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HAVE YOU TRIED THIS? FIELD-CONFIGURING SPACES AND IMPLEMENTING

MORAL MANDATES

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ABSTRACT

Organizational theorists and strategy scholars are both interested in how organizations deal with ambiguity, especially in relation to implementation. This paper examines one source of ambiguity that organizations face, which is based on their efforts to implement moral mandates. These mandates, which are related to areas such as environmental sustainability and diversity, are inherently ambiguous, as they lack a shared understanding regarding their scope and associated practices. They are also often broad and systemic and may be unclearly aligned with an organization's strategy. Due to these challenges, in this paper we theorize that collective action at the field level is necessary for organizations to advance and concretize moral mandates. We examine this theorizing through the case of the implementation of sustainability in higher education. We hypothesize and find support for the idea that when an organization's members engage in collective action at the field level, those organizations have an increased likelihood of achieving sustainability implementation. To gain insight into this field-to-organization relationship, we qualitatively examine 18 years of conversations from an online forum to develop a process model of moral mandate implementation. We theorize that collective action functions as a field-configuring space, in which actors from a variety of organizations come together to 1) refine the scope of the mandate and 2) create an implementation repertoire that actors can draw on when seeking to bring sustainability to their own organizations. Overall, our study provides a model of how ambiguous moral mandates can be implemented by highlighting the important role of collective action across organizations in concretizing those mandates and providing actors with the tools for their implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations increasingly face expectations to address moral concerns that originate externally through the mobilization of social movements around particular issues or causes, such as diversity, equality, sustainability, and ethics (Margolis & Walsh, 2003; King, 2008b; King & Pearce, 2010). Social movements, or organized collectives of individuals purposefully pursuing a morally-motivated cause, seek to align organizations with their greater vision, reducing the harms associated with issues such as inequality (Vasi & Suh, 2016), environmental degradation (Vasi & King, 2012; Muñoz, Olzak, & Soule, 2018), and exploitative labor practices (Bartley & Child, 2014). We refer to these types of expectations on organizations as "moral mandates," and recognize that stakeholders advocate for moral mandates that lie outside of, and may even be incompatible with, an organization's strategy (cf., Suchman, 1995).

Moral mandates are often on the frontier of organizational transformations and laden with a high degree of ambiguity; they are characterized by a lack of shared understanding regarding their associated practices, their purpose, and their scope (Sonenshein, 2016; Briscoe & Safford, 2018; Augustine, 2021). They often demand broad and systemic change (e.g., "remedy diversity," "stop climate change," etc.) without articulating a set of specific practices or standards for organizations. This means that even if an organization's leaders aspire to implement a moral mandate, it is not always clear how they should best go about it (Crilly, Zollo, and Hansen, 2012). For example, while most members of an organization might agree that pursuing diversity is a good idea, where exactly should an organization start? How do they define or measure diversity, to know if it has been achieved? Hiring a diversity manager may be an initial commitment to the mandate, but it is often unclear what, exactly, these individuals should be doing in their day-to-day work (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). Organizational members who are tasked with managing the implementation process may fail to achieve results

simply because they do not know how to best approach their work (Huy, 2002; Briscoe & Safford, 2018; Hengst, Jarzabkowski, Hoegl, & Muethel, 2020). Handling such mandates is especially difficult, compared to other ambiguous objectives, since moral and ethical considerations are usually seen as peripheral to a firm's strategic planning (Hosmer, 1994).

Organizational theorists and strategy scholars have both theorized the inherent problem of ambiguity in organizational decision-making and implementation (e.g., March and Olsen, 1975; Abdallah and Langley, 2014). Although most types of decision implementation involve some level of ambiguity, it is especially salient in moral mandates, due to their subjectivity and the lack of familiarity and experience that organizations have with them. Past research has commonly focused either on the initial or on the later stages of implementing moral mandates. For example, studies of the initial stages have examined how individuals craft strategic frames to convince organizational members of a mandate's importance (Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young, 2017). But while these studies demonstrate what leads to organizational commitments to a mandate, they do not explore implementation. Studies of the later stages have examined the adoption of policies or practices that are already clearly-defined, such as same-sex partner benefits to address the moral mandate of LGBT inequality (Briscoe and Safford 2008), or recycling programs to address the moral mandate of environmental degradation (Lounsbury 2001), but these studies largely miss the preceding process of how a repertoire of specific practices come to be associated with a broad mandate.

Seen in this light, an important facet that has not been explicitly accounted for in the literature is the collective capacity of social movements and those engaging in their associated fields to concretize moral mandates into specific practices or policy requirements that become implemented inside individual organizations. Inasmuch as moral mandates offer normative constraints about what markets and organizations ought to do or how they ought to provide resources, products, and services (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Anteby, 2010; Hedberg &

Lounsbury, 2021), it is crucial for movements, and the actors in the nascent fields that come to surround movements, to combine the causes they are advocating for with concrete practices and policies, in addition to simply pressuring organizations to change. Furthermore, while implementation of issues like diversity, sustainability, and equality has been largely theorized as an organization-level issue that requires intra-organization tactics or solutions, the role of field-level collective action to concretize mandates is an important piece of puzzle that has been overlooked to date.

Therefore, in this study we ask the following set of interrelated research questions: (1) do interactions within fields, or across organizations, affect individual organizational implementation of moral mandates, and, if so, (2) how do such field-level processes enable organizational-level implementation? To address these questions, we examine the case of sustainability in higher education in the U.S. In the early 2000s, colleges and universities faced pressure from key stakeholders, especially students, to be more sustainable. In response, hundreds of colleges and universities made public commitments to sustainability and created new sustainability manager positions to carry out those commitments. However, it was not always clear how organizations should put their espoused commitments to sustainability into practice. As of 2017, only 395 of the approximately 4,298 higher education organizations in the U.S. (or about 10%) achieved what we consider to be a clear indicator of implementing sustainability, by reporting on their sustainability efforts through the industry-standard voluntary tool called the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS). Despite the discourse of sustainability that has permeated this sector, challenges remain with addressing the sustainability mandate with actionable practices and strategies.

To examine the field-level processes surrounding this moral mandate and their impact on the organizational-level advancement of sustainability, we conduct a mixed-methods study with two stages of analysis. Drawing on prior studies, we theorize that as organizations engage

more in field-level collective action to concretize a moral mandate, they are better able to advance that same mandate within their individual organizations. We subsequently test this theorizing in our case through examining the impact of participation in an online forum about sustainability in higher education where a diverse array of individuals in the sector discussed their work to implement sustainability. We label this online forum a "field-configuring space" where field-level collective action to concretize a moral mandate takes place. Through event history analysis, we find a significant relationship between organizational participation in this field-configuring space and organizational advancement of sustainability. We consider this to be initial evidence that the organizational implementation of a moral mandate benefits from the focal organization's engagement in collective action at the field level.

To delve into how this occurs, we then carry out a qualitative investigation that enables us to develop theory about how engagement in cross-organizational collective action enables the implementation of a moral mandate inside organizations. In this analysis, we examine the conversations in the online forum amongst individuals from different organizations. Our analysis indicates that this field-configuring space facilitated two types of interactions. First, it served to scope the moral mandate – drawing boundaries around it to make it more manageable, and second it enabled a repertoire for implementation to be developed and refined. In our findings, we show how these interactions contributed to concretizing the ambiguous moral mandate for sustainability and enabled organizations that engaged in the field-configuring space to more effectively advance sustainability.

In the following, we first discuss the ambiguous and systemic nature of moral mandates, which we regard as one of the root causes underlying the challenges organizations face in implementing them. We then strive to connect field-level processes to organizational outcomes by theorizing how greater participation in field-level collective action helps organizational members overcome the difficulty in making progress on moral mandates. Then,

our analysis offers a model of how individuals across organizations, once they accept a mandate as necessary, boil ambiguous mandates down to more manageable, concrete actions by building and refining a practical repertoire of implementation across organizations. Based on a systematic analysis of interactions in a field-configuring space as well as the variation in organizations choosing to report on their sustainability performance, we provide empirical evidence of how collective action, in this case through interactions in field-configuring spaces, matter for organizations' efforts to address moral mandates.

THEORY

Organizational Challenges to Addressing Moral Mandates

Moral mandates deal with causes or interests that are often marginalized in organizations, so movement-backed initiatives for organizations to address moral mandates are on the frontier of organizational transformations. When moral mandates are first gaining traction, they can be appealing for organizations to commit to, yet in practice they are often amorphous and ambiguous (Sonenshein, 2016). Both social movements and organizations tend to lack a shared understanding about the meaning of these mandates and the means to translate them into concrete actions and demonstrate progress on them (e.g., Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008; Grodal, 2017). While much organizational scholarship emphasizes the idea that organizations aim to avoid making costly substantive changes, and instead pursue symbolic measures to attempt to appease external audiences (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Westphal and Zajac, 1994), we argue that even when there is a will to pursue substantive change, it is not always clear how to go about doing so. For example, in a study of managers who were hired to address equal employment opportunity and affirmative action (EEO/AA) within organizations, Edelman, Petterson, Chambliss, and Erlanger (1991) found that these newly-appointed individuals faced an extreme amount of ambiguity in their work, which led them to organically construct a shared

understanding of "equality" and determine what practices should be associated with it. Chandler (2014: 1726) found similar characteristics in the mandate for firms to be ethical, emphasizing that "public perceptions regarding what it means for a firm to be *ethical* are still forming," creating "task uncertainty" (also see Risi & Wickert, 2017).

There are a couple of reasons that organizations struggle to reduce ambiguity and create shared meaning around moral mandates. First, organizational commitment to moral priorities often lacks organization-wide dedication or leadership support (Deeds Pamphile, 2022), and even when that leadership support is there, efforts to address moral mandates often simply get incorporated into existing practices in a "business-as-usual" fashion (Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Not all organizations are equipped to experiment internally to produce the necessary knowledge to effectively implement moral mandates (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007) or prepared to hire external consultants to expedite the process (Edelman, 1992; Dobbin & Kelly, 2007), as they would do when implementing a mandate for change that is strategically material or legally enforced. As such, change agents often lack internal resources or the executive support to implement moral mandates, so prior work has highlighted that they often seek out peers outside of their own organizations to consult with about their implementation efforts (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, 2020; Deeds Pamphile, 2022).

Second, since moral mandates usually address higher-order principles such as diversity, sustainability, and inclusion (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Kalev et al., 2006; King & Pearce, 2010; Edelman, 2016), implementing them necessarily entails systemic change both across and within organizations – from altering practices such as recruiting and promotion to broadening the scope of stakeholders to include those who have been traditionally neglected. Addressing moral mandates involves not only organization-wide but also field-level change, so individual organizations alone might struggle to make progress on these mandates. For this reason, as reflected in such moves as the creation of voluntary industry standards to tackle issues such as

deforestation and human rights (Bartley, 2003, 2007), organizations often form cross-organizational initiatives that collectively engage with these issues (Lee, 2009). Resulting practices and policies, therefore, often operate at the field level, reflecting how the field collectively understands underlying concerns, and ultimately facilitating organization-level transformation.

