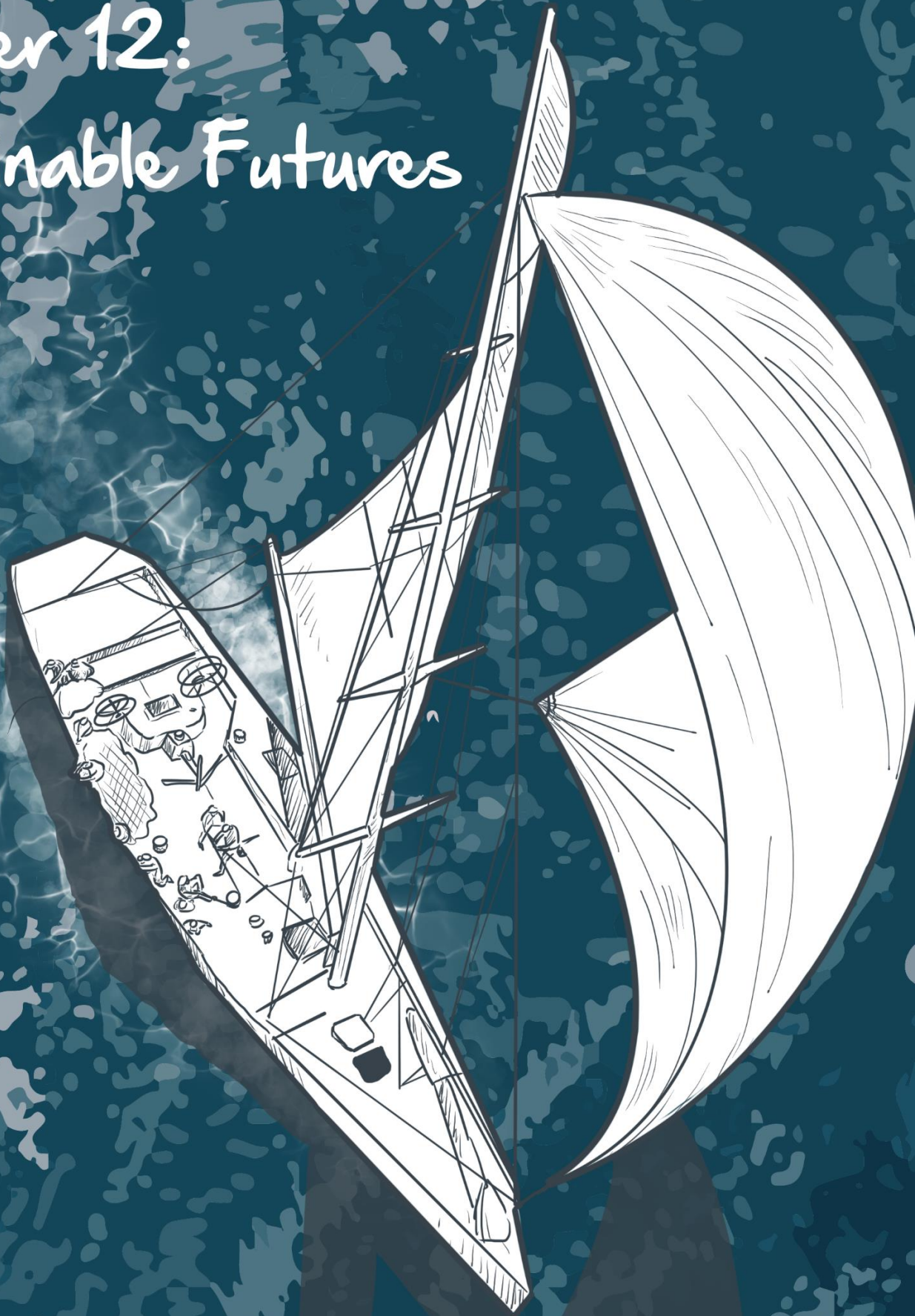


Chapter 12: Sustainable Futures



Sustainable futures depend on social equality, environmental protection and a more balanced economic growth across the planet. Will improved global co-operation and adaptability be sufficient for a successful outcome?

12

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

Native American Proverb

This chapter uses an “ecosystem approach” to recognise the value of connectedness, cooperation, collaboration and interdependence in achieving a sustainable future. It offers three sustainability frameworks: the 4 Ps (purpose, people, planet, prosperity), the SDGs and the Caplor House, as well as some practical auditing tools at an individual and organisational level. Becoming a sustainable organisation means balancing your impact on the natural environment and human and social welfare whilst maintaining long-term economic viability. However, the greatest success will come when sustainability is fully integrated into the purpose and soul of your organisation.

