Daring to do things differently

How leadership enables a successful business to minimise negative ecological impact.

Submitted by Susan Ann Chapman to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
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Signature: ………………………………………………………………………..
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving sustainable business. I inquire how sustainability might be more embedded in the day-to-day operations of business beyond the rhetoric of strategic plans, vacuous mission statements and technological fixes. I am exploring how leadership might be embodied in behaviour to promote sustainable business practice. What approaches to leadership might we adopt that are more commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of natural systems? How can we root discussions about leadership and sustainability in an understanding that both are socially constructed phenomena? This is the field to which my research aims to contribute an empirical study.

What constitutes sustainable business practice remains unclear, and due to its very situated nature this is likely to remain the case. My research is prompted by reports in the literature suggesting that approaches taken to date to promote more sustainable ways of doing business have been limited and slow. Furthermore the mainly techno-centric approaches that have been applied in some cases are reputed to exacerbate the continued dualism between human activity and the environment. The leadership literature is swamped with books, conferences and workshops on the subject of sustainability. Despite this, a ‘how’ gap exists between the rhetorical ideals of sustainable business practice and their working application, which this situated inquiry addresses.

This inquiry centres on a small to medium size service sector company comprising two hotels located in a small sea-side resort in the South West region of the UK. The philosophy of the company – known here for the purpose of anonymity as The Hotels – is to maintain a successful luxury hotel business whilst at the same time minimising its negative ecological impact. Undertaking a longitudinal ethnographic study, I witnessed first-hand the leadership challenges posed by working to uphold this philosophy.

In conclusion, my findings do not highlight any one action, way of being or simple stepped approach. Instead they combine ways of thinking and behaviours, some of which run contrary to the dominant positivist paradigm; daring to do things differently enables a successful business to minimise its negative ecological impact.
Dedicated with love to my girls:

Sara Louise
Rosy Louise
Molly Erin

Inheritors of the world we create.
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1. Introduction

“They took all the trees
put ‘em in a tree museum,
and they charged the people
a dollar and a half just to see ‘em.
Don't it always seem to go
that you don't know what you've got
‘till it's gone.
They paved paradise
put up a parking lot.”

(Joni Mitchell, Big Yellow Taxi, 1970)
1.1 Purpose

The question at the heart of this study is to explore how ‘sustainability’ might be more embedded in the actual day-to-day doing of operating a successful business, beyond the rhetoric of strategic plans, vacuous mission statements and technological fixes. How can we actually influence behaviour and embody sustainable business practices? The overall purpose of this inquiry is to gain a better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving ‘sustainable’ business practice.

I am aware that there are many ways of appreciating ‘sustainability’, and I begin by exploring the contested nature of this concept. I focus attention on the way society has approached the sustainability agenda over the last twenty-five years, questioning the sufficiency of the predominantly positivist paradigm and the techno-centric (Doppelt, 2003, 2012; Marshal, Coleman and Reason, 2011; Lozano, 2012) stance taken. Sustainability is an ecological issue, a cyclical process, in my personal opinion most effectively illustrated by composting. Approaches in organisations have tended to focus on solutions driven by technology and economics (Hawken, 2010; Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; Jackson, 2009; Vale and Vale, 2009). We attempt to measure and analyse the impact of our actions for sustainability without recognising the relational issues, the consequences of actions taken in one place for those who may be ‘out of sight and out of mind’ (Gore, 1992, p. 145) in other parts of our shared world. As Capra (2002) suggests: ‘understanding human organizations as living systems is one of the critical challenges of our time’ (2002, p. 88).

Leadership literature informs us of continued and growing concerns about environmental devastation resulting from human activity (Doppelt, 2012; Rimanoczy, 2013; Rockström and Associates, 2009; Whiteman, Walker and Perego, 2012) and yet authors report progress to promote sustainability has been modest (Doppelt, 2003), slow (Robinson, 2004) and even limited (Hardman, 2012) since the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability were first introduced in the Brundtland Report in 1987. My interests are therefore prompted by my own frustration with this seemingly general lack of progress of sustainable practice in business organisations, despite the increasing concerns for social and environmental well-being.