Taken together, moral mandates are challenging to implement because doing so involves substantial work to concretize abstract moral mandates that are inherently ambiguous. We argue that in order to implement new moral mandates, preceding processes are necessary for constructing and refining the meaning of a given moral mandate and the means to achieving it. Since this process, by its nature, requires collective efforts and resources, individual organizations tend to fall short of providing a space for the process to unfold. In exploring how organizations navigate these challenges, we seek to shed light on how a moral mandate becomes loaded with certain meaning and associated with particular means of implementation through collective action within field-configuring spaces.

Field-Configuring Spaces as Sites for Concretizing Moral Mandates

We conceptualize field-configuring spaces as ongoing discursive arenas that bring together people from diverse backgrounds and organizations that are interested in a common issue; they provide a space where individuals can gradually shape the focal field by producing shared knowledge and resources that are not necessarily available within individual organizations (McInerney, 2008; Mair & Hehenberger, 2014; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Ferraro & Beunza, 2018; Hehenberger, Mair, & Metz, 2019; Clune & O'Dwyer, 2020; Buchter, 2021). Field-configuring spaces are locations for the potential institutionalization of new practices, as interactions between participants give rise to a community that helps achieve and maintain the issues they seek to advance (Meyer, Gaba, & Colwell, 2005; Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue,

& Hinings, 2017). They are important to our research questions because they serve as arenas for collective action that produce, refine, and accumulate the ideas and practices that are, in our case, necessary for ultimately implementing moral mandates within organizations.

We theorize that insofar as moral mandates are ambiguous and systemic, collective action at the field level can help further internal efforts to address moral mandates. While individual organizations would be less of an arena for articulating moral mandates for the reasons given above, people can transcend their organizations and come together as participants in the same field as they seek to advance the same moral mandate (Buchter, 2021). Similar to relational spaces within organizations (Kellogg, 2009; Heinze & Weber, 2016), field-configuring spaces enable a diverse array of people to join together, talk about roadblocks, experiences, and know-how, and construct shared understandings. The extent to which individuals within organizations who are trying to pursue changes in line with a moral mandate engage in interactions and conversations in a field-configuring space would affect their access to information and knowledge in the form of practices, strategies, and meanings that are under construction at the field level. Therefore, this variation in field-level engagement would end up creating substantial variation in how well-informed and well-equipped individuals in organizations would be at overcoming the challenges in implementing a moral mandate. Based on this, we offer the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis: A higher degree of organizational engagement in collective action within a field-configuring space focused on a moral mandate will be associated with a higher likelihood that an organization makes progress on addressing that moral mandate.

RESEARCH SETTING: SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Our setting is the field of sustainability in higher education in the United States. The concept of sustainability arose in this sector in the early 1990s, when students and social movement organizations such as the Student Environmental Action Coalition and the National Wildlife Federation called on colleges and universities to be more sustainable in their operations; the demands were broadly concerned with environmental harm and social inequities (Eagan & Orr, 1992; Keniry, 1995; Lounsbury, 1998, 2001). In response to these pressures, in the late 1990s and early 2000s higher education institutions signed commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to improve their environmental impact. One popular commitment was for organizations to become a member of the newly-created Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). As of 2019, 1,103 schools in the U.S., or 26% of higher education institutions, had become members of AASHE. This membership came at a small cost and did not require any specific practice changes, but served as more of a signal of commitment to addressing sustainability.

Led by AASHE, newly-hired sustainability managers soon began to collaborate to design a voluntary industry standard to track their sustainability efforts. This tool, called the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System, or STARS, was launched in 2010. Colleges and universities who submit a STARS report are rated, and the STARS data are fed into sustainability rankings such as Princeton Review's *Guide to Green Colleges* and the Sierra Club's *Cool Schools* list. Even though STARS is a standard tool, schools do not have to tick all of the boxes on it to report their sustainability activities. So, even after the introduction of STARS, there remained some flexibility in how schools could go about practicing sustainability. The fact is, however, that very few organizations in this sector (about 10%) have achieved the implementation of STARS, which is surprising given that so many more made initial commitments to sustainability. In the following, we gather multiple types of data in order to understand what affected the heterogeneity across schools in advancing sustainability.

The Green School Forum as a Field-configuring Space. We began our study by conducting preliminary interviews with sustainability managers in higher education, to try to understand the challenges that they faced and strategies that they pursued in getting their organizations to implement sustainability. Through these informant interviews, we learned about the existence of an online forum that sustainability managers told us they turned to when they were unsure how to progress with their work. This forum was established in 1992 as an extension of a book titled *The Campus and Environmental Responsibility* (Eagan & Orr, 1992). Over time this forum had become the central discussion arena for this field. Between 1992 and 2017, 1,840 individuals engaged in the forum. The forum hosted a diverse array of members and went through significant changes in its member composition as the field evolved over our period of study. As Figure 1 shows, while outsider actors such as non-profit workers and activists and students were dominant participants in the forum when it began, university sustainability managers began to increase from the mid-2000s and eventually became the largest contributing group.

Insert Figure 1 here

As we began to recognize in this case, the field level was a site of extensive collective action as actors coordinated with one another, contested the moral mandate, and generated agreement at times. In this paper we argue that discourse is one of the forms of collective action that is foundational to any field. As Augustine and King (2019) argue, this discourse may take different forms, but these conversations are essential to deciding the trajectory of a field (Grodal, 2017). Moreover, participating in the forum is an indicator that at least some employees of the university were committed to implementing the sustainability mandate, as they voluntarily joined the forum for this purpose. Participating in the conversation gives actors an opportunity to share their experiences and challenges in implementing sustainability,

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generate shared meanings about what sustainability in higher education should look like, and share know-how about "best practices" and other concrete measures taken to implement this moral mandate. In this sense, the forum is a good example of a field-configuring space.

In the following, we first conduct a quantitative study to test our hypothesis that engagement in field-configuring spaces has organizational implications. Then, to better understand the dynamics that underlie the quantitative findings, we turn to an abductive study (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) that is based on analyzing the content of conversations within the online forum. After analyzing these data, we present a process model based on the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative studies.

QUANTITATIVE DATA AND METHODS

In order to investigate whether or not there is support for the hypothesis in our case, we conduct event history analyses of the relationship between forum engagement and organizations submitting a STARS report, which we consider to be an indicator of advancing the moral mandate of sustainability within an individual organization. The STARS voluntary reporting tool requires extensive resources and involves reporting on data from across an organization, making it a costly endeavor. It covers hundreds of sustainability indicators across categories as wide-ranging as academics, operations, planning and administration, engagement, and innovation and leadership (see Appendix Table 1 for a detailed overview of the issues included in STARS). Additionally, STARS has evolved through numerous iterations, which reflects that there has not been a single established standard way to "achieve" sustainability, so submitting a report to STARS indicates a commitment to following this evolution and practicing sustainability through the currently-accepted understandings.

We obtained our data from multiple sources, as outlined in Table 1. First, we collected the full corpus of online forum conversations and meta-data between 1992 and 2017 through

web scraping. For the following analyses, we include all of the conversations on the forum between 2007 and 2017 sent by a person affiliated with a school, because STARS reporting began in 2010 and we are interested in forum participation that closely precedes a STARS submission. Second, we obtained the full archive of STARS submissions from the AASHE STARS reporting system. Between 2010 and 2017 there were 757 STARS reports submitted by 395 U.S. higher education organizations. Finally, we used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to control for institutional characteristics such as the number of full-time students, revenue, public (vs. private) schools, and land-grant universities.

Insert Table 1 here

Sample Construction

We constructed our sample of organizations by first identifying all U.S. higher education institutions classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education at least once since 2005. This resulted in 622 schools. This sample allows us to identify groups of largely comparable institutions in terms of size. This also means that we excluded relatively small schools that participated in the forum (N=272).[1]

Despite comparable organizational size, some schools in this initial sample could have been more or less committed to sustainability in the first place. For example, in the latter case, they are more likely to neither show up on the forum nor submit a STARS report (and vice versa). To account for this concern around potential omitted variables that would influence

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[1] Among large or very large 622 colleges or universities, 224 schools (or 36%) have participated in the forum. Given that there were 496 schools on the forum, 272 schools (496 − 224 = 272) that are not classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification are excluded from the sample. This sample construction is necessary because as described, preparing for and submitting a STARS report is costly and school size is positively correlated with school revenue or assets. Although we control for size, our findings based on the sample of schools that are largely comparable in size would be less influenced by probable confounding factors. On top of that, with the sampling frame based on the Carnegie Classification, we are able to include schools that have never participated in the forum yet submitted at least one STARS report. This suggests that forum participation itself is not a strong necessary condition for STARS submission.

both forum engagement and STARS submissions, we restricted the sample to schools that have been a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, or AASHE (N = 392; about 63% of the initial sample) at any point during the time window. AASHE organizational membership is a low-cost commitment to sustainability that does not come with associated requirements to institute any specific changes. The primary rationale for this subsampling is that compared to non-AASHE schools, AASHE member schools have made an initial public commitment to sustainability, so these schools are more likely to be actively working towards implementing the moral mandate, or at least are under more public scrutiny to turn their commitments into actions.

This empirical approach is driven by the fact that we do not see lower-commitment efforts (which some may classify as purely "symbolic,") as purely pursued to avoid making more "substantive" changes (Crilly et al 2012). That is, in our case, instead of seeing AASHE membership and STARS submissions as substitutes for one another, we consider that organizations may pursue the lower-cost, easier pathway of AASHE membership first, and then get on the road to more substantive changes later. This theorizing is supported by prior findings such as those by McDonnell, King, and Soule (2015). Furthermore, in our case, STARS is a program that is directly associated with AASHE, so AASHE members at least would have been aware of STARS and received ongoing communication regarding STARS. As a robustness test, we subsequently examine if the results are consistent in the initial sample of 622 large or very large colleges and universities, as it can be expected to be harder to find support for our hypothesis in this sample that includes both AASHE member and non-member schools.

Variables

Outcome Variable. We utilize the first STARS submission as our dependent variable because the decision and effort to adopt, prepare for, and submit an initial STARS report is a good indicator of an organization advancing sustainability. Furthermore, the theorized benefits of the forum, which include access to a shared understanding about the meaning of the moral mandate, and the means to make progress on it, would be most valuable for helping organizations report to STARS for the first time. This is the period that people interested in advancing the moral mandate within organizations would need to get the initial leadership support to do STARS, convince others from across the organization to gather the requisite data for the first time, design and implement new tracking tools to measure practices that were previously unmeasured, and develop the correct methodologies to make the data commensurate for STARS. At this point, these individuals lack sufficient internal precedents that guide this work.

It is also possible that subsequent submissions might be influenced by other factors we do not consider. For example, it might be much easier to report to STARS after initial processes have been put in place and routinized. On the other hand, some organizations may determine that it is too costly or risky to keep publicizing their sustainability involvement if they do not perform well in their first STARS report. In these cases, there would be a different set of enabling factors or disincentives that go beyond implementing initial commitments. For these reasons, our focus on the first STARS submission best captures the effect of forum engagement through which a shared understanding of practices and strategies can be most beneficial. So, the dependent variable is 0 until a school submits its first STARS report, and 1 in the year of submission. If a school submits a report to STARS, it is subsequently dropped out of the sample; this results in the final sample of 2,453 school-year observations.

