting, and the implications and consequences of achieving one or the other. Indeed, this links to the next section which addresses the issue of institutionalisation. Where a strategy is implemented because of an existing dictate, for example from a CEO, it may be said to be legitimate at a collective level: that is, it may have validity. However, there may be questions as to its institutionalisation, especially if its validity is relying on the

ongoing dictate from the CEO. If the strategy then gains legitimacy at the individual level: that is, it is seen as appropriate by all members of the group, it is no longer the dictate of the CEO, it may be said to have become institutionalised. It is to this question of the strategic and institutional nexus regarding the process of legitimising that this chapter now turns.

5.5 Strategic and Institutional Nexus

The literature review addressed the issue of the differing traditions in the legitimacy literature: strategic versus institutional. Those in the institutional school believe organisations 'receive' legitimacy by conforming to system-wide norms, beliefs, and rules, and individuals cannot use deliberate strategies to manipulate it (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Those in the strategic school believe individuals can work actively to influence and manipulate the type and amount of legitimacy they possess (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). While this work sits in the strategic school, exploring the process of legitimising by individuals who aim to increase the legitimacy of the sustainability strategy, it has also acknowledged that institutional pressures and factors are relevant. While individuals may undertake intentional actions in line with the strategic tradition, these may be affected by, or may affect aspects of the institutional environment. As such, it is important to reflect on the interplay between institutions and individuals, with the aim of clarifying the nexus of the strategic and institutional traditions of legitimacy.

5.5.1 Institutional Influence on Individual

As Drori and Honig (2013) noted, individuals do not legitimise in a vacuum, but "within a particular organisational field, economic market, socio-historical space and geographical place" (p. 372). That is, institutional pressures affect strategic choices in relation to legitimising as they do other strategic choices such as business models or market expansion. When legitimising an internal organisational strategy, individuals should not only be aware of the institutional pressures at play, but should be proactive in ensuring their subsequent legitimising strategy and action choices incorporate these. At its heart, the conformance legitimising strategy speaks to the notion of incorporating the existing institutional environment. Indeed, the institutional school argues that entities 'receive' legitimacy by conforming to norms, beliefs, and values (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). As such, the extensive and indeed foundational nature of conformance points to the importance of institutional components. 'Pure' scholars in the institutional legitimacy tradition would challenge any notion of individuals acting proactively, even as regards the conformance strategy (Suchman, 1995). That is, they may argue that as legitimacy operates at the subconscious level there is little chance of entities being reflexively aware of it or using strategies to influence it (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002) even where those strategies relate to conformance. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the institutional tradition of legitimacy, and institutional pressures on legitimising. This is important because, as Suchman (1995) observed, individuals face both strategic challenges and constitutive pressures. The evidence demonstrated conformance-only respondents undertaking fewer actions on average in the process of legitimising. However, equally, the fact

that they do use some actions suggests that even a conformance legitimising strategy is not the inactive construct that those in the 'pure' institutional tradition of legitimacy may argue.

Moving beyond this argument, it is obvious that the widespread use of legitimising actions demonstrates proactive strategic legitimising. However, one action deserves attention in this analysis of the strategic/institutional nexus. The evidence in particular of contextualisation as a widely used legitimising action, supports the influence of the institutional environment on the legitimising process and choices. Contextualisation is the action of incorporating and using existing institutional factors, either from the external environment, or leveraging internal institutional structures associated with historical or cultural factors, in the process of legitimising. This provides evidence of the link between the strategic and the institutional, and further supports Suchman's (1995) reflection that the strategic/institutional divide may prove an obstacle to 'legitimacy' achieving its full theoretical potential in explaining the associated empirical phenomena.

5.5.2 Individual's Influence on Institutions

The second aspect of the strategic/institutional nexus brings the theory of institutional work into the discussion. This considers the impact individuals can have on institutions (Suddaby et al., 2013) and responds to calls to bring the individual back into the purview of institutional analysis (Lawrence et al., 2011). This is especially relevant in the context of this study because of the role of the manipulation legitimising strategy in attempting to change the environment. While