The External Environment

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.” Jane Goodall

The health and state of our planet and the needs of future generations are becoming increasingly prominent in the thinking of both young and old. There is a growing shared aim to look after the environment, reduce the use of plastics and fossil fuels, protect habitats and wildlife, work together for peace and unity, reduce poverty and bring about equality and social justice across the globe. This increasing drive towards a sustainable future stems from a wider societal expectation. For example, the voice of young people heard in protests, strikes and marches across the world calls for governments, businesses and NGOs to take action on climate change and to do things differently to contribute to a sustainable future for all.

CHAPTER 12: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

The coronavirus crisis has challenged all our assumptions about what is normal in today's world, and what to expect in the future. Although it has disrupted the way we work and live, it has also provided an opportunity for us to reconsider the legacy we want to leave on this planet and how we need to challenge our practices in order to create a more sustainable future.

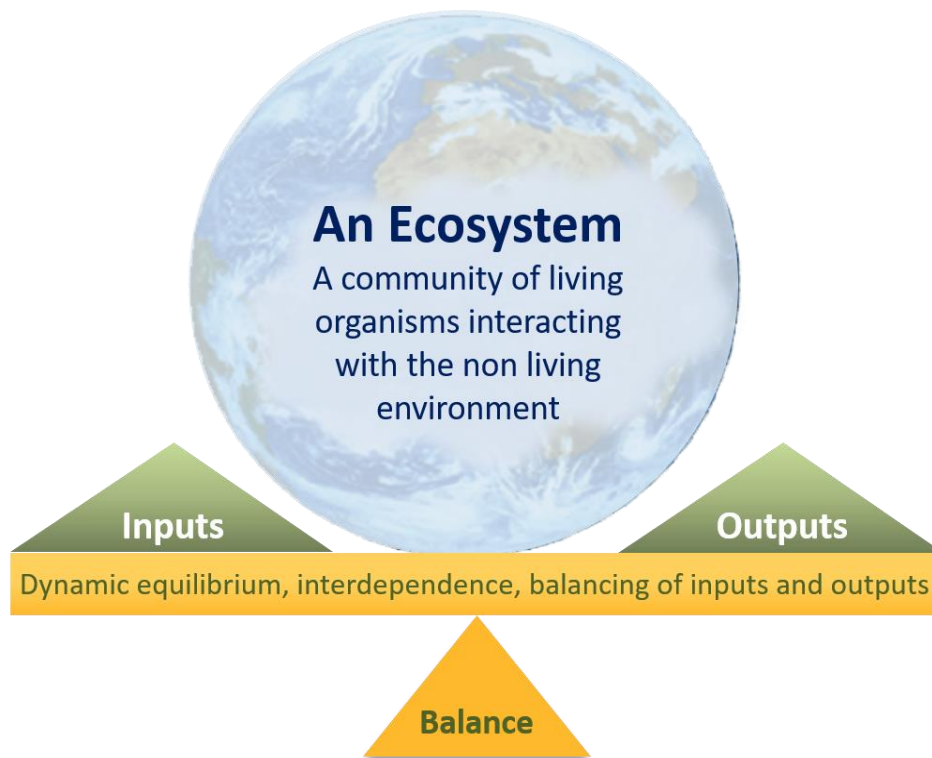
Organisational leaders are now faced with the challenge of leading their organisations sustainably into this new future.

Sustainable development requires joined up thinking on the impact of climate change, biodiversity and habitat loss, social equity, social justice, cultural respect, human rights and long-term economic stability. There is no simple way of achieving this. The issues are complex and interconnected. Tackling one concern may have foreseen and unforeseen consequences which may positively and negatively impact on many other issues.

The Ecosystem Approach

“Even if you never have the chance to see or touch the ocean, the ocean touches you with every breath you take, every drop of water you drink, every bite you consume. Everyone, everywhere is inextricably connected to and utterly dependent upon the existence of the sea.” Sylvia Earle

An ecosystem is an interconnected system of living beings and the physical environment. For the system to be healthy there needs to be balance of inputs and outputs (see diagram below). Ecological balance is defined as a dynamic equilibrium of both biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living/physical) components within a community of organisms in which diversity remains relatively stable yet subject to gradual changes through natural selection (WWF, 2020). Simply put, net inputs need to balance net outputs across all levels. The system will fail or will catastrophically affect and be affected by neighbouring ecosystems if there is an imbalance.



An Ecosystem Approach

If we consider an organisation to be an ecosystem, its community of living things is its workforce and the abiotic environment is its geographical setting together with the numerous processes and functions which hold the organisation together. The actions and reactions of each individual within the organisation will impact on those functions, the inputs (e.g. resources) and the outputs (the product or service).

If the organisation is in balance it will naturally contribute and help balance its stakeholders and wider communities thereby contributing to a sustainable future. If an organisation is not balancing its inputs with its outputs, then it will cause its stakeholders and connected communities to become unbalanced and the knock-on effects can be difficult to trace and quantify. As Greta Thunberg (2019) states “no one is too small to make a difference”, thus the actions of all individuals within a system can and do make a difference to the balance of the system, or organisation, as a whole.