Explanatory Variables. On the basis of the online forum data, we constructed variables that capture the extent to which individuals affiliated with a school participated in this field-

configuring space. These are organization-level measurements which enable us to capture the extent to which each organization engages more or less with the field-level discourse that gradually shapes the field of sustainability. It is through exploiting this variation that we study how field-level processes, into which we will delve further with qualitative analysis below, might affect organization-level outcomes.

Although we do see people in the forum with a variety of roles as shown in Figure 1, sustainability managers were the dominant category during our period of our study, and they were the ones working internally to realize commitments to the mandate for sustainability. So, we focused on sustainability managers' engagement on the forum.

Forum engagement measures the extent to which a sustainability manager from a school participated in the forum through the number of times they posted to the forum in a given period. While it is possible that a sustainability manager was *de facto* on the forum by only reading messages but not posting anything, we used a more conservative measure of engagement in constructing this variable. We used a two-year rolling sum of the number of forum posts to capture sustained engagement. If forum engagement facilitates the adoption of STARS, and if the adoption of STARS is not trivial such that sustainability managers need to address a number of issues along the way, a time window longer than just one year would be necessary to reflect the prolonged nature of implementing sustainability. Although we do not have a particular expectation of how long the time window should be, the effect of forum engagement would be stronger if it is more recent, and gradually depreciate over time as the relative timeliness of knowledge wanes. We therefore also investigate the effect of this variable by varying the time window from one to five years. Because of the skewed distribution, we performed a logarithmic transformation of it.

Control Variables. We control for institutional characteristics of schools with data on higher education organizations from the U.S. government's Integrated Postsecondary

Education Data System (IPEDS). As a proxy for size, *FTE (full-time equivalent) enrollment* of students and *revenue* were included as time-varying covariates and log transformed. There are rationales for controlling for size: the bigger a school is, (1) the more likely the school might be to engage in sustainability practices due to its greater visibility as well as its access to resources, and (2) the more likely it is that the school has individuals who are interested in and oriented towards sustainability issues (Lounsbury, 2001). Note that our sample is of colleges and universities that are classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification. Thus, our sample schools are already larger than average-sized schools.

In addition, we control for institutional status, utilizing two control variables - *public vs. private* and *land-grant universities* - to account for the possibility of different institutional types affecting the outcome of interest. We also include a dummy variable that indicates whether a school is ranked in the *top 100* by the *U.S. News & World Report* in a given year. We treat the ranking for national universities and for national liberal arts colleges separately. Theoretically, ranking can be a proxy for reputation. The more highly ranked a school is, the greater visibility and accountability the school is likely to face. So, we control for ranking because those schools with a higher reputation are more likely to face reputational pressures to commit to a sustainability mandate and implement policies that reflect that mandate (King, 2008a).

Even when size and reputation are controlled for, schools can still differ from one another in terms of the pattern of historical commitment to sustainability issues. That is, if a school has been committed to sustainability issues or at least revealed that it is interested in such issues even before participating in the forum, the school is likely to be different from other schools that have not made such previous commitments. Prior commitments are a particularly important proxy for organizational character (Selznick, 1957; King, 2015) or disposition

(Cardinale, 2018). We therefore collected indicators of earlier sustainability commitments from three sources.

First, we include whether or not a school is a signatory to the *Talloires Declaration*. This commitment, launched in 1990, has been signed by over 500 colleges and universities from all over the world. The declaration entails an action plan for incorporating sustainability and environmentalism into the policies of higher education organizations. We identified when an institution signed this declaration from the webpage of the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), who coordinated and publicized the signatures. Second, we include data on signatories to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (*ACUPCC*), an initiative that was founded in 2006. Member institutions sign on to the ACUPCC by making a commitment to create and submit a climate action plan, along with publicly reporting on their greenhouse gas emissions. ACUPCC was signed by 633 institutions between 2006 and 2016. We collected data on when an institution committed to the ACUPCC. Third, we note when a school was a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (*AASHE*). While we restricted the sample to schools that have ever been a member of AASHE, this variable is time-variant because the member schools joined the association at different times.

These early commitments help us identify different kinds of colleges and universities in terms of their character and preceding interest in sustainability. So, we include dummies for each of these three early commitments: for the Talloires and ACUPCC, these dummies are 0 until a school signs the commitments, and 1 in the year of signing and the years after. As the AASHE membership is more dynamic such that schools can theoretically come and go by either paying or not paying the annual membership fee,[2] the variable is 1 in the year when a

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[2] Membership fees vary by student enrollment size. According to the current fee structure, the membership fee for the mean sized school in the sample is $1,910 per year. (source: https://www.aashe.org/membership/member-types/institutions-in-north-america/)

school is an official member of AASHE and 0 in the year when it is not. As schools joined and withdrew their membership in different years, we include this variable in our estimations.

Lastly, even though the STARS system was officially launched in 2010, there was a pilot program carried out between 2008 and 2009. Since it is likely that pilot participant schools are different from non-pilot participants in terms of commitment to sustainability as well as access to and knowledge of STARS, we create a dummy variable and control for *STARS Pilot*.

Analysis

To test our hypothesis, which predicts the likelihood of submitting an initial STARS report, we use discrete-time event history analyses (Allison, 1984). We tracked each of the organizations in our sample from 2010 to 2017 and created a panel data set with a school-year unit of analysis. All spells ending prior to 2017 are treated as right censored at that point. The panel starts in 2010 because that is the year when colleges and universities became at risk of submitting a STARS report. We use the calendar year as the time clock for models. All the time-varying covariates are lagged by one year. For potential heteroskedasticity in the error terms, robust standard errors clustered by school are obtained and reported below. Schools are dropped out of the sample in the year following the first STARS report.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Insert Tables 2 & 3 here

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are provided in Table 2. Table 3 presents the results for first STARS submission estimations. Model 1 includes only the control variables. It is noteworthy that schools that submit their first STARS report tend to be an AASHE member, a STARS pilot program participant, a four-year school, and a school that is ranked in the top

100 in the US News Rankings. For example, the estimates imply that, at each survival time, the hazard rate for STARS pilot schools is about 93 percent higher than the hazard rate for non-pilot schools; and the hazard rate for US News Top 100 schools is about 130 percent higher than that for non US News Top 100 schools. Models 2 and 3, respectively, introduce the degree of forum engagement by any representatives from a school and that of sustainability managers in the previous two years. Both of them are significantly associated with the submission of a STARS report in the following year ($p < .001$), but in Model 4 where we separately introduce the degree of forum engagement by sustainability managers and non-sustainability managers, we found that the association is primarily driven by the engagement by sustainability managers. In particular, as it is log-transformed, the estimated coefficient ($b = .29$) in Model 3 is equivalent to the elasticity of the hazard with respect to the number of forum posts by sustainability manager in the past two years. In other words, for example, a 50 percent increase in the number of forum posts leads to an increase of about 17 percentage points in the hazard. In unreported analyses (available upon request), we tested a few variants of Model 3 with varying time windows from one to five years, the results are substantively similar.

To account for the possibility of diffusion, we controlled for the number of prior adoptions of STARS reporting in various ways in Models 5 (number of adoptions in the prior year), 6 (cumulative number of prior adoptions), and 7 (3-year moving sum of prior adoptions). Again, the main effect remains significant. In an unreported robustness check (see Appendix Table 2), we ran the same set of analyses with the full sample including both AASHE member and non-member schools. Because we theorized that the latter type of schools is less committed to sustainability in the first place, we expected that it would be harder to find support for our hypothesis within this sample. Nevertheless, we find that the results are consistent with the findings in Table 3, which provide additional support for our theorizing.

QUALITATIVE DATA AND METHODS

Controlling for a number of factors that we believe should matter in implementing a moral mandate (e.g., resources, size, organizational character, related and prior commitments, and inter-organization diffusion), we find that the extent to which sustainability managers engaged in the online forum was strongly associated with the odds of their organization effectively addressing the moral mandate of sustainability. These findings are intriguing in that mere engagement in field-level collective action by a few organizational members committed to sustainability could have led to nowhere, and regardless of this engagement, individuals still face substantial obstacles to implementation inside their individual organizations. While forum engagement might reflect sustainability managers being motivated to a different extent, which then might suggest that implementation is largely driven by variation in employee motivation, motivation alone cannot fully resolve the issue stemming from the ambiguity and systemic nature of moral mandates. More importantly, the findings allude to the fact that a field-configuring space, like the forum in our case, can play a role in furthering moral mandates within individual organizations.

Nevertheless, the quantitative evidence alone cannot tell us *how* such a space helps overcome the challenges that organizations face in addressing moral mandates such as sustainability. We therefore turn to an abductive methodological approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) that utilizes qualitative data in order to uncover the nuanced processes through which field-level interactions ultimately result in furthering the moral mandate of sustainability. The methodological approach is abductivebecause we began our overall study with a keen eye on the existing literature, and uncovered a key idea– engagement in field-configuring spaces – that mattered in this case but, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been adequately theorized or empirically investigated. In our subsequent analyses, we acknowledge findings from relevant research alongside our

quantitative findings (rather than approaching our data as a blank slate), and aim to add further insights by zooming in on the processes that explain the relationship between engagement in field-configuring spaces where a moral mandate is being discussed and an organization's likelihood of implementing concrete practices associated with that moral mandate.

Online Forum Data & Analyses

To analyze the content of the conversations in this field-configuring space in greater detail, we first created a sample of messages from the online forum. Because we are ultimately interested in how field-level engagement might enable organizations to advance moral mandates, which we considered in this context to be indicated by submitting an initial STARS report, we created a purposeful sample of all conversations that were related to this indicator of sustainability implementation, which we operationalized as any conversation that contained at least one of a list of keywords related to STARS or reporting. The keywords included "STARS", "sustainability tracking", "sustainability performance", "sustainability rating", "reporting tool", "reporting framework", "reporting system", "rating system", "AASHE reporting". This approach returned 447 conversations, comprising 1,565 individual messages. From there, we randomly sampled 30% of these conversations to have a more manageable number of messages for in-depth hand-coding, which resulted in our final sample of 473 messages.

The aim of our analyses is to understand the conversations and activities that were present on the forum over time, and what individuals were seeking or gaining from these interactions. To develop a coding structure for these data, two co-authors read the full sample of messages, utilizing an open-coding approach at first to stay close to the data while capturing the multitude of activities that we could observe (Glaser, 1978; Locke, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). We then met as a team and discussed what we had captured through open-coding and

began to develop a multi-layered coding structure based on the patterns of activities and their relationship between one another.

We realized two important things at this point. First, we could see that there were three layers to the conversations. The first was what we had coded directly, which were the relational activities that individuals in the forum were carrying out in their conversations (e.g., person A is providing a recommended course of action to person B). The second was what these relational activities meant in more abstracted, or theoretical terms, which we term "interactions." Interactions represent what different relational activities achieve (e.g., by providing a recommended course of action person A is *requesting advice or giving direction* to person B). Finally, we determined that there were higher-level overarching themes in the conversations. Themes are what those interactions reflect in terms of *what is being relationally accomplished* (e.g., by person B sharing advice with person A, they are collectively developing and refining a repertoire for implementation).