Rimanoczy (2013) questions what might be holding us back from making faster progress to implement sustainability (2013, p. 98) and Western (2013) suggests that
it is not possible to transform to a sustainable society ‘without a radical revision of how organizations and businesses are led and run’ (2013, p. 246). On a positive note, Western highlights many attempts around the world to promote green technology, but also suggests there is:

...too big a gap between those advocating environmental solutions, and the networked and distributed leadership necessary to transform organizations and society. (2013, p. 246)

This inquiry in the domain of ‘Leadership and Sustainability’ explores how leadership enables a successful, medium sized luxury hotel business to minimise its ecological impact.

Raworth (2012) notes the biggest stress on the planet derives from the lifestyle and spending habits of the ‘wealthiest 10 per cent of the world’s population, and the production patterns of the companies producing the goods and services that they buy’ (2012, p. 5). The business that is the focus of this inquiry, ‘The Hotels’, is potentially one such company, providing luxury goods and services to a select clientele. As one of The Hotels’s managers commented, aligning ‘ecological conscience and luxury’ is a challenge because ‘the two things don’t sit that naturally together’. However, this firm aims to be a successful and sustainable business. As one Director explains, ‘We need to prove that actually taking sustainable business decisions isn’t economic death.’

The purpose of this study is therefore twofold: to contribute both theoretically and empirically. I intend to develop deeper understanding of ‘how’ leadership can enable a business to minimise its negative ecological impact, promoting more sustainable business practise as we know it. However, it must be noted that I do not intend to produce a list of tips in the manner of Van Leenders (2012), or make recommendations for strategic policy changes as Holliday, Schmidheiny and Watts (2002), or give name to new leadership approaches like Avery and Bergsteiner (2011). This study will not produce a ‘how to guide’, more an in-depth situated case study that may stimulate ideas and possibilities for others elsewhere. Given consideration for situated circumstances, how might others challenge their status quo and do things slightly differently?
Leadership and sustainability is an under-researched area of study; as Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) note, our ‘understanding of how sustainability is “operationalized” in firms is weak’ (2008, p. 512). And Walker, Redmond and Giles (2010) identify a ‘paucity’ (2010: 1) of studies undertaken to explore sustainability, particularly in small to medium sized firms, despite their collective contribution to ecological damage being substantial (Tilley, 2000, p. 37).

Beginning in 2010, this study is timely, coinciding with Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which met in June 2012 to review progress since the first Earth Summit in 1992.

Acknowledging that the mainly positivist approach to sustainability taken so far has benefitted humanity in many ways, this study joins a throng of leadership authors questioning the continued influence of this paradigm on leadership for sustainability (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling and Taylor 2011; Hardman, 2012; Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; Marshall, Coleman and Reason, 2011; Parkin, 2012; Wheatley, 1994; Wheatley and Frieze, 2011).

I find myself questioning the existence of sustainable policies and measures as evidence of actual practice in the workplace and wonder if we can assume these approaches as sufficient to overcome some of the challenges of application. In my pilot studies I identified practical challenges such as: hierarchical power and control, bureaucracy, conflicting policies that prevent sustainable practice, as well as individuals who just could ‘not be bothered’ to change their regular habits or even know what to do to be more sustainable. As Parkin (2010) recalls, a manager leaving a so-called ‘masterclass on sustainability’ was overheard to complain ‘But I still don’t know what to do differently on Monday!’ (2010, p. 2). Parkin (2010) suggests many people are keen to crack on and find different ways of living and working more sustainably, but simply don’t know how to go about it.