this may be viewed at a micro organisational level of change, it can also be viewed at a more macro institutional level. Indeed, how do institutions change if not one individual at a time, one policy at a time or one organisation at a time? As such, actions taken by individuals for the purpose of legitimising can alter the values and norms of the organisation and, in turn, society (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975). It should be noted that it is not being argued that the individual in the study are heroic and overt leaders of institutional change: such a notion was explored in the literature review in relation to institutional entrepreneurship and discarded (Lawrence et al., 2011). Rather, it is argued that individual's actions in legitimising sustainability have the potential to impact the institutional environment through the more subtle medium of institutional work. Institutional work sees social actors as neither bystanders to a larger social dynamic nor 'heroic' institutional entrepreneurs who engage in an insurmountable uphill battle for change. Rather, studies on institutional work investigate the ways in which "social actors carry out actions, practices and processes that alternately and interchangeably create, maintain, transform or disrupt organizations" (Drori and Honig, 2013: 367). The most obvious example of this is through the manipulation legitimising strategy. Indeed, manipulation has been described as "the purposeful and opportunistic attempt to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures and evaluations" (Oliver, 1991: 157). However, evidence of change can be found prior to manipulation, with the generalised legitimising pathway theorizing the movement from limited to intermediate to extensive integration which depicts the outcome of institutional work.

For clarity, this aspect of institutional work addresses individuals aiming to alter the institution of 'business', such that it moves from being focussed on short-term

economic returns to incorporate other broader aspects of sustainability and integrate them into daily operations and strategic vision. However, a second institutional impact is worth noting: that of the impact of legitimising strategy on the emerging institution of sustainability. Recall that institutions are enduring elements of social life that affect behaviour and beliefs (Lawrence et al., 2011). Sustainability is an emerging institution not yet fully formed or institutionalized (Suddaby, 2013, personal communication) but which is beginning to permeate social (including business) life based on the premise of balance between social, environment, and economic outcomes (Elkington, 1997) as well as reducing negative impacts and increasing positive impact. As such, and as discussed earlier in relation to the impact of conformance-only legitimising strategies, the institution of sustainability, as it is being formed and crafted, can be impacted by the individual, socially constructing interpretations of sustainability within each organisation. These are at most determined by, or at least impacted by, legitimising strategies and actions.

5.5.3 Reciprocal Nature of Strategic/Institutional Approaches

The discussion above supports the reciprocal nature of the strategic/institutional elements of legitimising. This can be compared to the notion of a 'critical institutional approach' (Lawrence et al., 2011: 56) which comprises an institutional theory that problematizes the status quo as well as attempts to explain it. This would engage with the relationship between embeddedness in the institutional context and emancipation from it, thus depicting "a struggle on the part of individuals … to step out of their established roles, adopt a reflexive stance, and engage in the institutional work necessary to transform the conditions under which they live and work"

(Lawrence et al., 2011: 56). Moreover, evidence of combined legitimising strategies resulting in potential paradoxes which have been identified through this research reflects this struggle.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented a novel generalised legitimising pathway, depicting the progression of individual's legitimising an emerging organisational strategy. Elements of this pathway were then extracted and contextualised within existing literature in order to understand the wider implications. This included exploration of the importance of conformance as an initial and foundational strategy, as well the importance of moving beyond conformance and the risk of not doing so. Also addressed was the fundamental issue of combined legitimising strategies and in particular the complex roles of both selection and manipulation, as well as the roles of specific legitimising actions. The strategic/institutional nexus formed the focus of the next section of this chapter with the conclusion that a reciprocal relationship exists. By incorporating aspects of both, a more holistic and realistic representation of the legitimising process can be made.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

The conclusion chapter has three distinct aims: to summarise what is now known about the process of legitimising given both the existing literature and this research, to specifically describe the theoretical and applied contribution of this research, and to look forward to what still needs to be understood to continue the journey to understanding the process of legitimising. It starts by restating the research objectives and design. It then summarises the outcomes and contribution, focusing on the process of legitimising as it is now understood.   The next section acknowledges the limitations of this research, and proposes specific further research aimed at addressing these limitations and further improving academic research on the process of legitimising. Concluding remarks pull together all aspects of this thesis.

6.1 Summary of Research Objectives and Design

This research project was born from an initial interest in the differences between corporate sustainability and CSR, but refined given considerations of research difficulties and potential for significant academic contribution associated with this initial research interest. It evolved to place the context of sustainability strategy at the centre of the research, and in particular to understand how this strategy gained standing within the organisation. Such an interest naturally led the researcher to use legitimacy theory as a lens through which to study the phenomenon. However, investigations of the legitimacy literature and further reflections on the core of the topic, led to an interest in the process of legitimising, rather than the outcome of legitimacy.   This was in part informed by the researcher's ontological and epistemological stances, interested in uncovering processes and accepting both