If we delve deeper into this ecosystem concept, we can see that interdependence is critical and is maintained by an interconnectedness and flow of materials and energy between other ecosystems. Natural ecosystems have both a top down control on their function e.g. predator related, and a bottom up control which is reliant on the inputs and the producers of the

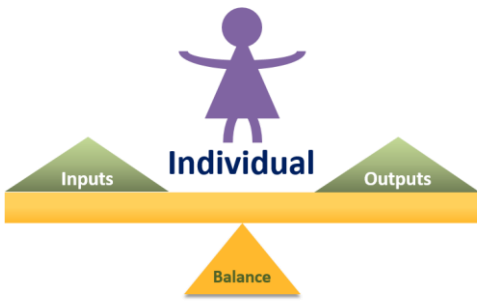
CHAPTER 12: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

system. This is the same for any organisation; there is top down control e.g. from external pressures such as legislation, competition, economic climate, and public opinion. And bottom up control again from outside sources for example legislation, available resources, and the current economic climate.

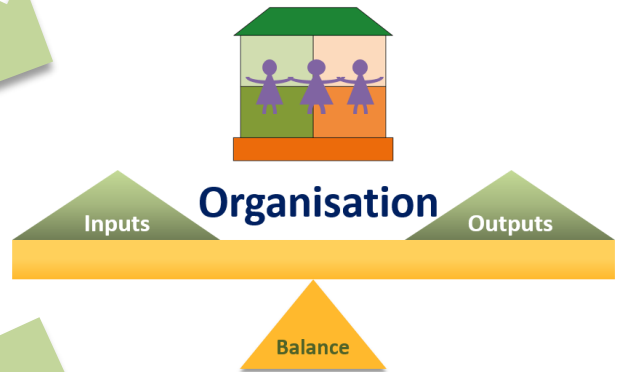
The idea that organisations have equivalents to natural ecosystems where there is co-evolution, competition, collaboration, cooperation and interdependency provides useful insights into the complexity of the connectedness between organisations. Back in 1993, business strategist James Moore put forward the idea that in a business ecosystem, companies coevolve capabilities around a new innovation: they work cooperatively and competitively to support new products, satisfy customer needs, and eventually incorporate the next round of innovations. He suggested that when an ecosystem thrives then all will benefit but if conditions change too rapidly then there can be catastrophic failure as there is imbalance in the system.

This ecosystem approach can be explored at different organisational levels; for example, individual, organisation and communities, as well as three different attitudes; informational, emotional and behavioural (Lozano, 2008). These attitudes have a determining effect on the sustainability of the ecosystem. For example, the ecosystem will thrive if the participants have developed patterns of behaviour that streamline the flow of ideas, talent and capital throughout the system (Hayes, 2019).

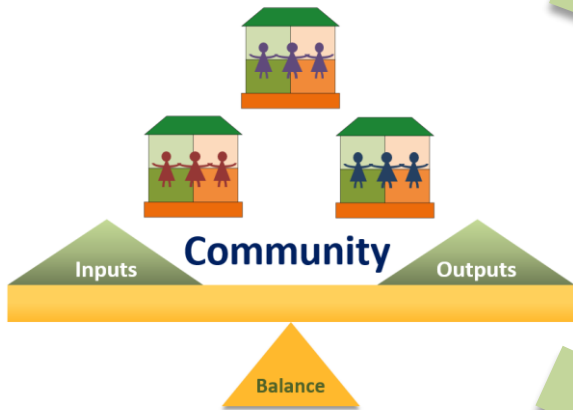
The ecosystem approach to a sustainable future is one which is recognised as being balanced at every level (from individual, organisation and community to wider world). It is understood that this balance is in constant flux and can only be worked at by recognising the value of connectedness, cooperation, collaboration and interdependence and acting on this as much as possible.



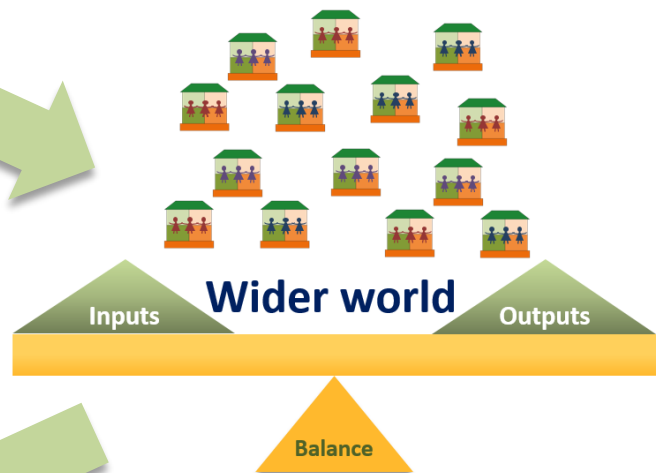
A sustainable future starts with individual acts – self leadership