At this point, we recognized that although our sampling was at the conversation level, the activities we observed were operating at the level of the individual message. Multiple activities were embedded in the same conversation. Additionally, single messages exhibited multiple activities. After these realizations, we applied our coding in a way that was not mutually exclusive at the individual message level. We then went through those codes to apply axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Myers, 2019) that grouped the activities that we identified into categories of activities, interactions, and finally higher-order themes. After finalizing our coding structure, we carried out an inter-rater reliability check on a separate sample of 51 messages (about 11% of the sampled messages) and reached a Cohen's Kappa of .89 for the categories of interactions and .82 for the coding related to themes – these are considered acceptable figures.

Qualitative Findings: Field-configuring Spaces for Advancing Moral Mandates

Through our analyses of the conversations in the online forum, we saw that individuals were working towards producing a shared understanding of how organizations should interpret and then act on the mandate for sustainability, and this included determining the practices that should be associated with sustainability, as well as the prioritization of those practices, the goals they should be working towards, and strategies for furthering these goals. Overall, the conversations cohered into seven types of interactions that comprised two overarching themes: (1) scoping the moral mandate and (2) developing and refining a repertoire for implementation. Table 4 outlines these interactions, alongside their definitions and exemplars from the text, and Figure 2 shows the data structure of activities, interactions, and higher-order themes.

Insert Table 4 and Figure 2 here

Scoping the Moral Mandate. The first theme that we observed in the conversations was that of scoping the moral mandate. This theme indicates that the forum served as a space for theorizing what the mandate for sustainability *could* be, or what it *should* be, and therefore how it should be approached or pursued within organizations. The interactions that comprised this theme served to reduce the ambiguity and draw boundaries around the broad scope that organizations were challenged with in implementing the moral mandate for sustainability. Three types of interactions were found under this theme: (1) theorizing possibilities; (2) evaluating alternatives; and (3) challenging underlying assumptions.

The first interaction of *theorizing possibilities* consisted of articulating alternative and preferred futures that those working towards implementation could or should pursue. Sometimes these conversations bordered on vision statements, with people sharing their hopes or dreams of what achieving the implementation of sustainability might look like inside individual organizations, as shown in the following:

My thoughts (dreams) of what campus sustainability will/does/should accomplish across all of higher education and society: Through modeling behavior and integrated curriculum, campus sustainability empowers students to develop solutions to poorly designed social, economic and political systems that will enhance environmental and community prosperity. Campus sustainability builds community awareness around social, economic and environmental issues, offers resources to identify and create solutions, and serves as an integral partner in the implementation of these solutions, locally and globally. (ind1505b-6127)

In other cases, individuals engaged relationally in theorizing possibilities to discuss a future state in relation to a particular question, for example the following message related to a broader conversation around whether or not the future of sustainability roles was eventual demise or inevitable progression:

I agree that it is a complicated job, constantly evolving. I've talked with some of our peers who say that if they're doing their job correctly, they will eventually work themselves out of a job. I disagree. Other governance functions are not so fatalistic. There is always a need for sustainability in the C-suite, or as high up the senior leadership chain as possible. (ind1710a-12095)

Overall, theorizing possibilities was a key to scoping the moral mandate, as it served to draw boundaries around what the implementation of this moral mandate should look like in practice.

The second interaction that comprised this theme was *evaluating alternatives*, which involved collective problem-solving efforts aimed at finding the best way forward from a range of options. For example, the following message was part of a conversation regarding whether or not organizations should be ranked based on their sustainability programs, which was a central concern for organizational members as they tried to understand how much of their focus should be on reporting, and what types of reporting systems would best further sustainability in their organizations:

Once items are ranked there is a top group and a bottom group. Relegation to a bottom group could easily cause a loss of enthusiasm among administrators at some institutions, and convince administrators at current nonparticipants to stay out because they would end up starting near the bottom. The temptation to rank things despite imprecision in rankings is probably unavoidable. I hope that at least as much emphasis will be placed on recognizing every institution that gets above some substantial but basic level of accomplishment. (ind1601c-7274)

This question of rating versus rankings was only one set of alternatives that were discussed in the conversations. For example, another key tension was the question of how to best achieve energy efficiency – is it better to invest in infrastructure changes that take personal choice out of the equation (such as motion-sensor lighting), or should organizations be pursuing behavior change programs? In evaluating these alternatives, one individual commented that, "I realize that you asked about behavioral change, but I can't resist editorializing a bit. It is my opinion that structural improvements to infrastructure are more effective than behavioral changes in improving sustainability performance." Others followed on with data and examples to evaluate these alternatives. Overall, collectively debating alternatives such as these helped in prioritizing the broad field of options that organizations faced in approaching implementation, and therefore enabled those who were engaged in these conversations to further concretize what "operating sustainably" actually looks like.

The third interaction was *challenging underlying assumptions*. This interaction came about when individuals challenged aspects of sustainability that they had previously taken-for-granted. For example, many individuals commented that they were afraid to engage with the issue of divestment from fossil fuels at their schools, as this was a hotly-debated topic that touched on a schools' finances and was seen as some as outside the remit of sustainability managers. However, one individual challenged this view, writing:

> I don't think divestment calls have to be poison pills for sustainabilistas. If framed in the larger context of aligning the institution's mission and values with its investment strategy. In the foundation world it's called, 'mission-based' investing. Divesting is thus just one aspect of the necessary realignment with investing being the other. Sustainabilitistas can and should make that claim without fear of dismissal. (ind1601c-4337)

By challenging this underlying assumption, it enabled the individuals in the forum to see new perspectives on how their work could expand into this area that they may have assumed was "off limits." In a perennial conversation about where sustainability offices should be located in

the university hierarchy, another individual challenged the underlying assumption that they needed to be permanently located in a single area, stating:

> If sustainability officers are expected to develop into a "jack-of-all-trades", then maybe the best solution is to arrange their positions to rotate through the administration. Spend a year or 2 in operations, academics, student affairs, with short sabbaticals to Athletics, Foundation, or Auxiliaries. Work for the best mentors, get the professional development you need. Human Resources will freak out. (ind1708e-14314)

Challenging underlying assumptions contributed to defining what sustainability *could* be, and encouraged peers to break into areas that they may have not considered as part of their work (but where the moral mandate could be substantially furthered), or to organize themselves in new and unusual ways. This contributed to scoping the moral mandate in a way that it embraced practices and policies that broke with the status quo.

Overall, these interactions contributed to scoping the moral mandate for organizations whose members were engaged in these conversations. In the forum, individuals from different organizations discussed what is possible, feasible, and preferable for implementing sustainability. A shared vision around what the scope of this moral mandate should be enabled them to overcome some of the challenges that were inherent in the otherwise broad and ambiguous mandate for change. Producing scaffolding for "what should be" through these interactions in the forum enabled them to define and refine the scope of the mandate and prioritize some pursuits over others. However, carrying out this process of scoping does not necessarily include a blueprint of how, exactly, organizations should proceed. That is where the next set of interactions that we uncovered came into play.

Developing and Refining a Repertoire for Implementation. We found substantial evidence of a second theme of developing and refining a repertoire for implementation. The interactions that comprise this theme involve sharing emergent understandings of the practices and strategies for furthering sustainability implementation, and they are: (1) exchanging

information, resources, tools, and contacts; (2) requesting advice or giving direction; (3) sharing experiences and exemplars. Interestingly, individuals on the forum also explicitly talked about how access to this repertoire helped them both concretize their work as well as gain traction towards implementation by effectively framing their work to others.

The forum was used extensively for the first interaction of *exchanging information, resources, tools, and contacts*. Individuals shared tools such as spreadsheet templates that they used for collecting the data that would eventually feed into their sustainability reporting, they exchanged contacts for people who were sympathetic to sustainability within the most widely-used food suppliers, and they shared research papers and data that would help others make more informed decisions in their work or convince others of a certain course of action. For example, the following individual asked for information on whether or not prospective students take sustainability into account in deciding which college or university to attend, and talked specifically about how they hoped to use this information in convincing others in their organization of the value of the changes they were trying to make:

> In trying to goad our admissions folks into featuring more of our campus sustainability initiatives in their campus visits program for prospective students, I began looking for data to back up the idea that incoming students are, in fact, swayed by a university's "green" practices…Anyone else have anything more up to date? Thanks in advance. (ind1507d-3529)

In response, someone shared the results of an annual survey from the *Princeton Review* that supported the idea that students evaluated prospective schools based on their sustainability efforts:

> Check the results of question 12 in the latest (2015) Hopes and Worries survey from Princeton Review, which surveyed both prospective students and their parents…A majority (60%) of respondents said having information about colleges' commitment to environmental issues would contribute "strongly," "very much," or "somewhat" to their application/attendance decisions. (ind1507d-3529)

In addition to the discussion of this survey in the online forum, its results were mentioned numerous times in our interviews with sustainability managers as a data point that

they used in framing their efforts within their organizations by connecting sustainability to the goal of attracting students. So, through this example, we can see how the interactions on the forum enabled this information to be shared, interpreted, and turned into a resource for furthering implementation.

The second interaction that comprised developing and refining a repertoire for implementation was *requesting advice and giving direction*. Individuals on the forum frequently asked for advice of how to advance their efforts at implementation, especially when they were facing specific roadblocks in their organizations. For example, the following individual asked for advice in navigating pushback from their foundation in relation to sustainable investment strategies:

> We've been working with our Foundation on an "Investments" chapter for our in-progress Sustainability Action Plan. After numerous meetings, we're feeling like we're not getting very far in changing their process or culture in concern to sustainable investing. What we're hearing is that our Foundation sees themselves as a separate entity from the University and therefore not subject to the goals in the University's Sustainability Action Plan (i.e. we can't tell them what to do). Additionally, our Foundation pays an asset management firm to manage their assets for them, therefore they do not have direct control over the investments. We'd love to see a Foundation board that is genuinely engaged in social and environmental issues. I'm wondering if any of you have found success in working with a Foundation in a similar situation. (ind1702a-2340)

As responses came in to this and other requests for advice, individuals shared their perspectives on how their peers should move forward. Some messages also gave specific direction that recommended that others follow a specific path of action, even if that path differed from what they had been planning to do. For example, the following message was a response to someone asking for a recommendation of a consultant who could help them prepare their STARS submission:

> I know you asked for a consultant recommendation, but my first reaction is to advise you to think about doing the STARS report yourself. A key component to a successful STARS submission is knowing/learning who has what data on campus, and the process of having an internal person/team find that out is especially important when a college is just getting started in the world of gathering sustainability metrics. (ind1708a-14824)

Requesting advice and giving direction can modify the practices of individual change

agents, as they aim to draw on the collective experience of the group in order to avoid the

pitfalls that others have experienced in their organizations.