contingent and changing contexts which problematize the positivists approach to 'proving' causality. However, it was also informed by the existing legitimacy literature which lacks attention to either theorizing or empirically investigating the process of legitimising. Such a gap may be an obstacle to the wider use of legitimacy as a theory to examine process based phenomena. As such, the research objective broadly aimed to understand how individuals go about legitimising sustainability. More specifically, it focused on understanding and interrogating the legitimising processes that Heads of Sustainability employ in attempting to gain legitimacy for their sustainability strategy from other members of their organisation. This was approached with the legitimacy theory lens and theorised as 'internal legitimising'. Internal legitimising was understood as a process whereby individuals attempt to gain legitimacy for an organisational strategy from others within the organisation. However, there were numerous gaps in knowledge regarding what this process entailed and how it progressed. What little had been theorised through existing frameworks and conceptualisations were either one dimensional and static – often acknowledging more complex, possibly temporal, elements, but failing to include these – or appeared to give the strategy itself agency, departing from the focus on individual and their actions which is important in process research. To address this, the researcher interviewed 51 Heads of Sustainability, and use qualitative data analysis to identify the legitimising strategies they employed, drawing on and extending Suchman's (1995) CSM legitimising strategy model, and then inductively identified specific legitimising actions the individuals undertook as part of these umbrella legitimising strategies.

6.2 Summary of Research Outcomes

The current research project focused on the legitimising strategies and actions used by individuals attempting to legitimise the sustainability strategy within their organisation and, importantly, paid close attention to the interrelationships between these strategies as well as the temporal progression. The study found that the process of internal legitimising involved combining different legitimising strategies and employing different legitimising actions over time. A generalised legitimising pathway was theorised, based on this empirical evidence, which demonstrated how legitimising strategy combinations progress from C-only, to CS, to CSM. That is, as sustainability moved through different levels of integration, additional legitimising strategies were incorporated. The four most significant actions undertaken by individuals throughout these stages were micro-reframing, contextualisation, leveraging sponsorship, and disassociation. Moreover, evidence showed the use of these increased on average as practitioners moved through the legitimising pathway. As such, this research generated a framework for understanding the complex and temporally driven progression of legitimising, which involves the dynamic use of multiple legitimising strategies and associated underlying actions. Moreover, it conceptualized a pathway which individuals seeking to understand the legitimising process may follow. The specific contributions of these research outcomes will now be explored in more detail.

6.3 Theoretical and Applied Contributions

This section summarises the three areas in which the current research has contributed to existing knowledge. The first two focus on theoretical contributions, the third on contribution to practice. First, contribution to legitimacy theory is summarised. This was the focus of this research and forms the central contribution of this thesis. Second, contribution to sustainability is outlined, which is a secondary contribution. Finally, applied contributions are detailed in order to demonstrate the relevance of this research to practice.

6.3.1 Contribution to Legitimacy

For legitimacy, these results provide a focus on the *process* of legitimising which has received scant attention since Suchman (1995) proposed his conceptual framework. By interrogating all three legitimising strategies individually, it provides empirical evidence and theoretical development for each, contributing to more rigorous and directed future research. However, the most significant contribution comes from evidence of the interplay between the strategies indicating the complex and dynamic nature of legitimising, and theorizing the temporal nature of such a relationship. Moreover, by ensuring the individual remains central to the research, a further contribution has been made whereby the actions undertaken by the individual have been identified and mapped. By combining these actions with the results outlined above, the research produced a generalised legitimising pathway which responds to the gaps in the existing legitimising research and ensures the individual remains central to the process research. This generalised legitimising pathway may be used as a framework for future empirical investigations of legitimising. However, it may

also benefit from further theoretical and conceptual development, for example with input from other literatures including psychology. As such, the most significant contribution in relation to the legitimacy field is in the development of knowledge surrounding the process of legitimising which will hopefully serve to increase its presence in future research related to legitimacy, but also related to tangential areas such as change management and framing. It is hoped that this research is a step in bridging the gap between legitimacy outcomes and legitimising process, by providing an in-depth exploration of the process construct. Future research should further test the extended legitimising framework proposed here, and further refine it theoretically and conceptually, including linking it to outcome metrics. Finally, by exploring the strategic/institutional nexus, a further contribution is made ensuring legitimacy, as a theoretical construct, reflects the 'true' situation in which neither the individual nor the institution predominate, but exist with reciprocal elements. As such, it responds to the call to incorporate both strategic and institutional traditions into the study of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and provides evidence for how these combine (see, for example, the 'contextualisation' legitimising action).