As I have already stated this study is not intended to produce a ‘how to’ step-by-step guide, given the very contextual and situated nature of sustainability. Instead, I want to look beyond the legal requirement for companies to have Corporate Social Responsibility policies, well-meaning strategic statements of intent and polished proclamations to find for myself examples of ‘how’ thought processes and behaviours might shape situated sustainable organising and day-to-day doing in an attempt to make a difference, and in so doing hope I might stimulate ideas for action in others.
1.2 Methodology

My research draws on a theoretical framework grounded in social constructionist perspectives (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999; Gergen and Gergen, 2003). This approach builds on the notion that organisations are socially defined by webs of values, habit, behaviour and norms exploring how people conceive, give meaning to, make sense of and enact assumptions about the reality they perceive. Grint (2005) refers to the way in which leaders actively ‘construct’ a situation, and suggests it is less about ‘what’ the situation allegedly ‘is’ and more on ‘how’ the situation can be handled by taking into account the context.

Ford (2010) advocates a more critical and reflexive approach to leadership research ‘which pays attention to situations, events, institutions, ideas, social practices and processes’ (2010, p. 48). By undertaking an ethnographic study, I hope to better appreciate the situated challenges people face when attempting to work more sustainably in this particular business context, and how situated leadership behaviours might help to overcome these.

The hospitality business at the focus of this study comprises two hotels each attracting slightly different customer market segments. For the purpose of anonymity I refer to the business as The Hotels. The family owners have been in business for fifty years and are publicly renowned for exemplary sustainable practice in the form of national awards (Appendix 1). They aim to continue to develop and maintain a successful business whilst minimising their negative impact on the earth. A statement on the website of the newer of the two hotels claims:

We are very proud of the hotel that we have built and the painstaking efforts that we have made to protect and harmonise with our unique environment. We like to think that we’ve put our money where our mouth is and are leading by example, showing that great design can go hand in hand with sustainability.

Reading The Hotels’s literature helped to form my research questions more precisely. The language they use enabled me to avoid using the term sustainability, and, given its contested nature, having to explain what I meant by its use. Instead I could focus on the action, rather than the name or term given to the actions. My questions are, first, ‘What is going on here?’ and second, ‘What might we learn about
the “doing” of leadership that helps this organisation to minimise its ecological impact?

1.3 Contribution

This study addresses the ‘how gap’ between the rhetoric and the doing of leadership to promote sustainable business practice, or as The Hotels prefers to say: work in ways to minimise their ecological impact. Although there is an abundance of literature written on the subject of sustainability authors such as Parkin (2010), and Bolden et al. (2011) tell us there is very little written about ‘how’ people embed sustainability in their everyday practices; this study contributes by providing a rich, detailed, empirical case study of a successful luxury hotel business that seeks to make minimal impact on the planet, and provides an analysis of how they do it.

The data gathered offers specific insight into how we might conceptualise leadership for sustainability as an inquiring, engaged and collective practice at a local and operational level, dealing with micro issues, not just an approach reserved for strategic policy and planning.

Findings show The Hotels accomplish what they do to minimise their negative ecological impact by people engaging in shared leadership and systemic processes. These include making things complex, telling stories to elaborate on facts and make sense of others’ perspectives, appreciating the wicked nature of problems and addressing these collectively. Leadership at The Hotels is about challenging the status quo and daring to do things differently, taking risks and making mistakes. People are mindful in their approach as individuals and this influences, and is influenced by, organisational mindfulness in a mutual dynamic. Verbs are used rather than nouns, articulating intentions as actions, and this embeds sustainable ideals in practice, whilst also keeping routines fresh and alive. The whole way of being and doing is about accomplishment, working to minimise ecological impact, connecting local actions with global issues.

This study therefore contributes to literature on organising, sensemaking, mindfulness, sustainability and leadership.
1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured around seven main chapters, beginning with this Introduction. Here, I set the scene, providing an overview of the whole thesis. I have so far explained the aim and purpose of the study, provided my rationale, stated the chosen methodology, and briefly outlined my findings. I have also suggested how this study contributes to existing literature in this field of study. Finally, I will outline what is to follow in the following six chapters.

Chapter Two, the literature review, contains three main sections. The first two sections review the literature and lay out the foundations, the subjects that frame this research: Sustainability and Leadership. The third section of the Literature Review asks what kind of literature exists that might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together? What approaches to leadership might we adopt that are more commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of natural systems? This chapter concludes by identifying themes from the literature that formulate the basis for this inquiry and introduces the intended methodology.