The third and final interaction is *sharing experiences and exemplars*. Individuals on the

forum frequently shared their direct experiences to inform or inspire others. For example, one

person explained how green buildings can "be 'sold' to the bean counters" – detailing how they

had framed green building in terms of cost savings and efficiency gains. Experiences were also

shared in response to specific questions, such as the following:

> Does anyone know anything about the UI (Universitas Indonesia) Green Metric World
> University Sustainability Ranking? I've been asked by our administration if this is
> something we want to pursue. I've not heard about it until now, but looking at their
> website I see several US universities on their list of participating schools. Is it worth
> pursuing? Does it cost to participate? (their website doesn't mention anything about
> costs) Is it very much different than STARS? (ind1309b-16575)

An individual responded to explain their experience of using this tool in addition to,

but not as a replacement for, STARS:

> We have used the [Green Metric World] data collector during subsequent years as a
> convenient way of reporting to both the Princeton Review and Sierra magazine. But we
> don't see the data collector as a replacement for STARS…1) the data collector is a
> static, one shot tool (enter the data and submit and you're done) whereas STARS is an
> active management tool that you can utilize for up to an entire year as a means of
> collecting data from many sources (many people can enter and save data and come back
> later and edit again until its all done right). 2) the data collector does not produce a
> rating, whereas STARS results in a rating (bronze, silver, gold, platinum). STARS has
> been the single most important tool for tracking and prioritizing our sustainability
> efforts. The resulting rating has also provided valuable leverage in catalyzing additional
> change with our internal stakeholders, everyone wants to get the points in their area of
> responsibility and get the recognition for having earned those points. (ind1308d-7381)

What we can see from this exchange is that if the first individual did not have access to

this field-configuring space, they may have been pressured by their administration to expand

their work into an additional rating tool that was not fit-for-purpose. Through this forum, they

received a comprehensive understanding of the options for reporting from someone with direct

experience within one hour of their request, and furthermore the individual sharing their experience emphasized how going about things in the way that they had could improve the odds of advancing sustainability through what they termed "catalyzing additional change" internally.

Similar to sharing experiences, individuals also shared exemplars, or what they considered to be flagship programs or policies at other organizations. Sharing both experiences and exemplars could help organizational members frame their implementation efforts in terms of what other institutions are already doing –enabling them to tell others in their organization, for example, that "Harvard has a green revolving fund," or "Stanford has divested from fossil fuels." The effect of these exemplars is shown through the thanks that one person gave another for sharing an exemplar of a well-known school that had divested from fossil fuels, which helped them make progress internally in their similar efforts:

> I just passed this along to the President at [my university] whom my colleagues and I pushed exactly this type approach for more than 20 years. Since [my university], like other big schools, likes to compete with similar big schools, this helped us! (ind1702a-6675)

Overall, we found that the interactions that contributed to developing and refining a repertoire for implementation could help overcome some of the challenges in implementing moral mandates, and that these interactions could also build on one another over time. For example, one sustainability manager from a Midwest university posted the following in 2014, asking about possible tools for gathering the data to input into STARS:

> We are preparing for our "data grab," for our STARS report. We were wondering if there were any other institutions that used Microsoft Sharepoint in putting together their STARS report and, if so, would you be willing to share your methods/forms/etc. Thanks in advance for your assistance! (ind1405d-5994)

This individual received responses and tools from others for managing their data better. And two years later, in 2016, this same individual requested advice on how to communicate sustainability to departments that they relied on to provide the data for STARS:

> We are working on putting together a "charge," something to be issued from our president to the different deans and departments that will be involved in our STARS submission. Has anyone had a similar circumstance and possibly some language that they would like to share? Thank you! (ind1610d-958)

This individual utilized the forum to gather both tools and advice to enable them to better pursue sustainability inside their organization. And they achieved their first STARS report following these conversations, in 2017.

Overall, we can see that across most conversations, when individuals requested help, others freely provided it in a timely fashion. They also shared their experiences of what had worked or not worked for them and shared details about exemplar organizations or programs that they recommended following. In considering what these interactions accomplish, we can see how having access to a repertoire for implementation that is built cross-organizationally, or at the field level, can provide individuals with the resources for concretizing and framing their work, to move it from a broad and systemic mandate for change to specific practices and strategies for implementation.

DISCUSSION

We set out to gain insight into the field-level processes that can enable moral mandates to be advanced within individual organizations. We first presented evidence from event history analysis that the engagement in a field-configuring space for sustainability in higher education is associated with the further advancement of the sustainability mandate at the organizational level. Through an abductive analysis of the conversations in the focal field-configuring space, we gained insight into the general processes by which collective action can enable organizations to overcome the challenges in implementing moral mandates. Ultimately, we

find that these field-level interactions enabled participants to turn an ambiguous moral mandate into a more concrete set of practices and strategies that could be brought into their organizations.

Insert Figure 3 here

Figure 3 depicts a process model of our findings. The processes of concretizing moral mandates consist of two types of interactions, (1) scoping the moral mandate and (2) developing and refining a repertoire for implementation. Before delineating each of these interaction types and discussing their implications, it is worth noting that in the online forum we studied, these two interactions did not occur in a phased or linear manner, but rather, they happened recursively. While Figure 3 might deliver some impression of a linear progression from left to right following the overarching funnel (in dashed lines), the processes we observed were more of an ongoing effort to scope the boundary of a given mandate and come up with practical solutions for implementation. In doing so, forum participants often revisited and reflected past conversations and ongoing actions. Therefore, the nature of these processes can be described as recursive as the interactions and their outcomes create feedback for subsequent interactions. Our analyses suggest that over time these processes result in the creation of a substantial body of knowledge and information that ultimately helps participants in the forum to advance the mandate inside their organizations.

As shown in Figure 3, sustainability managers in the online forum took part in scoping the moral mandate for sustainability in higher education by asking and answering what is possible, by collectively evaluating possibilities, by taking a critical stance on what they have been doing thus far, and by sharing their reflections on their work and purpose. In doing so, these actors drew boundaries around what they collectively believed sustainability in higher education ought to address and concretized these into tangible and workable visions (e.g.,

Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). By enabling individuals to work together across organizations to collectively draw clearer and more manageable boundaries around their change efforts, these interactions we have uncovered serve to gradually decrease the ambiguity and deal with the systemic nature of the moral mandate of sustainability. Faced with a moral mandate, organizations need to construct a shared understanding of their work and its associated aims, which are often assumed to be given or readily available in much of the prior research on the diffusion of a certain policy or practice (Lounsbury, 2001; Briscoe & Safford, 2008). In contrast, drawing a boundary around "what should be" was necessary in our setting because the field of sustainability itself was still evolving, and the meaning of achieving sustainability was not settled. We find that individuals within different organizations had to go about this process through connecting with others in field-configuring spaces.

Scoping and breaking down moral mandates into more manageable terms is a necessary step to facilitate implementation as, in doing so, the meaning and goals of addressing the mandates get clarified. While existing research has shown that field-level collective action through, for example, professional associations (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002) or employee groups across corporations (DeJordy et al., 2020) can help legitimate change initiatives or provide resources to a group of internal activists, little research has investigated how the ambiguity inherent in any moral mandate can be reduced. This ambiguity, to be fair, may be beneficial in the short run for inducing the concessions that have been frequently studied in prior research, because different parties can interpret what needs to happen in a way that appeals to their interests (Gioia, Nag, & Corley, 2012; Sonenshein, 2016). A less understood caveat, however, is that ambiguity can in fact be problematic when it comes to implementation, due to the lack of specificity of what needs to actually be pursued. In our setting, colleges and universities willingly claim that they are committed to sustainability, but the inherent ambiguity of what it means to "be sustainable" has been a challenge for furthering

commitment (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015). Similar difficulties should be prevalent in other endeavors to tackle grand challenges, such as equality or diversity, where there is no readily available consensus on what it means to make progress (Jay, 2013), and it is unclear how to measure progress (cf., Chatterji, Durand, Levine, & Touboul, 2016). Our findings suggest the importance of field-configuring spaces in hosting conversations across organizations that collectively put flesh on a moral mandate and, thereby, advance the mandate within organizations.

Second, with the first type of interaction to scope moral mandates, sustainability managers also developed and refined a repertoire for addressing moral mandates that equipped them with the practices and strategies necessary for the successful advancement of the mandates inside their organizations. A repertoire for implementation was constructed and spread by exchanging information that is not easily available from elsewhere (including from within their individual organizations), by giving and receiving advice on issues, problems, and strategies, and by illustrating success stories based on their own experiences or exemplary cases in the field. The resultant repertoire helped individuals within organizations aptly deploy reliable practices and strategies, increasing their chances of implementing the mandate.

While this type of interaction might seem somewhat mundane, it is crucial for the organizational implementation of moral mandates. Field-configuring spaces bring otherwise isolated people working towards the same mandate together, facilitating the sharing of information, advice, and experience and, as a result, the construction of a shared repertoire. Without such a space, people would have to work separately in their respective organizations on the same set of issues and problems. However, as DeJordy et al. (2020) has shown in their analysis of "inhabited ecosystems," those who share a passion for a moral mandate often rely on and benefit from cross-organizational relationships. In particular, people across organizations learn from one another by getting secondhand experiences from what worked or

did not work by others facing similar challenges or by drawing on exemplars in their industry. Moreover, by borrowing contacts, materials, and practices from other organizations, people working on a moral mandate who have access to a small resource pool overcome the lack of organization-wide support for their work and minimize trial and error. While DeJordy et al. (2020) provide evidence about collective action and mobilization from tens of organizations located in a city, we corroborate their findings and extend them to show that engagement in field-configuring spaces resulted in variation in the extent to which sustainability was successfully advanced across hundreds of geographically dispersed organizations. In doing so, we demonstrate that these field-level processes to promote moral mandates have significant consequences for organizational outcomes.

Contributions to Theories of the Influence of Field-level Processes on Organizational Change

Organizational scholars have been interested in how external pressures encourage organizations to address societal challenges. Some scholars have studied the diffusion processes of a well-articulated policy or practice that is taken as given (Lounsbury, 2001; Briscoe & Safford, 2008; McDonnell, King, & Soule, 2015). This approach implies that the advancement of moral mandates largely depends on the organizational adoption of certain well-defined practices or policies, so it is crucial to understand what kind of social structures or social movement tactics can better elicit organizational commitment and adoption. Other scholars have tended to focus on how fields evolve around a moral mandate given the typical challenges and threats to an existing order (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Hehenberger et al., 2019) or show the importance of market mediators as standards-setting bodies in nascent fields (Lee, Hiatt, & Lounsbury, 2017). These studies typically focus on the role of movements and diffusion processes that lead to the building of new fields, but they focus less on how field-

level processes contribute to furthering the implementation of those practices and policies inside individual organizations. Furthermore, most of these studies ignore the inherent ambiguity in implementation of these mandates and how that implementation becomes more concrete over time.

Our findings suggest that scholars should pay more attention to the systemic and ambiguous nature of moral mandates as a reason that change is often stalled within organizations (Wijen, 2014; Risi & Wickert, 2017; Soderstrom & Weber, 2020) and, ultimately, to how these challenges in advancing moral mandates can be overcome. Understanding how moral mandates become concretized is especially important considering their ambiguous relationship to organizations' strategic considerations. Our study provides a novel account of how organizations become better equipped and informed of how to advance moral mandates that they are expected to address. Our perspective recognizes that advancing a cause does not end with the adoption of a mandate; in fact, this is just one step in institutionalizing new changes within a field. By systematically categorizing field-level interactions and discourse and showing their organizational implications, this study creates an account of the less understood relationship between field-level processes and organizational outcomes. For fields that are at the frontier of ambiguous moral mandates, the efficacy of those mandates depends on the ability of change agents to come together in field-configuring spaces where their ongoing interactions help them identify concrete practices and policies that can be translated for receptive organizations (e.g., DeJordy et al., 2020; Buchter, 2021).