6.3.2 Contribution to Sustainability

For the sustainability literature, this research makes two contributions. First, it draws attention to the more comprehensive construct of sustainability, concluding that where C-only is pursued, there is potential for broader aspects of sustainability to be lost from the construct. Interestingly, this may position the choice of legitimising strategy as an important factor in the success or otherwise of sustainability as a form of social change. That is, this research presents the role of the legitimising process,

and by extension the legitimising individual, as one potential key factor in shaping the construct of 'sustainability' itself. Concepts such as sustainability are open to multiple interpretations and are continually changing. While the concept emerged from 'sustainable development', this thesis suggests that if aspects broader than those which facilitate direct economic returns are ignored in the legitimising process, it is possible that the understanding of sustainability itself may evolve from being a balance or trade-off between social, environmental, and economic bottom lines, to social and environmental issues being always subservient to economic returns. However, the research also suggests that sustainability practitioners *are* using different legitimising strategies at different times and for different audiences, in order to legitimise sustainability beyond conformance. Of course, whether this process is successful requires an extended research design including measures of legitimising as a process, matched to legitimacy and legitimacy typologies as outcomes. However, it does provide some evidence of the broader concept of sustainability being incorporated into organisational life.

6.3.3 Contribution to Practice

Sustainability practitioners face a complex challenge, particularly where they are aiming to legitimise non-conformance aspects of the sustainability strategy into their organisation. However, they also have a number of tools available to them as they attempt this. The process of legitimising involves combining different strategies and actions at different times and leveraging different audiences and perspectives. Moreover, it is occurs over a medium to long term time frame, and is not a matter of providing one simple argument to all. By explicitly identifying the general pathway

for the process of legitimising, this research enables practitioners to better visualise both their role in that process, as well as the limitations they must contend with. Moreover, it provides a guide to assist them in the journey. Finally, and importantly, the research points to the role legitimising can have in forming the emerging institution of sustainability. It should therefore provide practitioners with a reflection point on what they are hoping to achieve within their role, and whether their chosen legitimising strategy is able to contribute to that. That is, if individuals are committed to durable social change towards sustainability, they should understand that their choice of legitimising strategies and use of legitimising actions can play a role in the dispersion of sustainability, as well as in the definition of what sustainability means within a business context.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

This section outlines limitations of the current study and proposed future research. Because a number of the limitations lead into future research directions these have been combined into one analysis.

6.4.1 Tracking the Temporal Progression

One of the key limitations of this study relates to the cross-sectional data collection. This is more pronounced because of the conclusions related to the temporal nature of the process of legitimising. While the sustainability integration categorisation addressed this issue to the extent possible given the constraints of the study, a better solution would be to collect longitudinal data following the legitimising processes of specific individuals over time. Process research reflects "the what, why and how of

some sequence of individuals and collective action" (Pettigrew, 1997: 338) and is best addressed by capturing multiple time points (Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). While a large sample of such data would be ideal, even data from a small selection of individuals, perhaps all currently at the C-only stage, which tracks their legitimising strategies and actions as they pursue legitimacy for sustainability would provide useful insights. Moreover, were such data to exhibit similar strategy combinations and actions to that proposed in the generalised legitimising pathway, this would provide further validity and confirmation of the current research results and conclusions. Fundamentally, process based research should explore individuals enacting processes, and longitudinal research is best placed to do this.

6.4.2 Linking Process to Outcome

This research focusses on the process of legitimising sustainability strategy undertaken by individuals. However, it does not test the outcomes of this process. As such, conclusions that can be drawn regarding how 'legitimate' sustainability has become within the target audience must be tempered by the appropriateness of using sustainability integration as a reflection of this outcome. While these conclusions were not central to the research questions, and so such contingent assumptions were deemed acceptable, any study which aimed to draw solid conclusions regarding the outcome of legitimacy would need to develop a targeted research design testing such outcomes. This would make a further contribution to the current research by adding an 'effectiveness' component to legitimising choices. One such research design may be a matched-pair method. This would involve exploring the process of legitimising

as undertaken by an individual, and simultaneously exploring the levels of legitimacy ascribed to the strategy by the target audience. By incorporating this into a longitudinal design, this would also go some way to addressing the issue of causality which would no doubt become central to ascribing actions of legitimising with outcomes of legitimacy: how could it be proven that it was the individual's actions which resulted in legitimacy and not a pre-existing view held by, and/or external factor having an impact on, the audience?