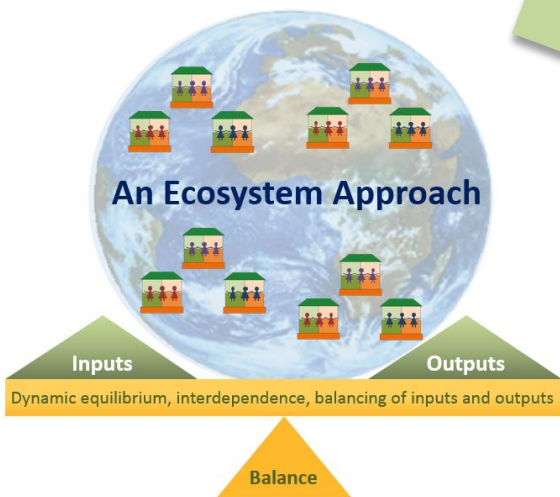
An organisation considers itself as an ecosystem and balances its inputs and outputs for a sustainable future



Community stakeholders are interdependent ecosystems and co-evolve



A sustainable future requires active leadership and collaboration across individuals, organisations, communities, countries and continents



How does an organisation become sustainable?

“Don’t judge every day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.”

Robert Louis Stevenson

If the ecosystem approach provides a conceptual way of understanding the complexities and interrelationships that impact our future, how does an organisation contribute to a sustainable future?

Simply put, a sustainable organisation may be defined as an organised group of people aiming to advance a sustainable future either as part of its “usual” business or as its key purpose. For example, there is continuous thinking on the mission, purpose, values, goals of the organisation and these are fully integrated into the functioning of the organisation and its usual business and are not sitting outside it.

We need to change the way we think and act as individuals, we need to collectively change the way we work, both with and for each other. Becoming a sustainable organisation requires an approach that looks inwards and outwards on many levels, does not function in isolation and really does think long term.

A sustainable future is one where people can meet their needs without compromising the ability of people in the future to meet their own needs. In order to achieve this then it is crucial that organisations need to be open, sharing knowledge and information about best practice, be prepared to collaborate and support each other, and embrace the challenge of doing things differently.

In becoming a sustainable organisation it would be easy to go in search of a list of do’s and don’ts, identify areas of concern and create policies and procedures to demonstrate sustainable responsibility. Yet, now there is a growing interest in there being something more. Research by Matt Gitsham et al. (2008) identified that both knowledge and skill sets (learning to do) and a set of attitudes (learning to be) are critically important for leaders to possess in order for their organisations to be able to respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities of corporate responsibility and sustainability. The key message of their work was that there needs to be a focus on developing the mindset and skills of individual leaders,

rather than simply introducing new policies and procedures. The table below provides a reflective exercise to examine your own individual leadership skills and abilities.

<i>Mind and skill sets for leaders</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Personal rating 1 low, 5 high</i>
Systemic thinking	Understand the complexity of how one system impacts on another	1 2 3 4 5
Embracing diversity	Reflect deeply on the historical relationships, the impact on gender, class and other aspects challenging equality and equity	1 2 3 4 5
Thinking long term	Keep an eye on the long term as well as short-term outcomes of your/your organisation's actions	1 2 3 4 5
Emotional awareness	Deeply reflective and self-aware	1 2 3 4 5
Meaningful dialogue	Across organisations, communities, governments	1 2 3 4 5
Integration	Work in alignment for mutually beneficial positive outcomes	1 2 3 4 5
Collaboration	Synergies and combined energies of collaboration enable essential creative thinking and innovation	1 2 3 4 5
Involvement	Developing and empowering others to become leaders themselves	1 2 3 4 5
Balancing local and global perspectives	Think about your consumption patterns and the impact of them on others	1 2 3 4 5

Mind and Skill Sets for Leaders of Sustainable Organisations

Frameworks for a sustainable future

“A healthy ecology is the basis for a healthy economy.” Claudine Schneider

There are many different frameworks for looking at sustainability, including the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and John Elkington’s “triple bottom line” approach (Elkington, 1998). At Caplor Horizons, we use three approaches for exploring sustainability and how we can be more sustainable in different aspects of our work. These frameworks are:

- The Four Ps: Purpose, People, Planet, Prosperity
- The Sustainable Development Goals
- The Caplor House

The Four P’s of a Sustainable Future

As mentioned in Chapter 2, our definition of a sustainable future is one in which a healthy environment, economic prosperity and social justice are pursued simultaneously to ensure the wellbeing and a good quality of life of present and future generations.

The early development of our principles for a sustainable future are attributed to the late Ann-Marie Brouder, a leader in the global sustainability movement, as well as influences from John Elkington’s “triple bottom line” (people, planet, profit), the 5P’s of the Sustainable Development Goals (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships) and the Brundtland Report’s (1987) definition of sustainability. They have now evolved into 4 clearly defined principles: purpose, people, planet and prosperity. The guiding principle of “purpose” reminds us to be working with others rather than in isolation to achieve our shared goals and a common purpose that is bigger than ourselves.