Chapter Three, the methodology, begins by clarifying my epistemological assumptions, and provides an explanation as to why an ethnographic undertaking was chosen and what this entails. A discussion about ethnography acknowledges its origins and uses over time. A further section provides a situated account explaining how the research was undertaken, including gaining access, managing relationships and the specific techniques employed to obtain and manage data. A final section explains how traditional criteria of validity, replicability and reliability are not appropriate measures by which to assess an ethnographic study. Instead, the three dimensions of ‘convincingness’ namely authenticity, plausibility and criticality (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993) demonstrate how this work makes a valuable and original contribution to knowledge building in the domain of leadership for sustainability.

Chapter Four, the analysis, introduces the ethnography and explains how the hotel business at the centre of this study was encountered ‘quite by chance’, and subsequent sections introduce the company and describe first impressions. The main body of the chapter recounts ‘first order details’: facts and information heard, observed and recorded in field notes as people went about their everyday work. A
summary of the main themes, or ‘first order concepts’, as termed by Van Maanen (1979), is drawn from the literature to bring this chapter to a close.

Chapter Five, the discussion, aims to make sense of what is going on at The Hotels using a process of reflection, identifying ‘second order concepts’ (Van Maanen, 1979) and bringing these to bear on the data. This chapter concludes by summarising the themes that have emerged from this discussion to describe leadership at The Hotels, addressing the question at the heart of this inquiry: What might we learn about the ‘doing’ of leadership that can help an organisation to minimise its negative ecological impact?

Chapter Six, the conclusion, is the final chapter and reflects upon my rationale for this research and considers the contribution this study makes to leadership literature. The methodology is reviewed and suggestions made for further research.

An Epilogue contains some thoughts of a more personal nature in relation to this piece of work and the five years of study that have led to its creation, coming as they do in the later years of my career in the field of leadership learning.

1.5 Summary

In this first, introductory chapter I have set the scene, providing an overview of the whole study. I have stated the purpose of this inquiry providing my rationale, briefly described the methodology, outlined my findings and stated how this study contributes to literature. Finally, I have outlined what is to follow in the subsequent six chapters. The next chapter reviews the literature in the areas forming the focus of this inquiry: Sustainability and Leadership.
2. Literature Review

‘What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose
and all four of them to me? And me to you?’

(Gregory Bateson, cited in Capra, 1989, p. 77)
2.1 Introduction

This chapter, structured in three parts, reviews the literature and lays out the theoretical foundations of two established subjects framing this inquiry: ‘sustainability’ and ‘leadership’, and moves on to ask what literature exists which might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together?

To appreciate what is meant by the term ‘sustainability’, the chapter begins by reflecting for a moment on the historical ecological origins of the concept. The literature documents the groundswell of environmental concerns raised during the mid-1900s and the influence of this on world leaders, raising the profile of ‘sustainability’ on the international political agenda. I particularly focus on exploring how the dominant positivist-rational paradigm, conventional wisdom and neo-classical economic assumptions have influenced western societies in addressing the concept of sustainability. Authors such as Parkin (2010) suggest the objectification and quantification of sustainability appears to disassociate sustainability from social interaction rather than embed ways of thinking and being within everyday individual behaviour and social practices.

The second part of this chapter moves on to consider leadership as an established discipline, acknowledging a variety of approaches, theories and styles over time. Contemporary authors suggest a shift in ways of thinking about and knowing leadership. Two concepts that reflect this shift are described in more detail: the consideration of leadership as a series of ‘discourses’ over time (Western, 2008, 2013) and leadership as a ‘moment of social relations’ (Ladkin, 2010, p. 26). I have selected these two concepts as they enable us to know leadership as a socially constructed accomplishment, a phenomenon that influences and is influenced by the lives and reality of others and involves the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). In particular, I point to Western’s discourse on ‘eco-leadership’ as offering some potential to contradict the assumptions about linear causality and individualistic heroism in the so-called ‘traditional’ leadership models, offering some hope that leadership could be enacted in a way that acknowledges the interdependencies and interconnections that mirror ecological approaches in nature. At present this approach remains very much at a conceptual level: only a small number of studies illustrate these concepts in practice. This paucity provides an
opportunity for my thesis to make a valuable contribution, providing a situated understanding of how leadership practice might address some of the challenges associated with sustainability in organisations in ways that are more commensurate with ecological systems. This part of the chapter concludes by summarising current trends and themes in leadership literature and considers how these might influence the practice of leadership for sustainability in future.