6.4.3 Observing Processes

A third limitation relates to the reliance on interviews to reflect the processes undertaken by individuals. This is linked to the limitations of cross-sectional analysis, and is a common limitation for all interview-based research: the reliance on retrospective accounts (Glick et al., 1990). Interviewees may neglect important project events, or add their own judgement or interpretation into the narratives, in an attempt at post-rationalization (Flynn and Du, 2012). Moreover, in process research, they may not even be consciously aware of the processes they are pursuing and so may not be able to communicate these in an interview. Future research on the process of legitimising would benefit from direct participant observation, whereby the individual undertaking legitimising is shadowed and observed by the researcher so that his/her actions can be objectively documented and analysed. This would also enable the researcher to get closer to the underlying reality by being less removed from the construct under study. Such a design would be consistent with a critical realist approach aiming to uncover such underlying mechanisms.

6.4.4 Analysing the Individual

While the research and results focussed on ensuring the individual remained central to the study, little investigation of the individual actually occurred. As such, potential explanations for legitimising choices which related to the individual's background, psychology, or attributes were ignored. Future research could address this, and place the individual as central to the research design. One avenue which was mentioned briefly in relation to sustainability was that of individual identity. While the discussion section explored how legitimising choices may impact identity, future research may explore how identity impacts legitimising choices. Another avenue may step back from the legitimising strategies and actions *per se*, and consider the sensemaking process individuals undergo leading up to legitimising choices. Do they bracket and label organisational actions retrospectively when making sense of them (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005)? In what way does this process, which may take place subconsciously, impact the subsequent legitimising choices? What factors influence such a sensemaking process?

6.4.5 Analysing a Network of Actors

Moving in the other direction, while this thesis has considered the role of the individual actor, it is likely that their actions combine with those of other actors internal - and potentially external - to the organisation in the process of legitimising. This was already demonstrated to some degree with the importance of leveraging leadership in developing coalitions of support. Future research may consider these interactions. In particular, this would speak to the growing focus on distributed

agency and collective action as routes to institutional change (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007).

6.4.6 Deconstructing Language

A final potential limitation relates to the analysis process and in particular the focus on content analysis. This in itself is not a limitation (see the method section for further justification). However, an avenue of future research may incorporate discourse analysis, thereby placing the role of language as central to the process of legitimising. While this was briefly referenced in relation to micro-framing, it is worth further elaboration here. A number of authors consider the use of language to be an essential component of legitimising. Some examples of specific constructs include the role of rhetoric (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), issue selling (Dutton et al., 2001), and issue crafting (Sonenshein, 2006). While these were briefly referenced in the discussion chapter in relation to the results of this research, developing a research design which explored the language component of legitimising would likely pay more attention to micro-processes such as these, and would provide a useful addition to the actions already identified.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

This thesis explored the process individuals undertake in legitimising sustainability within an organisation. It extended Suchman's (1995) CSM legitimising strategy model, by identifying how these strategies are used concurrently and temporally, and then augmented this by identifying specific actions individuals undertake during the process of legitimising. As such it fills an important research gap, providing a

comprehensive depiction of the legitimising process, and ensuring the individual remains central to this process. It concluded that there is a pattern evident in individual's legitimising processes, and this was depicted by the generalised legitimising pathway which incorporated both concurrent and temporal strategy interrelationships. More broadly, this thesis has highlighted the potential contribution of the legitimising process to both organisational and institutional change. It supports further focus on individual's actions, strategies, and choices in legitimising organisational strategy, as well as their role defining and shaping underlying constructs such as sustainability.

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Appendix One: Email Template

Dear,

I am a PhD student studying at the University of Edinburgh. My research relates to the drivers of corporate sustainability.

I am trying to identify leading sustainability practitioners such as yourself to be involved in my research. I'm hoping you may be willing to undertake a short (30 mins - 1 hour) and relatively informal interview in the new year? The interview will include questions about how and why your company pursues sustainability.

All responses will be completely confidential, and both companies and individuals will remain anonymous. If you agree to provide your views, you will receive a preliminary report soon after all the interviews have been completed, which will describe the main themes that emerged from the interviews. I would also be happy to stay in touch and share findings from other aspects of my research which may interest you.

Thank-you for considering this request and I would be happy to answer any queries you have either over email or over the phone. I very much hope you will consider being included in this important area of research.