Together these findings contribute to an extensive framework for understanding how organizations adapt to pressure and expectations of the external environment. The ways in which organizations implement and adapt to moral mandates would partly resemble general change processes where organizations identify problems, search for solutions, and evaluate select alternatives (Greve, 2003; Posen, Keil, Kim, & Meissner, 2018). The preponderance of

the literature on these processes has shown that organizations manage change demands driven by poor performance, technological innovation, and changes in regulation, and that they often invest in internal and collaborative research and development (Powell, Koput, & Doerr, 1996), develop human capital (Groysberg & Lee, 2009), and merge with or acquire other organizations (Ranft & Lord, 2002). However, a lack of inherent interest in and leadership support for addressing moral mandates may be at odds with what has been assumed away in the literature on material, technological, and legal change demands. Our process model, therefore, provides unique insight into change processes that lack internal, organizational demands for change.

Furthermore, this suggests scope conditions for our field-level process model. First, our findings are probably most applicable to contexts where the terms of a change demand are ambiguous, such that it could be interpreted in numerous ways and there is no a priori agreement about the outcomes required by the mandate. Therefore, our model would not apply to situations where organizations are required to take specific actions that are readily articulated. Second, organizations themselves have little incentive to concretize the terms of a change mandate and associate it with actionable plans and practices. Even though organizations face significant uncertainty about how to improve performance and keep pace with technological change and regulation (i.e., the first scope condition), they are meant to tackle uncertainty as part of their operations (cf., Bansal, 2003). Our model is most applicable to situations where change demands are foisted on organizations and industries by external actors, like social movements, and those where these demands are yet to be fully acknowledged as a legitimate and strategically viable concern by organizations. Our findings show that field-level collective action is necessary to drive support for such morally-based changes and to identify concrete, actionable measures associated with the mandate.

The Role of Field-configuring Spaces in Concretizing Moral Mandates

Our study sheds light on the role of field-configuring spaces in enabling the advancement of moral mandates at the field-level. It is one thing for organizations to state that they commit to moral values and another to enact those values (cf., Howell, Kirk-Brown, & Cooper, 2012; Ashforth, Schinoff, & Brickson, 2020). Moral mandates may often be at odds with a set of existing espoused values inherent in the industry or organization. Therefore, converting espoused values into enacted ones is inherently challenging. Prior work has placed considerable weight on spaces inside organizations like "relational spaces" (Kellogg, 2009; Heinze & Weber, 2016) as well as on interactions inside organizations for their potential to enact stated values such as sustainability (Hengst et al., 2020; Soderstrom & Weber, 2020). We add to this the possibility that interactions in cross-organizational spaces may operate in parallel as a source of meaning and repertoire development that can enable the advancement of moral mandates. Our findings implicate that field-configuring spaces are complementary and necessary when actors push for field-level changes. The collective action occurring in these spaces creates valuable resources and knowledge that change agents can use in their efforts to transform their own organizations within the scope of the moral mandate.

Although we are not the first to acknowledge the importance of collective action in shaping the emergence of nascent fields (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014; Kahl, King, & Liegel, 2016; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017), our study significantly extends this body of work by suggesting that existing organizations in a relatively mature field can be shaped by field-level collective action (Greenwood et al., 2002). In addition, we provide supporting evidence for the efficacy of external spaces and relationships across organizations by showing the significant association between the engagement in an external space and the implementation of a moral mandate, which has not been available from the vast majority of prior work that happens to be primarily qualitative (e.g., DeJordy et al., 2020).

We also contribute an understanding of the importance of online spaces and platforms to change initiatives. To date, online spaces have been studied mostly in the literature on open innovation and product development (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, & Majchrzak, 2011), but our case shows that the potential of online spaces goes beyond those areas. In our analysis, the forum's openness to the involvement of a variety of engaged actors created an ideal environment. This openness also contributed to the spread of knowledge once members of the forum began to settle on concrete practices. However, we do not think that online forums are the only platforms for collective action of this type. In fact, online spaces may become echo chambers or devolve into ideological battlegrounds – it is likely that neither of these would be productive in the way we find. Although this is not something we explored in great detail, the online forum in our case attracted individuals with similar passions, identities, occupational expectations, and contextual backgrounds, which would have helped this online forum become a constructive space and avoid the tensions prevalent in many online communities (see Faraj et al., 2011).

In conclusion, we demonstrate the role of field-configuring spaces in reducing the ambiguity inherent in moral mandates may apply more generally to strategic decisions. Although moral mandates may stand out as extreme in this regard, most strategic decisions are not clearly implementable or objective (e.g., March and Olsen, 1975). Our approach suggests that field-level processes shape over time how those strategic decisions come to be seen and implemented. In short, field configuring spaces concretize strategic mandates that were once laden with ambiguity. In this study, we found support for the idea that when an organization's members engage in collective action at the field level, those organizations have an increased likelihood of implementing a moral mandate. Our findings highlight the important role of collective action among change agents working across organizations in concretizing moral mandates and equipping themselves with the tools for implementation.

Figure 1. Change in Forum Composition[1,2]

Panel A. 1992-2000
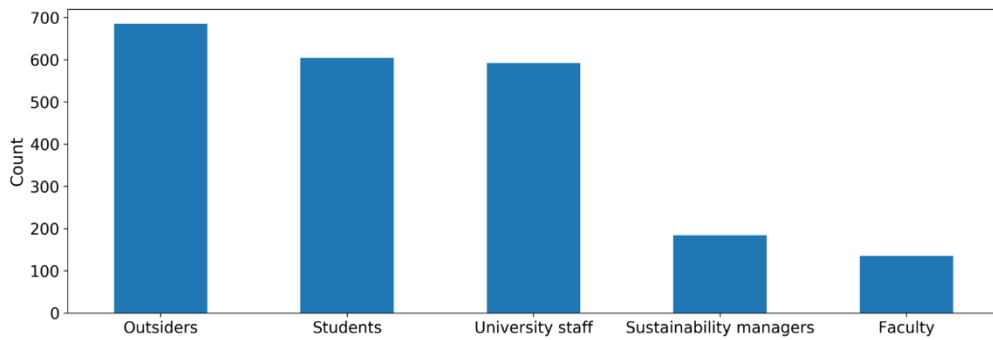
Panel B. 2001-2010
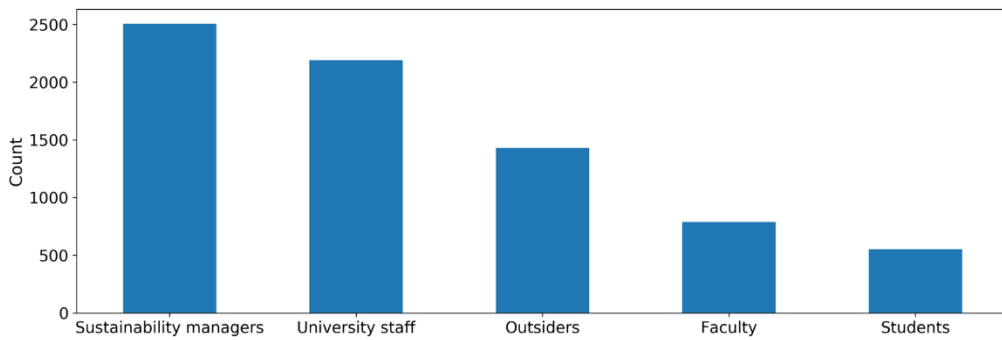
Panel C. 2011-2017
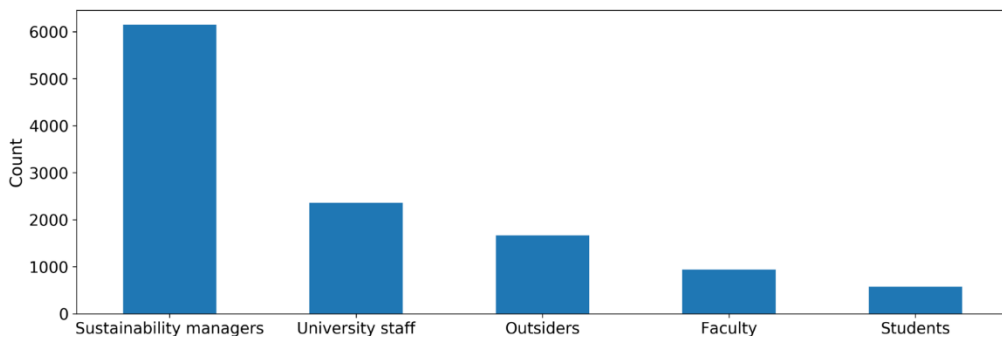
[1] The term "sustainability manager" includes individuals with titles such as "sustainability manager," "sustainability director," and "sustainability coordinator."
[2] We identified the sustainability managers on the forum as well as other forum participants by using the text of their messages, their email signatures, and if necessary, by searching online through organizational websites and online resume repositories such as LinkedIn. We were able to identify the roles of 97% of the participants on the forum.

Figure 2. Data Structure of the Themes, Interactions and Activities on the Online Forum

Activities	Interactions	Themes

Activities

· Articulating alternative and preferred futures
· Sharing visions and role expectations
· Drawing boundaries around sustainability work

· Collectively searching for the best solutions
· Comparing alternative options
· Prioritizing options for furthering sustainability

· Questioning taken-for-granted interpretations
· Questioning taken-for-granted practices
· Redefining the scope of sustainability work

· Asking for or sharing facts or cost
· Asking for or sharing resources, tools
· Asking for or sharing contacts

· Asking others for situation-specific advice
· Providing a recommended course of action

· Sharing what worked or did not work in their organizations
· Sharing what they considered to be flagship programs or policies at other organizations

Interactions

Theorizing possibilities

Evaluating alternatives

Challenging underlying assumptions

Exchanging information, resources, tools, and contacts

Requesting advice or giving direction

Sharing experiences and exemplars

Themes

Scoping the Moral Mandate

Developing and Refining a Repertoire for Implementation

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Figure 3: The Cross-Organizational Construction of a Repertoire of Implementation for Moral Mandates
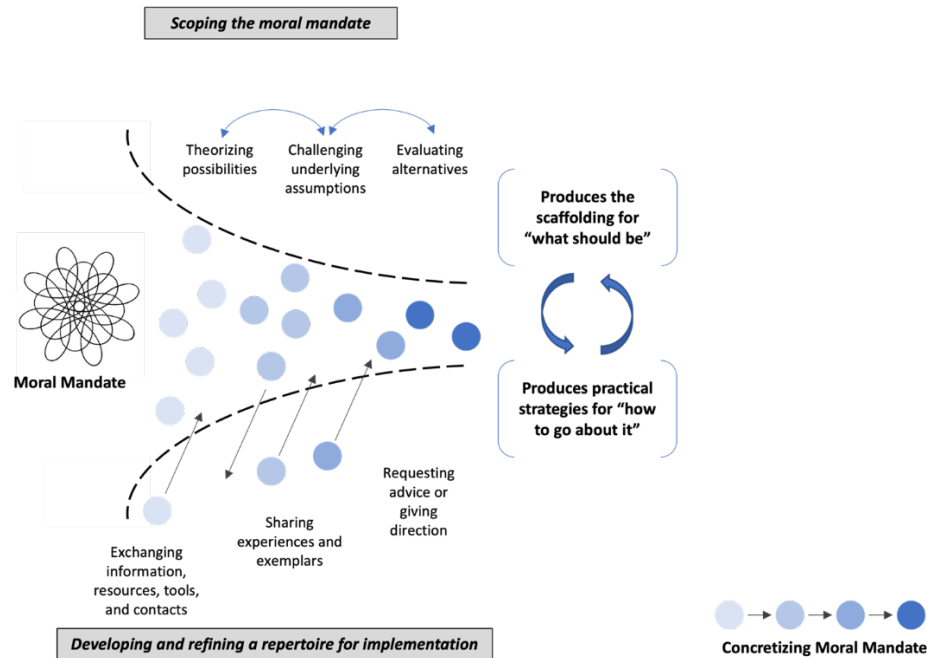
The processes of concretizing moral mandates consist of two types of interactions, (1) scoping the moral mandate and (2) developing and refining a repertoire for implementation. On one hand, individuals in the online forum took part in scoping the moral mandate for sustainability in higher education by asking and answering what is possible, by collectively evaluating possibilities, by taking a critical stance on what they have been doing thus far, and by sharing their reflections on their work and purpose. On the other hand, sustainability managers developed and refined a repertoire for addressing moral mandates by exchanging information that is not easily available from elsewhere, by giving and receiving advice on issues, problems, and strategies, and by illustrating success stories based on their own experiences or exemplary cases in the field.