The third and final part of the chapter develops an understanding of the literature that might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together. Here, I question what approaches to leadership we might adopt that are more commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of natural systems? How can we root discussions about leadership and sustainability in an understanding that both are socially constructed phenomena? This is the field to which my research aims to contribute an empirical study.

Although some researchers such as Hardman (2012) have produced models exploring different routes forward to help businesses integrate sustainability into their organisations, the literature remains at a largely conceptual or rhetorical level, with few empirical examples at the level of day-to-day activity. A gap therefore remains in our understanding about how people seek to minimise their ecological footprint at work, and it is in this way that I intend my thesis to make a contribution to knowledge. I hope to demonstrate the need for increased awareness of how sustainability might be embedded in the daily lives of people at work, and point to the leadership processes that might be implicated in its accomplishment. I aim to describe how a group of people organise themselves, make decisions and take action in ways that aim to minimise the negative effect of their work on the environment. In so doing, I aim to build theory about how people can embed ‘being sustainable’ into their leadership and workplace practice and organising.

This chapter concludes by summarising a number of issues drawn from the literature that frame the inquiry at the heart of this study, reinforcing the importance of understanding how leadership enables the achievement of sustainable business.
2.2 Sustainability

The plethora of definitions of sustainability have been said to render the term almost meaningless (Jacobs, 1999; O’Riordan, 1988), ‘distracting from the need to address ongoing environmental degradation’ (Marshall and Toffel, 2005, p. 673). Authors suggest the term sustainability is to some extent ‘becoming a cliché’ (Lélé, 1991, p. 607) and, as Hutchinson (1995) points out, it is regularly used by industry in a contradictory way. He illustrates this with the example of ‘sustainable mining’, where he argues there are absolute limits and current extraction practices do not constitute ‘sustainable mining’ or a system of ‘natural replenishment’ (1995, p. 87) as the original use and principles associated with the term suggest.

To better appreciate the notion of sustainability, the first section of this chapter begins by reflecting for a moment on the historical ecological origins of the concept. Moving on, the next section examines the work of prominent authors who contributed to raising environmental concerns during the mid-1900s and their influence on world leaders in raising the profile of sustainability on the international agenda. Sections four and five of the first part of this chapter review literature that describes how sustainability has been received and accommodated in societies dominated by a positivist-rational paradigm, conventional wisdom and neo-classical economics. I emphasise the limitations of the current literature, where notions of sustainability often remain at a conceptual and rhetorical level, disconnected from the accomplishment of ordinary daily working lives. This research project is so positioned as to contribute to an understanding of how people might embed sustainability into their everyday practice.

2.2.1 Reconnecting with the roots of sustainability

An argument central to my undertaking this inquiry is that the notion of sustainability as it is understood and addressed in contemporary society has ‘lost touch’ with its ecological roots and has become disassociated from the very sustainable and relational nature of the physical world and earth systems. As Parkin (2010) reminds us, we live in a very anthropocentric world, ‘thinking of nothing but ourselves’ (2010, p. 47). However, a review of literature suggests a number of authors in the field of leadership studies (Capra, 2002; O’Riordan, 1988; Senge et al., 2005; Wheatley and
Frieze, 2011) do refer to understanding sustainability as a concept rooted in ecological systems, emphasising the interconnectedness of relationships (including human ones) within nature. Redekop (2010) claims that until his publication ‘no-one has placed the relationship between leadership – as a general construct – and the natural environment at centre stage and examined it from diverse viewpoints’ (2010, p. 3). My purpose in this first section, therefore, is to revive this connection and reposition sustainability as an ecological issue, clarifying this as one of my underlying assumptions in undertaking this research.