Caplor Horizons' 4Ps of sustainability

These principles need to be in balance as with an ecosystem. These principles overlap and we think of them as a complex system. So how does this work in practical terms? Is it really possible to balance these principles when they can often be in conflict with each other?

These questions have been the subject of various studies. In agreeing that the integration of environmental, social, and economic principles is often connected to conflicts between the principles, a study by Ralph Hansmann *et al.* (2012) suggests that efforts which consider the economic situation of future generations or enhance social and human capital can achieve considerable integration and such initiatives have less likelihood of conflicts.

Thus, having a clear purpose which focuses on taking a long-term economic view of a viable and thriving society may help to produce shared values, avoid conflicts between the principles, and provide the opportunity for greater cooperation and synergy.

For example:

- Visionary thinking and innovation will generate social and economic benefits at the same time as resulting in the responsible use and reduction in natural resources

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- Education and sociocultural sustainability initiatives can simultaneously promote income and employment as well as improve social and environmental wellbeing.
- Protection of natural spaces and biodiversity and the reduction of environmental risks will improve the health and safety of the population and increase the potential for innovative ideas for economic prosperity.

The Sustainable Development Goals

There is a growing expectation (societally and legally) for organisations to demonstrate their credibility and approach to sustainability in a wide range of ways. This may be through monitoring, reporting and certification based on their practices and procedures. Pressure to do this may come from many directions including institutional traditions, rules and regulations, political will, social movements and media pressures. Such an approach may become the key focus of an organisation. For example, one practical way of your organisation demonstrating its commitment to a sustainable future might be to actively adopt and contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



The Sustainable Development Goals. Source: United Nations (2020)

For many leaders, SDGs are a good place to start as they offer goals, define targets and help to focus the ambitions for an organisation. They are helpful in demonstrating

interrelationships, emphasising the need for collaboration and uniting organisations and even nations in common action for the greater good. It is therefore pragmatic for any organisation to explore the SDGs and use them as an opportunity to create checks and balances and demonstrate sustainable credentials as part of what it is to be a sustainable organisation.

Adopting the SDGs may also offer global kudos and a “feel good” factor especially if the goals adopted are “easily attainable” and the organisation is already doing the actions. But is it enough? And is it also possible that using, incorporating and reporting on SDGs may be seen by your clients and staff as a form of greenwashing? Greenwashing is a form of spin where “green” public relations (PR) and marketing are deceptively used to promote the perception that the organisation is environmentally friendly and/or working for a sustainable future.

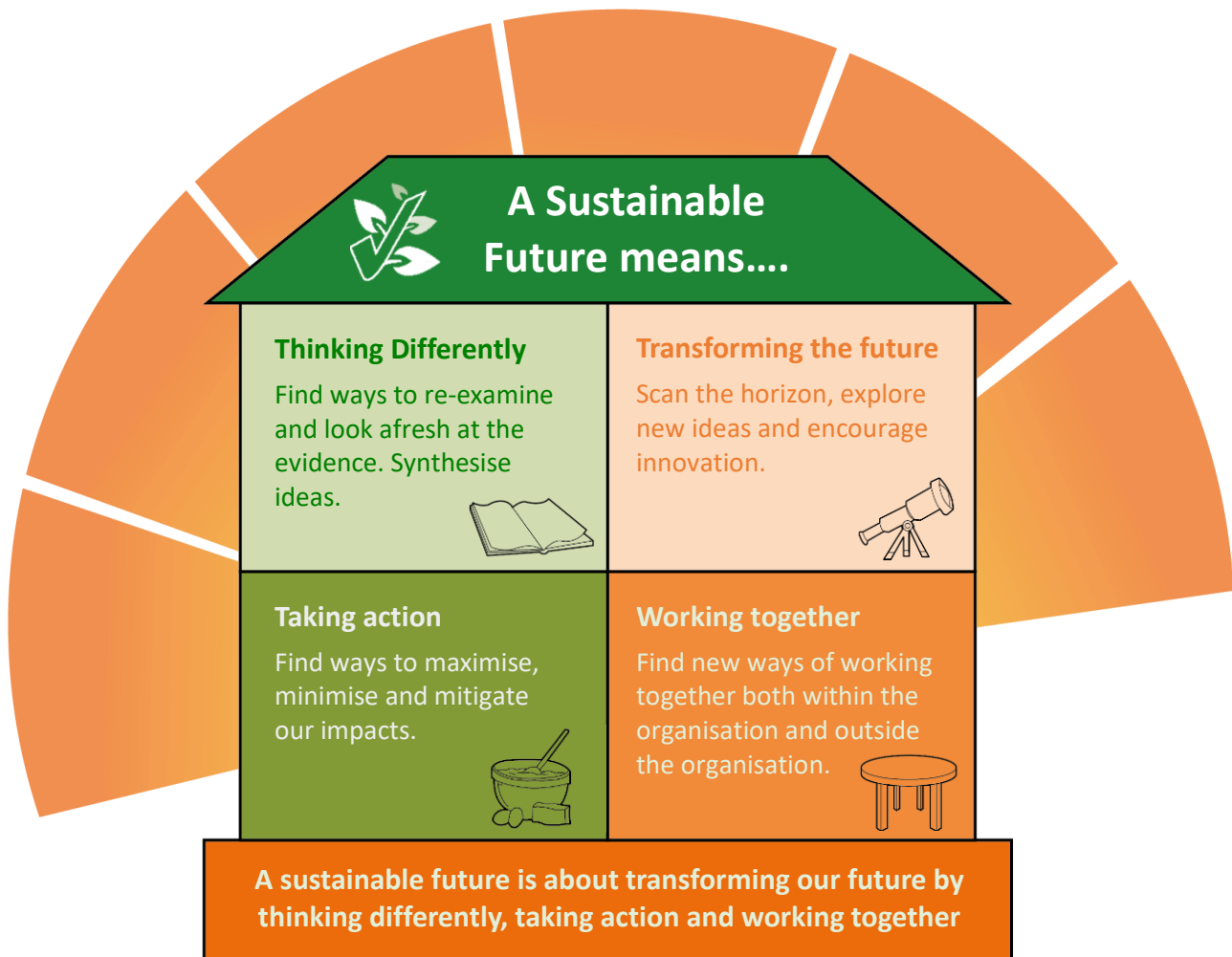
For the SDGs to have real meaning and value, organisations need to rise to the challenge of addressing the more demanding and stretching objectives, as well as scrutinising these for unintended consequences. Although SDGs can sometimes be used as a form of greenwashing, Nikos Avlonas (2018) states that “they refine complex concerns to easily understandable concepts” and therefore are a reasonable platform for any organisation to move towards an sustainable future and address the global challenges we face.