Kind regards,

Sarah Ivory
PhD Candidate
University of Edinburgh Business School

Phone: +44 (0) 7912422413
LinkedIN: uk.linkedin.com/pub/sarah-ivory/2/460/32a

Appendix Two: Summary of Respondents

No.	Title	Location	Industry
01	Sustainable Operations Strategy Manager	UK	Transport
02	Head of Sustainability, EMEA	UK	Construction
03	Director of Global Sustainability	UK	FMCG
04	Sustainability Director	USA	FMCG
05	Head of Environment Sustainability	Switzerland	FMCG
06	VP, Corporate Sustainability - Strategy & Environment	Germany	Telecommunications and Transport
07	Head of Sustainability	UK	Transport
08	Head of Sustainability	Finland	Telecommunications
09	Chief Sustainability Officer	USA	Building Materials
10	Global Director, Sustainability	USA	Pharmaceutical
11	Corporate Director Sustainability	Netherlands	Chemical
12	Director of Sustainability	UK	Construction
13	Director of Sustainability	UK	Professional Services
14	Head of Sustainability, EMEA	UK	FMCG
15	VP Sustainability	UK	Pharmaceutical
16	Group Head of Sustainability	UK	Construction
17	Sustainability Manager, UK & Ireland	UK	Manufacturing
18	SVP, Sustainability and Green Support	Sweden	Construction
19	Director, Sustainability	USA	Chemical
20	Global Head of Sustainability Management	Germany	Banking
21	EVP, Global Sustainability	UK	Manufacturing
22	Manager, Corporate Responsibility	Sweden	Transport
23	Head of Corporate Sustainability	UK	Telecommunications
24	Head of Sustainability, Africa	UK	Beverage
25	SVP, Sustainability	USA	Retail
26	Head of Corporate Sustainability	UK	Retail
27	General Manager, Sustainability	UK	Microelectronics
28	Director of Sustainability	USA	Clothing
29	Sustainability Leader	Australia	Chemical
30	Corporate Responsibility Analyst	Australia	Banking
31	Director, Group Sustainability	Australia	Packaging
32	Head of Sustainability	Australia	Technology
33	Group Sustainability Manager	Australia	Building Materials
34	Group Sustainability Manager	Australia	FMCG
35	Head of Sustainability Strategy	Australia	Banking
36	General Manager, Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability	Australia	Property

37	Director of Sustainability, Australia	Australia	Property Management
38	Group Sustainability Manager	Australia	Infrastructure Development
39	Head of Corporate Sustainability	Australia	Banking
40	Global Chief Sustainability Officer	Australia	Technology
41	National Sustainability Manager	Australia	Property Management
42	Director of Sustainable Construction	UK	Mining
43	Group Sustainability Manager	Australia	FMCG
44	Sustainability Director	UK	Construction
45	Corporate Social Responsibility	UK	Construction
46	Sustainability Strategy Lead Manager	UK	Energy
47	Sustainable Supply Europe	UK	Food Retail
48	Senior Sustainability Manager	Australia	Healthcare
49	Group Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Director	UK	Professional Services
50	Vice President, Sustainability	UK	FMCG
51	Sustainability Manager	UK	Technology

Appendix Three: Interview Schedule Template

Introduction:

The purpose of this interview is purely academic: I'm researching sustainability in organisations as it is currently pursued and practiced. All interviews and comments are non-attributable – either to you or to your company, and I'm hoping this will facilitate an honest and open discussion about where you see sustainability right now in your company and the industry. It is a semi-structured interview, so I have a few questions listed down here, but if something seems interesting we may pursue that and see where the interview takes us.

Questions:

1. Tell me briefly about your organisation? Its purpose, ownership, history…

2. Tell me about the history of sustainability in your organisation…

3. What is sustainability in your organisation?

4. How does sustainability relate to other goals and objectives of your company?

5. What happens when these clash? Can you give examples?

6. How do you convince people to embrace sustainability?

7. The economic downturn has been a difficult time: how has sustainability at your company been impacted?

8. What is your role and who do you report to?

9. How do you get a sustainability initiative approved for implementation?

10. What are the challenges you face in adopting and implementing sustainability internally? Who supports you and helps you overcome these?

11. A final overarching question: why does your company pursue sustainability?

Other Possible Questions
- Would the company ever pursue a sustainability programme that was uneconomic?
- What does 'balance' mean? Win-win-win? One wins sometimes while others lose?

- Rewards system?
- Could you do more?
- Your background/why are you in the sustainability space?
- Morals?