Table 1. Data Sources

Variables	Sources
STARS report submissions	Manually collected from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) STARS reporting system
Forum participation	Manually collected from the Green Schools Forum
Organizational characteristics	Obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
Talloires and ACUPCC signee status	Manually collected from the Talloires (https://ulsf.org) and ACUPCC (https://secondnature.org) webpages
University rankings	Obtained from the US News rankings

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

This table provides descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of the sample. Our sample is 392 US higher education institutions that (1) are classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education at least once since 2005 and (2) have ever been a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

	Obs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. First STARS Submission	2465	0.07	0.25																	
2. log(Forum Posts)	2465	0.49	1.04	0.17																
3. ln(Forum Posts by Sus Manager)	2465	0.31	0.79	0.19	0.83															
4. log(Forum Posts by Non-sus Manager)	2465	0.29	0.81	0.09	0.83	0.44														
5. STARS Pilot School	2465	0.06	0.24	0.09	0.18	0.13	0.20													
6. AASHE Member School	2465	0.69	0.46	0.15	0.22	0.20	0.16	0.12												
7. ACUPCC Signee	2465	0.08	0.27	0.11	0.30	0.30	0.23	0.14	0.16											
8. Talloires Signee	2465	0.13	0.34	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.10	0.15	0.12										
9. US News Ranking Top 100 School	2465	0.14	0.35	0.14	0.37	0.35	0.29	0.10	0.18	0.57	0.08									
10. Public School	2465	0.90	0.30	-0.04	-0.20	-0.17	-0.18	-0.06	-0.09	-0.24	0.01	-0.52								
11. Four-year School	2465	0.60	0.49	0.16	0.29	0.27	0.22	0.08	0.13	0.23	0.18	0.33	-0.27							
12. City-located School	2465	0.61	0.49	0.05	0.09	0.10	0.06	0.03	-0.07	0.03	-0.05	0.15	-0.08	0.11						
13. Land-grant School	2465	0.10	0.30	0.08	0.22	0.21	0.16	0.00	0.12	0.29	0.17	0.26	0.10	0.27	-0.01					
14. ln(Full-Time Student Enrolment)	2458	10.03	0.47	0.10	0.13	0.09	0.12	0.11	0.08	0.11	0.08	0.14	0.06	0.11	0.19	0.13				
15. ln(Revenue)	2454	18.45	1.57	0.17	0.39	0.31	0.33	0.13	0.23	0.35	0.16	0.52	-0.37	0.65	0.14	0.30	0.35			
16. log(Adoption in the Prior Year)	2465	2.29	1.41	0.02	-0.08	-0.02	-0.11	-0.06	-0.01	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06	0.03	-0.06	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01	-0.52		
17. log(Cumulative Prior Adoption)	2465	3.28	2.03	-0.00	-0.09	-0.01	-0.13	-0.07	-0.09	-0.06	-0.03	-0.09	0.03	-0.08	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03	-0.56	0.90	
18. log(Prior Adoption in the Prior Three Years)	2465	2.99	1.83	0.00	-0.09	-0.01	-0.13	-0.07	-0.06	-0.05	-0.02	-0.07	0.03	-0.07	-0.03	-0.05	-0.02	-0.55	0.95	0.98

Table 3. Discrete Event History Models Predicting Submission of STARS Reports

This table presents the results of discrete-time event history analyses predicting the likelihood of submitting an initial STARS report from 2010 to 2017. Schools are dropped out of the sample in the year following the first STARS report. We use the calendar year as the time clock for models. All the time-varying covariates are lagged by one year.

First STARS Submission	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
log(Forum Posts)		0.21**					
		(0.06)					
log(Forum Posts by Sus Manager)			0.29***	0.32***	0.29***	0.29***	0.29***
			(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
log(Forum Posts by Non-sus Manager)				-0.08			
				(0.10)			
STARS Pilot Member	0.66**	0.51+	0.57*	0.62*	0.57*	0.57*	0.57*
	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
AASHE Member School	1.45***	1.36***	1.33***	1.34***	1.33***	1.33***	1.33***
	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
ACUPCC Signee	0.07	-0.04	-0.07	-0.05	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Talloires Signee	0.19	0.21	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.23	0.23
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
US News Top 100 School	0.83**	0.77**	0.73**	0.72*	0.73**	0.73**	0.73**
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Land-grant School	0.11	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
Public School	0.40	0.43	0.36	0.34	0.36	0.36	0.36
	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)
Four-year School	1.54***	1.48***	1.46***	1.46***	1.46***	1.46***	1.46***
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
City-located School	0.35+	0.27	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
log(Full-Time Student Enrolment)	-0.34	-0.29	-0.29	-0.30	-0.29	-0.29	-0.29
	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
log(Revenue)	-0.24+	-0.26+	-0.25+	-0.25+	-0.25+	-0.25+	-0.25+
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
log(Adoption in the Prior Year)					0.80***		
					(0.13)		
log(Cumulative Prior Adoption)						0.45***	
						(0.07)	
log(Prior Adoption in the Prior Three Years)							0.59***
							(0.10)
Discrete Time Counter	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	2452	2452	2452	2452	2452	2452	2452
Number of Schools	392	392	392	392	392	392	392
LL	-520.52	-515.09	-513.33	-512.95	-513.33	-513.33	-513.33
AIC	1077.05	1068.19	1064.66	1065.89	1064.66	1064.66	1064.66

Robust standard errors clustered by school; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; + p < .1.

Table 4. Interactions and Activities present in the Online Forum Conversations

This table outlines six different types of interactions discovered from our analyses of the conversations in the online forum, alongside their definitions and exemplars from the text.

Interactions	Data Exemplar
Theorizing possibilities Definition: What could we do / who could we be? What is possible?	"How can we work together to ensure that we all have the attention of the appropriate folks and the resources we need to address the climate challenge?" (ind1605d-16156)
	My thoughts (dreams) of what campus sustainability will/does/should accomplish across all of higher education and society: Through modeling behavior and integrated curriculum, campus sustainability empowers students to develop solutions to poorly designed social, economic and political systems that will enhance environmental and community prosperity. Campus sustainability builds community awareness around social, economic and environmental issues, offers resources to identify and create solutions, and serves as an integral partner in the implementation of these solutions, locally and globally. (ind1505b-6127)
	One issue which may cause confusion is that it was scientists and technologists first became aware of the dangers of global warming, and the concerned scientists and technologists raised the danger flag earliest on and it is the politicians and then general public who have been lesser informed and perhaps the last to catch up. It therefore got the label in people's minds of just being a technological issue. This is sad since the political will for change needs to be a more mass movement before it has the influence and traction to get enactment. [...]. By creating awareness in the public at large and then allowing the public to develop their vision of what they want for their grandchildren and future generations, I think this is the most likely way to get the most political traction and then real action. (ind0805b-25247)
Evaluating alternatives Definition: What are the pros and cons of different pathways? What is the preferable way forward?	"Over the years, I have had conversations with a large number of you (and attended an AASHE session or two) about your professional opinions about the location of a sustainability office in the institution's organizational chart. Now, as our office is restructuring, I'd like to return to those conversations as inspiration for what we pursue. If you have an opinion about who an office of sustainability should report to (and why), I'd love to hear it." (ind1708e-10003)
	" I'm gathering some information on green building standards that can be applied to new construction and (more importantly) remodels and retrofits across a campus. Does your campus have a green building standard? Do you use one of the established rating systems as a requirement when doing a major remodel or building a new building (i.e. LEED, Green Globes, ASHRAE green buildings standard, etc.)? If so, I'd like to hear about what you're using as your standard, and why you chose that approach. We ([a university] sustainability staff) plan to propose a green building standard, and I'm looking to your experience to gather pros and cons of different approaches." (ind1002c-74)
	[An earlier post's] second sentence is important, addressing the purpose as part of selecting the software. I just left a tree committee meeting where we discussed mapping the trees for management needs in rough order of magnitude the project might cover 10,000 plant locations and 100 types. While we have identified the need for that map, we also discussed that a less detailed map of specimen trees in Google Earth may be more useful for teaching and public education. When it comes to sustainability maps, I think we have a similar issue of needing to identify the purpose (I think this is [an earlier post's] point as well). We eventually face a problem of how to deal with our success. Items we map when they are new and rare (bike racks, water bottle fillers, green buildings, solar panels, etc.), will not be worth mapping once they are ubiquitous and sufficient (bathrooms, water fountains, benches, etc.). (ind1509e-15241)
Challenging underlying assumptions	LEED [green building standard] does not guarantee that everything will be green and it is foolish to think that a LEED certification is the end-all and be-all. Instead we should focus on specifics that everyone can buy into and the best way to do that is to consider lifecycle costing instead of looking at third-party certification or first costs." (ind0705d-2865)