So, this leads us on to how you can use these frameworks. What is required to balance the four principles and what might be the “core” actions that bring the principles together?

Sustainability and the Caplor House

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Caplor House has a sheltering Roof that sustains it. The Roof is a place to consider how best our learning, thinking and actions can help to ensure a sustainable future. From the Roof, we use the lens of sustainability as our navigational tool taking into consideration what we have found out from all the rooms of the House and our awareness of learning from the foundation. We then plan our compass bearing and bring together all the elements that we need to think about for our voyage, going forwards.

Organisations can similarly use the Caplor House model to develop ways of thinking and working towards a sustainable future. The diagram below summarises some of the key actions you might take in each of the rooms.



The Caplor House and sustainability

- **The Observatory** – Moving towards a sustainable future requires us to do things differently. The Observatory is the place for new thinking. It is essential that organisations create an atmosphere and space to enable people to become more innovative, responsive and creative in how the organisation can become more sustainable. Organisations need to look outwards and ask the following question: “What do we need to do to work sustainably with others and the wider world?”.
- **The Library** – Having the critical curiosity to examine what other similar organisations are doing and having the confidence to collaborate may provide you with inspiration to look in new and different ways. There is also an opportunity in the Library to monitor and evaluate the impacts your organisation is having on others and the natural world and whether you are working sustainably to balance the four principles.

Evidence garnered will support a greater commitment towards a sustainable future and likely provide information on where there can be greater improvements made.

- **The Family Room** – It is the activity in the Family Room which unites and strengthens the bonds between the deeper purpose of an organisation with the people. As leaders, if you are able to really listen to your colleagues and respond in ways that support, motivate and inspire belief, then it is more likely that each individual within the organisation will believe that what they do will make a difference and will contribute to a sustainable future. Individuals will and do make a difference, but your organisation can make a greater difference if all individuals work in alignment and collaboration.
- **The Kitchen** – Ask yourself, what are the practical actions an organisation can take? What SDGs are going to be implemented as a priority and how? What are the realities of balancing the four principles? What are we going to maximise? Minimise? How do we mitigate the negative impacts we are having on people, planet and our prosperity?

A sustainable organisation is one that will organise itself differently. It will look within itself to enable it to work better with those on the outside. The Observatory might be where there are the visionary ideas but it is essential to be working across all rooms to back up the ideas with evidence, introduce and adapt new and different processes and inspire the people to embrace new ways of organising to be more sustainable.

The key to becoming a sustainable organisation is holistic thinking; that in everything that it does, the organisation holds to a guiding principle that is understood, believed, advocated and acted upon by all within the organisation.

Sustaining a Sustainable Future

“A leader is someone who crafts a vision and inspires people to act collectively to make it happen, responding to whatever changes and challenges arise along the way. A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world.”