Appendix Four: Evidence of Categorisation

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
1	Limited	3	0-9	Director of Safety and Sustainable Development, who reports to CEO	2	Very limited, just starting to put in papers for funding for trials of sustainable projects.
2	Extensive	20+	20+	CEO	1	Investment decisions require Head of Sustainability sign off, strong link to founder vision has remained with extensive sustainability integration
3	Extensive	20+	20+	Vice president, global sustainability, who reports to CEO	2	Purpose and values driven company from start, one of first companies to have corporate sustainable development group, statement of purpose adjusted in 2007 with addition of 'now and for generations to come' added
4	Inter-mediate	10	10-20	Senior Director, Global Operations Group	2	Focus on productivity initially, some movement beyond, mostly to risk management. Slow to act, prefer to consider issues carefully before acting.
5	Extensive	20+	20+	General Manager, Operations	2	Progressive and wide reaching concept of Shared Value developed by company and incorporated into strategy and decision-making

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
6	Extensive	20+	20+	CSO who reports to the CEO	2	Historic links and major push for sustainability 4 years ago with resourcing and commitment.
7	Limited	6	0-9	Not stated, attends executive meetings	na	CEO not supportive and end of franchise cycle approaching funding very few projects that go beyond that date.
8	Inter-mediate	19	10-20	Executive Vice President, Operations	2	All business groups have strategic targets for sustainability, and considered for investment decisions, however some examples of integrated sustainability strategy seems a bit 'light'
9	Extensive	11	10-20	CEO	1	Despite relatively recent integration, sustainability integrated into wider business strategy and goals, and a focus of the CEO.
10	Extensive	20+	20+	Sits in Supply Chain, but dotted line through Sustainability Council Chairman to Group Operating Chair (President of the company)	2	Strong history in company, central place in creedo, clear company-wide goals, mixed integration into strategy, but remained committed through economic downturn and increased attention to it.
11	Inter-mediate	9	0-9	CEO	1	Formal strategy, with moves to promote shared value and employee understanding.

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
12	Limited	6	0-9	Board Member responsible for Sustainability	1	Somewhat unclear due to recent merger, but some evidence given redundancy of previous post, and difficulties faced by current post of limited focus, especially during economic downturn.
13	Limited	2	0-9	Sustainability Partners	1	Early stages with limited resourcing, and interest based on prospective ad hoc offering to clients, rather any true integration
14	Inter-mediate	18	10-20	Global Head of Sustainability, who reports to another, who reports to CEO	2	Formal policy in place and integrated in places (eg mills), but difficulties getting traction elsewhere (eg products).
15	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Head of Sustainability, who reports to Head of HR, who reports to CEO	2	Longer evidence of commitment to environmental goals, but mixed evidence on integration of sustainability across whole organisation, more product, project specific
16	Inter-mediate	10	10-20	Not stated, sustainability as issue on Board agenda	na	Sustainability strategy with road map signed off by CEO, and implemented by all OpCos but with mixed enthusiasm and success.
17	Extensive	18	10-20	Head of Sales, UK, and Head of Sustainability AMEA	2	Extensive integration across all: sustainability central to business and corporate strategy and success
18	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Executive Vice President, who reports to CEO	2	Formal strategy with wide remit, but business model and decentralised control makes integration and enforcement difficult.

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
19	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Vice President, Safety, Health and the Environment who is also CSO/ who report to Exec VP, who reports to CEO	3	Formal strategy, integrated across business, but sheer size as well as footprint in chemicals makes engagement and implementation challenging.
20	Inter-mediate	9	0-9	CEO	1	Established a general sustainability policy, also some very specific sector policies. Follow international standards related to project finance and other product areas, and also establish own policies
21	Inter-mediate		Unknown	Board member Environment and Technology	na	Board member leads sustainability council, with projects driven throughout the business. Recent employment of Head of Sustainability and drive for integration.
22	Inter-mediate	18	10-20	Head of Corporate Relations	na	Sustainability is part of strategy development process in parallel with (but not extensively integrated with) other functions.
23	Inter-mediate	9	0-9	Director of Group Sustainability, who reports to Group External Affairs Director	2	Formal strategy development and aligned with overall strategy, but only selectively integrated on a product or geographic basis.
24	Inter-mediate		Unknown	Corporate Relations Director, Africa, who reports to President, Africa	2	Formal strategy, integrated into general strategy, but avoids labelling as sustainability. Working through some difficult trade-off issues on road to more extensive integration across all areas.

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
25	Inter-mediate	8	0-9	Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs, who reports to CEO	2	Widely and successfully integrated in selected areas, but avoiding issues in other areas (eg employees).
26	Inter-mediate	8	0-9	VP External Affairs	na	Widely and successfully integrated in selected areas, but avoiding issues in other areas (eg employees).
27	Limited		Unknown	Not specified	na	Environmental team were very incremental, not very ambitious because the power was held by the product teams, they would go to the product teams and say 'hey can we see where we could improve the energy efficiency of the television range?' and the television people would say 'no, not a priority for us'. And the environment people would say 'ok, see you next year'.
28	Limited	3	0-9	President/CEO but position combined with Quality Manager	1	Newly introduced position with little leverage and so far limited strategy.
29	Limited	10	10-20	GM Health and Hygiene, Manager of Global Sustainability, which reports to executive role	3	Reactionary elements introduced in specific environments (safety, pollution, local community), but questionable wider integrated strategy across the business. Current restructuring department, strategy, and reporting.
30	Inter-mediate		Unknown	Head of Sustainability, who reports to CEO	2	Formal strategy and attempts to integrated across business as central focus of strategy, but so far appears to have mixed results.