Definition: We have been operating under this assumption, but is it true?	If sustainability officers are expected to develop into a "jack-of-all-trades", then maybe the best solution is to arrange their positions to rotate through the administration. Spend a year or 2 in operations, academics, student affairs, with short sabbaticals to Athletics, Foundation, or Auxiliaries. Work for the best mentors, get the professional development you need. Human Resources will freak out. (ind1708e-14314)
	We've had conversations about these issues framed in the three STARS credits about investments: a sustainability investing advisory committee; adding positive or negative screens to (a portion of) investment decisions; transparency in portfolio makeup. In prepping for these conversations I've discovered that there is a small but growing trend among some asset managers to pay attention to ESG (Environment, Social, Corporate Governance) performance. [...] at a minimum, there appears to be no negative impact for using sustainability screens when investing. Some feel that ESG-positive companies are better bets over the long term: they have better leadership, think long term, have fewer regulatory liabilities, fewer social or corporate culture issues, and more satisfied and productive workers. (ind1702a-3732)
Exchanging information, resources, tools, or contacts Definition: Asking for or sharing specific information – such as facts or costs, as well as resources, tools, or contacts	"I'm designing our newest Sustainability Plan Progress Report and I'm looking for some good formats. Does anyone have a good sustainability progress report? What data do you highlight? How much information do you include? I would like to incorporate some of our STARS data this time, but STARS has so much detail that it's too much for this report" (ind1703b-2454)
	[A university] has a pretty robust green building standards document. LEED, and the requirement of particular credits or thresholds, are a component of the standards, but there are also other procedural items like requiring an integrated design process, energy modeling and lifecycle costing. (ind1609c-33264)
	At [a university] we are starting up a SCI program (Smart Communities Initiative), which is loosely modeled from [another university]'s Sustainable City Year Program . This is our 1st year and with this in mind, we are working out the kinks so to speak and I have pitched to the planning team we utilize a ranking system at the end of the SCI to provide municipalities a gauge on how sustainable they are and possible provide promotional leverage. We are investigating other such ranking programs and look forward to seeing this conversation grow. If anyone is submitting an abstract to AASHE for Innovation for Sustainable Economies & Communities I would recommend they reach out to the folks at [anotehr university] as they might have knowledge of research being conducted elsewhere, or might provide actual data from their own work. (ind1402d-24393)
Requesting advice or giving direction Definition: Asking others what they would advise in a particular situation or providing a recommended course of action	"I'd suggest that getting a consultant in to prepare the campus's STARS submission is the wrong way to go, and it's not a matter of price. Even if an expert were to be willing to do it for free (rather unlikely), the cost to the University would be unacceptable. That cost is primarily in terms of opportunity missed. STARS brings value largely in that it causes members of the campus community to take a broad, comprehensive look at many of the activities and initiatives which influence an institution's level of sustainability." (ind1202b-2207)
	Recently, in discussion with a senior leader, they said, "but you don't DO sustainability....it is others who actually DO the sustainability work." We all know how complicated our work is and how our work adds value, but do others really get us? We are change champions in our institution, dealing with a classic big messy problem with many interconnected challenges. We seek to simplify the complexity and achieve sustainability results by working on things like awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement (that's the ADKAR Model, but there's many other models). We influence change by establishing broad goals and targets in plans, identifying opportunities to use our campus as lab, identifying pilot projects to advance learning, communicating sustainability issues and doing many outreach, education and engagement activities to build a campus-wide ethic of sustainability. I wish all this had readily rolled off my tongue in the moment. Even though I have 8 years under my belt this came as a bit of a surprise. It got me to wondering what other smart sustainability directors and chief sustainability officers might have said. How would you respond to the following comment in a 30-second window? "...but you don't DO sustainability....it is others who actually DO the sustainability work." (ind1710a-9872)

	We are in the same place at the [a university], trying to determine the most meaningful metrics by which to measure our sustainability initiatives. For our part, I have decided to focus on AASHE's STARS because I feel that we will all eventually be expected to report out on the STARS framework. However, we are not committing fully to STARS at this time. It is very comprehensive (as it should be) but it would take too much of our staff's time to conduct the full assessment. I expect to put together an abreviated version of STARS within the next couple months and I will do my best to remember to forward that version to this list. If you need something quickly, I suggest looking at STARS and pulling out the most meaningful metrics you feel your office can handle without too much extra work. (ind0801e-17736)
	"Has anyone been using the Sustainability Literacy Test /SULITE to assess campus sustainability literacy? Can you share with me any thoughts or experiences?" (ind1607d-36109)
Sharing experiences and exemplars Definition: Sharing details of personal experiences of what has worked or not worked or sharing an example of an organization that is succeeding in a particular area	"I'm working with our campus GIS club to create a map of sustainable features on campus. As the club digs into research they would like to know what programs other campuses are using and any limitations associated. If you have any advice and/or your campus put together a how-to guide regarding building out the map feature of such a project, please send me a message." (ind1509e-7089)
	I use Twitter relatively regularly to keep people up to date on the day-to-day operations of our sustainability office, as well as any general sustainability info (not that frequent with these updates) and larger university-wide sustainability items of interest. We get lots of retweets from students (even those that don't follow us) and from our university's official blog. Truthfully, we don't do much advertising other than putting it on our facebook page and telling people about it when we remember to do so. I see us trying to expand our followers in the future, but for right now, our retweets and contacts have been high enough it hasn't made sense for us to put a whole lot of effort into marketing it any better than we already do. I think it's good for us. It shows a lot of transparency for what we are doing and gives students a better insight into our university operations and how things play out "behind the scenes". (ind1011d-5685)

Appendix Table 1. STARS Categories and Credits (STARS Version 2.2)

Category	Subcategory	Credit	Points	Category	Subcategory	Credit	Points
Academics	Curriculum	Academic Courses	14	Operations	Food & Dining	Food and Beverage Purchasing	6
		Learning Outcomes	8			Sustainable Dining	2
		Undergraduate Program	3		Grounds	Landscape Management	2
		Graduate Program	3			Biodiversity	1-2
		Immersive Experience	2		Purchasing	Sustainable Procurement	3
		Sustainability Literacy Assessment	4			Electronics Purchasing	1
		Incentives for Developing Courses	2			Cleaning and Janitorial Purchasing	1
		Campus as a Living Laboratory	4			Office Paper Purchasing	1
	Research	Research and Scholarship	12		Transportation	Campus Fleet	1
		Support for Sustainability Research	4			Commute Modal Split	5
		Open Access to Research	2			Support for Sustainable Transportation	1
Engagement	Campus Engagement	Student Educators Program	4		Waste	Waste Minimization and Diversion	8
		Student Orientation	2			Construction and Demolition Waste Diversion	1
		Student Life	2			Hazardous Waste Management	1
		Outreach Materials and Publications	2		Water	Water Use	4-6
		Outreach Campaign	4			Rainwater Management	2
		Assessing Sustainability Culture	1	Planning & Administration	Coordination & Planning	Sustainability Coordination	1
		Employee Educators Program	3			Sustainability Planning	4
		Employee Orientation	1			Inclusive and Participatory Governance	3
		Staff Professional Development and Training	2			Reporting Assurance	1
	Public Engagement	Community Partnerships	3		Diversity & Affordability	Diversity and Equity Coordination	2
		Inter-Campus Collaboration	3			Assessing Diversity and Equity	1
		Continuing Education	5			Support for Underrepresented Groups	3
		Community Service	5			Affordability and Access	4
		Participation in Public Policy	2		Investment & Finance	Committee on Investor Responsibility	2
		Trademark Licensing	2			Sustainable Investment	3-5
Operations	Air & Climate	Emissions Inventory and Disclosure	3			Investment Disclosure	1
		Greenhouse Gas Emissions	8		Wellbeing & Work	Employee Compensation	3
	Buildings	Building Design and Construction	3			Assessing Employee Satisfaction	1
		Building Operations and Maintenance	5			Wellness Programs	1
	Energy	Building Energy Efficiency	6			Workplace Health and Safety	2
		Clean and Renewable Energy	4	Innovation & Leadership		Catalog of optional credits available (up to 4)	0.5 each

Appendix Table 2. Discrete Event History Models Predicting Submission of STARS Reports

This table presents the results of discrete-time event history analyses predicting the likelihood of submitting an initial STARS report from 2010 to 2017. The sample is 622 US higher education institutions that are classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education at least once since 2005. Schools are dropped out of the sample in the year following the first STARS report. We use the calendar year as the time clock for models. All the time-varying covariates are lagged by one year.

First STARS Submission	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
log(Forum Posts)		0.21**					
		(0.07)					
log(Forum Posts by Sus Manager)			0.29***	0.32***	0.29***	0.29***	0.29***
			(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
log(Forum Posts by Non-sus Manager)				-0.08			
				(0.10)			
STARS Pilot Member	0.73**	0.58*	0.64*	0.69**	0.64*	0.64*	0.64*
	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
AASHE Member School	2.35***	2.25***	2.24***	2.24***	2.24***	2.24***	2.24***
	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
ACUPCC Signee	0.07	-0.05	-0.08	-0.06	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Talloires Signee	0.19	0.22	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.24	0.24
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
US News Top 100 School	0.86**	0.81**	0.77**	0.75**	0.77**	0.77**	0.77**
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Land-grant School	0.10	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
Public School	0.47+	0.49+	0.43	0.41	0.43	0.43	0.43
	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Four-year School	1.66***	1.60***	1.58***	1.58***	1.58***	1.58***	1.58***
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
City-located School	0.36*	0.28	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
log(Full-Time Student Enrolment)	-0.43+	-0.38	-0.39	-0.39	-0.39	-0.39	-0.39
	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)
log(Revenue)	-0.24+	-0.27*	-0.26+	-0.25+	-0.26+	-0.26+	-0.26+
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
log(Adoption in the Prior Year)					0.78***		
					(0.13)		
log(Cumulative Prior Adoption)						0.44***	
						(0.07)	
log(Prior Adoption in the Prior Three Years)							0.57***
							(0.09)
Discrete Time Counter	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4265	4265	4265	4265	4265	4265	4265
Number of Schools	622	622	622	622	622	622	622
LL	-538.34	-532.92	-531.19	-530.74	-531.19	-531.19	-531.19
AIC	1112.68	1103.83	1100.37	1101.49	1100.37	1100.37	1100.37

Robust standard errors clustered by school; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .1$.

Appendix Table 3. Panel Logit Estimation of Forum Participation

This table presents the results of panel logit analyses predicting the odds of participating in the forum. The sample is 622 US higher education institutions that are classified as large or very large by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education at least once since 2005. All the time-varying covariates are lagged by one year.

Forum participation	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Forum participation (1-year lagged)		2.96***	3.02***
		(0.21)	(0.16)
Forum participation (2-year lagged)			1.42***
			(0.16)
STARS Pilot Member	1.48*	0.60+	0.23
	(0.63)	(0.35)	(0.24)
AASHE Member School	1.15***	1.07***	0.86***
	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.17)
ACUPCC Signee	1.61**	0.64+	0.31
	(0.59)	(0.36)	(0.24)
Talloires Signee	0.38	0.23	0.02
	(0.47)	(0.27)	(0.18)
US News Top 100 School	2.15***	1.15**	0.47+
	(0.48)	(0.35)	(0.26)
Land-grant School	-0.07	-0.15	-0.32
	(0.58)	(0.32)	(0.23)
Public School	1.49**	0.78*	0.63**
	(0.57)	(0.34)	(0.24)
Four-year School	2.12***	0.90**	0.56*
	(0.58)	(0.32)	(0.24)
City-located School	0.17	0.18	0.07
	(0.38)	(0.21)	(0.15)
log(Full-Time Student Enrolment)	-0.05	-0.10	0.07
	(0.41)	(0.25)	(0.19)
log(Revenue)	1.02***	0.56**	0.34*
	(0.26)	(0.18)	(0.14)
Constant	-27.03***	-15.51***	-12.40***
	(4.69)	(2.99)	(2.14)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4942	4942	4332
Number of Schools	622	622	622
LL	-1050.81	-942.55	-804.95
AIC	2141.61	1927.10	1651.89

Robust standard errors clustered by school; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .1$.

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