Wayne Visser and Polly Courtice

As leaders of an aspiring sustainable organisation you also need to consider how you can sustain your goal for a sustainable future. What else might you need to consider and act upon to do this? Having a balance between four principles is just part of what makes a sustainable organisation. Maintenance and continuous development of sustainable practices can be an even greater challenge and requires active leadership and a sense of ownership and responsibility from each individual as well as mutual cooperation, collaboration, innovation and an openness to learn and to change. This relates to the many facets of an organisation as described in previous chapters.

Every organisation will be predisposed or biased towards certain directions of thinking in relation to a sustainable future. Simply put, a charity which works within the environmental sector may, if not considering carefully, put issues related to the planet before people and prosperity principles. A business may place more weight on profit and economics than social and environmental considerations for their view of a sustainable future. The reality is that these are all interconnected and if balances need to be reached you need to consider how your organisation will do this.

What is the practical starting point for any organisation and how can your organisation maintain momentum?

We would suggest that sustainability starts from the very core of the organisation – its purpose and its soul. An organisation which leads from the soul, where its purpose is integrated with sustainability, fosters deep connections between the 4Ps. This enables its stakeholders to find meaning and connection within the workplace as well as generating new ways of working and leading each other and the wider world.

We have shown in Chapter 8 that the soul of an organisation is something more than the organisational culture. The soul lies at the deepest level of an organisation’s culture, beliefs

and values, yet is more, as it relates to its hidden essence; its fundamental sense of purpose, and the organisation's sense of itself as a whole in the many worlds that it inhabits. Deep awareness and understanding of the soul of an organisation allows an organisation to move beyond the check box approach to being sustainable and really examine what being a sustainable organisation means for that particular organisation, its people and the world around it.

A sustainable future requires leadership vision, flexibility, adaptability and agility as well as a proactive approach to meet the demands of this ever-moving goalpost. We know that balancing the 4Ps requires collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It also calls for the organisation, its leadership and its people, to do things differently and to help people to overcome their resistance to change. If there is the imagination to grasp changing opportunities and a willingness from the leadership to adapt like an ecosystem, then it is likely that the sustainable organisation is also a viable organisation. An organisation which has the vision to see a different future is one which will reap the rewards for doing the right things for the right reason (Daly, 2013).

For an organisation to sustain its sustainability, Deborah de Lange *et al.* (2012) suggest three key factors:

- Develop and maintain sustainability strategies
- Examine honestly and critically whether reporting practices are substantive or symbolic (greenwashing)
- Analyse what the attributes required for sustaining sustainability are (rather than on what the factors affecting and facilitating the initial adoption are)

These are very much activities based in the Library and Kitchen of the Caplor House. Building on this we can see that the practicalities of sustaining sustainability can be reflected in the practices within every room of the Caplor House where there is continuous development of ideas (Observatory), constant analysis of the evidence (Library), regular review and refinement of the processes (Kitchen), and unbroken dialogue between all within the organisation and the outside world (Family Room). In working in this way, the sustainable organisation will contribute to a ripple effect which can further influence others to also make

CHAPTER 12: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

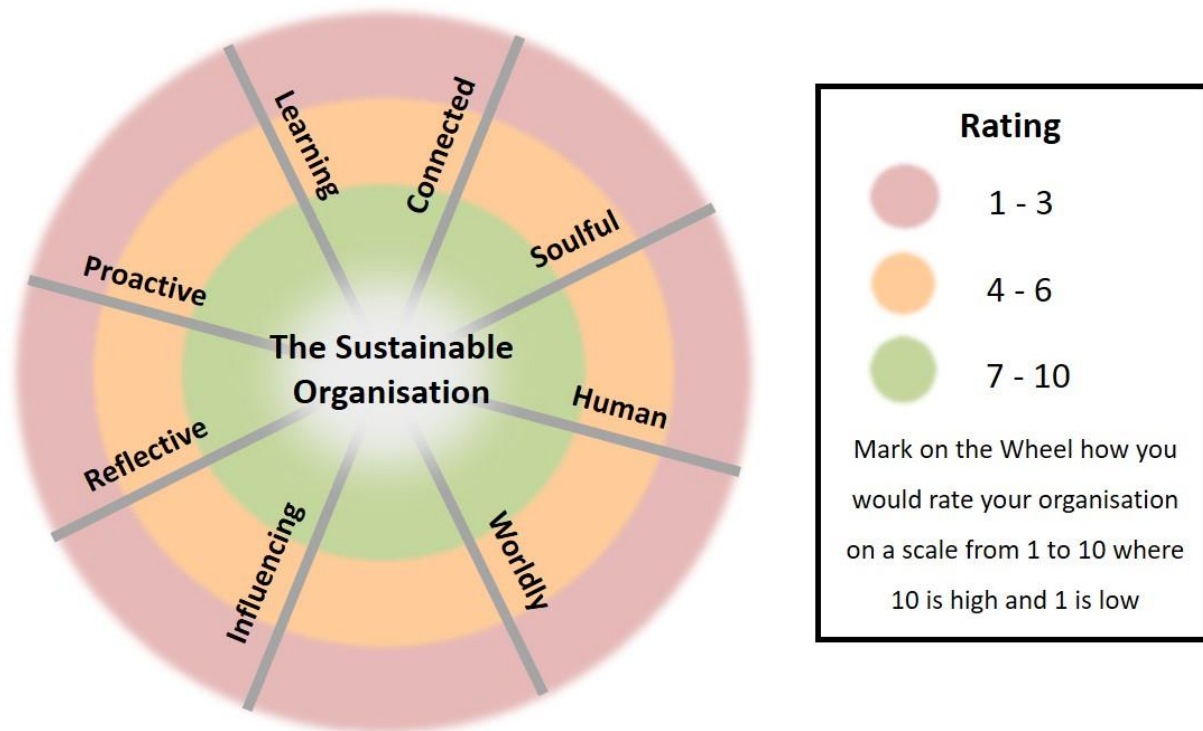
changes.