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
31	Limited	Less than 5	Unknown		na	Sustainability commitments only in order to 'stay out of trouble' and 'keep your nose clean'. Not integrated or prioritised unless customer interest prompted attention.
32	Inter-mediate	18	10-20	Head of Corporate Affairs, who reports to the CEO	2	Formal strategy with apparent integration across business, but also evidence of difficulty implementing and getting buy-in
33	Inter-mediate	10	10-20	On leadership team, appears to report to CEO	1	Low margin manufacturer, sustainability to stay in business, but also innovative design houses displaying new materials and designs for sustainable future
34	Limited	8	0-9	Safety, Health and Environment director who reports to Head of Group Operations and Supply Chain, who reports to the CEO	3	Some strategy with attempts to implement but evidence of being marginalised and not given priority, resourcing, or attention.
35	Inter-mediate	12	10-20	GM, Also have a Board Sustainability Committee	1	Charged by Board with developing clear Sustainability Strategy, which is now integrated into the general business strategy, and being rolled out
36	Extensive	12	10-20	COO	2	Widely integrated across all areas, leveraged as point of market leadership, Head of Sustainability role scaled back because integrated to all departments
37	Inter-mediate		0-9	COO and Head of Sustainability Consulting Asia Pacific	na	Formal strategy, widely integrated and core part of business plan, but appears more project specific and research/advisory than extensively integrated.

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
38	Inter-mediate	4	0-9	Group General Manager, Corporate Affairs, who is on leadership team	2	High level commitment, formal sustainability strategy aligned with main strategy, and leadership team changes to those conducive, roll out in process, on way to extensive integration.
39	Inter-mediate	12	10-20	Head of Corporate Affairs	na	Recent strategy refocus towards sustainability, with roll out, attention from top management and beginnings of commitment.
40	Extensive	20+	20+	Executive Marketing Director	na	Historic commitment from founding, widespread integration of sustainability into all strategy, operations, and decisions.
41	Limited	6	0-9	National Director, Property and Facilities Management, and Sustainability Committee reports to Board	na	Some senior level interest, but very limited strategy and sustainability projects or implementation.
42	Inter-mediate	17	10-20	CEO	1	Senior level commitment and formal strategy, beginnings of widespread understanding and implementation but challenged by type of business (primary resources).
43	Limited	5	0-9	Head of Risk to CFO to CEO	3	Early stages of sustainability with limited influence and leadership support.
44	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Chairman and CEO	1	Formal strategy with board level approval but difficulty getting attention and buy-in from middle management who should be implementers

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Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
45	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Head of Sustainability, then to Chairman and CEO	1	Formal strategy with board level approval but difficulty getting attention and buy-in from middle management who should be implementers
46	Inter-mediate	7	0-9	1 year remit with specific remit to develop new sustainability strategy beyond 2012	na	New mission of company approved by board centres on sustainability: To be a long term successful business, within a thriving society, operating within limits
47	Inter-mediate	7	0-9	Senior Director, poultry, produce, fish and beverages and sustainability, who reports to VP Supply Chain	3	Formal strategy but focused only on selective products, geographies and supply chain, and evidence of difficulty implementing across departments and borders.
48	Extensive	20+	20+	Head of Sustainability	na	Social mission focussed company with sustainability as central pillar to strategy and widely integrated throughout organisation.
49	Inter-mediate	6	0-9	Chief Executive of Core Services	na	Some evidence of sustainability with board oversight and some integration, but limits to implementation based of change management challenges, and commitment
50	Inter-mediate		Unknown	Vice President, Operation Efficiency and Sustainability, who reports to CEO	2	Strategy developed with patchy implementation and challenges of complexity of issue and inconsistent commitment

Code	Categorised as:	Approx years since intro	Years since intro: (0-9, 10-20, 20+)	Reporting Line of HoS*	Steps from CEO	Other evidence of level of integration
51	Inter-mediate	20+	20+	Head of Corporate Responsibility to HR Director, but also direct line to CEO	1	Strategy developed with some implementation, but with commitment issues given the economic downturn and focus on economics.

*Where interviewee was not Head of Sustainability, they were asked who HoS reported to.