How does an organisation realistically manage to do this? We would advocate that a sustainable organisation needs to embrace balance. Leaders should focus on balancing the 4Ps and doing this by balancing being:

- A Learning organisation
- A Proactive organisation
- A Connected organisation
- A Human organisation
- A Soulful organisation
- A Worldly organisation
- An Influencing organisation
- A Reflective organisation

Each of these “types” of organisations are ways of working and organising, and all can create unique and individualised approaches towards becoming a sustainable organisation. There is no right or wrong approach, only a balance which is both conscious and unconscious.

We use the “Sustainable Organisation Wheel” (below) as a simple audit tool to review how balanced your organisation is. Reflecting on this will provide clarity on the nature of your organisation and help identify other perspectives worth considering when moving towards the goal of being a Sustainable Organisation. There is no “right” balance and balance also requires constant adjustment.



Sustainable Organisation Wheel

Setting out on the journey to becoming a sustainable organisation may seem complex, daunting, and difficult to achieve. It cannot be underestimated how multifarious your approach might need to be, yet, if the drive to be a sustainable organisation comes from within, from you the leaders and all the people within the organisation, then it is more than possible for your organisation to achieve the goal of calling your organisation a sustainable one, both now and in the future.

The reality is that working towards a sustainable future is both an art and a science. Although the desire may come from the soul and the ideas from the mind, the actions from our behaviours and the interconnectedness of our ecosystems mean that it will always be a challenge to balance the 4Ps.

The practicalities of examining the far-reaching benefits and costs of any decision or action are not straightforward. Maximising and minimising functions and activities within an organisation may result in compromise, collaboration with partners, and mitigation until alternative solutions can be found. For a sustainable organisation such decisions need to be taken by: listening to the very soul of the organisation which defines the deeper purpose;

CHAPTER 12: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

examining the evidence; looking at the practicalities of each decision; and reflecting on how the people can work together and for each other and the future.

We believe that sustainable organisations are about leadership; not just leadership from the top of organisations but from within each and every one of us – self leadership. If we can all take the time to consider:

- our own responsibility towards a sustainable future,
- how we may need to do things differently,
- how we can help to balance the 4Ps,
- and how we can find the courage to speak out and act,

then we are all contributing to the sustainable future of our own organisations and the wider world.

What is sustainable development?



Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Frameworks for a sustainable future

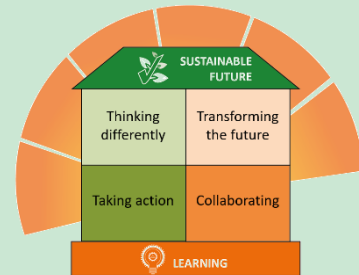
The 4 Ps



The SDGs



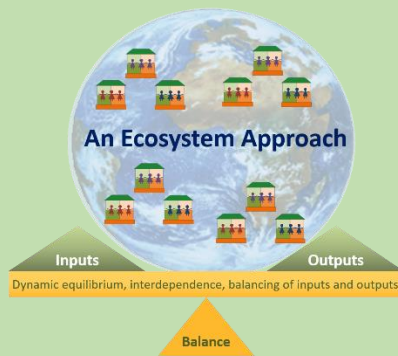
The Caplor House



Sustaining a sustainable future

An ecosystem approach

A sustainable organisation recognises it is not only a system in itself but part of a bigger, interconnected system.



Embed it in the soul

A sustainable organisation will fully integrate sustainability into the purpose and soul of the organisation.



Sustainability auditing tools



Individual Assessment

Mind and Skill sets for Leaders of Sustainable Organisations



Organisational Assessment

Sustainable Organisation Wheel

Chapter Twelve: Sustainable Futures

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