The term ‘sustainability’ has gained popularity in contemporary society only relatively recently, although, as O’Riordan (1988) reminds us, it has been ‘a desirable objective throughout human history’ (1988, p. 31) to use and replenish renewable resources. He defines ‘sustainability’ as a broad phenomenon ‘pertaining to the survival of living matter’ (1988, p. 30), but acknowledges that interpretations of the term sustainability have differed over time ‘depending on the character of the man–land relationship’ (1988, p. 31).

Hughes (1983) describes the vital role of land management in Greek and Roman society, when the effectiveness of community leaders or ‘local governors’ was judged by their ability to manage their lands sustainably. Hughes (1983) suggests that in these times the Earth was recognised as a living organism, and revered as a great Goddess, Gaia, caring for all life forms as parts of the whole cyclical and sustainable system: ‘From her all things spring; to her return all things that die’ (1983, p. 55). In the late 1960s Lovelock (2005) utilised Gaia as a seemingly appropriate metaphor for his hypothesis, which he termed ‘Gaia Theory’, to represent Earth as one single self-regulating living system evolving and keeping conditions favourable for life for ‘3.8 billion years’ (2005, p. 25). An illustration of the ‘man–land’ relational nature of sustainability in a modern day context is provided by Hardin (1968) in his classic paper ‘Tragedy of the Commons’. The purpose of his paper was to address what is probably the most controversial aspect of sustainability, that of an ever increasing population within the bounds of a finite world. However, putting to one side Hardin’s (1968) central argument of over-population, I will focus instead on the insights his paper offers more widely as useful considerations and contributions to the notion of sustainability in modern society.

At the centre of his argument, the concept of ‘the tragedy of the commons’ is a story about individual greed. Hardin (1968) retells a parable first recorded in 1833 and
written by William Forster Lloyd. The story illustrates a non-sustainable man–land relationship brought about by individuals behaving in ways they believe will be to their personal benefit, thinking of themselves, whilst at the same time denying the truth of what is happening to the collective wider society, or the environment upon which their livelihoods depend. Hardin (1968) builds on the retelling of this tale to illustrate how examples of this concept manifest in modern day situations, our overfishing the seas, extensive use of protected parklands and problems with mountains of waste products and polluted watercourses, in essence problems we now refer to by citing the concept of ‘sustainability’. Hardin (1968) identifies this class of problems facing society as ‘no technical solution problems’ (1968, p. 1243). His thesis asserts that these non-sustainable issues cannot be resolved by technical means alone, but instead require changes in our thinking, behaviour and personal responsibility.

Baker (2006) explains how, by adding the notion of ‘development’ to the concept of sustainability, the focus of sustainability shifted from ecology to society and more specifically ‘the steering of societal change, especially through changes to the way in which the economy functions’ (2006, p. 7). Parkin (2010) ponders on the inevitability of economic growth and prosperity being in conflict with our concern for our environment and social well-being. She suggests we:

\[ \ldots \text{do not have to lead narcissogenic lifestyles. We can choose to develop healthy ways of living that include just relationships with the environment and each other. (2010, p. 62)} \]

Nevertheless, as hopeful as this may sound, our current lifestyles are founded on a well-established system of human economy that I argue is incompatible with and not commensurate with the systemic ecological character of natural systems. In the next section, I refer to a number of classic texts that have made attempts to draw this ‘man–land’ disconnection to our attention.

2.2.2 Raising ecological concerns; voices calling for action

Human activity effecting changes to the planet on a global scale has been noted since the Industrial Revolution, taking earth from a state of geological stability known as the ‘holocene’ during which human life flourished in harmony with the nature, into a new epoch, the ‘anthropocene’, a state where human activity is the dominant
change agent of earth systems (Rockström and Associates, 2009). In response to
the pace of societal change since the 1950s and the impact of human activity on
earth systems, the latter half of the 1900s witnessed the ‘rebirth of environmentalism’
(Kerry Turner, 1988, p. 1) as influential environmentalists produced seminal works
making the case for lifestyles within environmental constraints.

Carson (2000), a conservationist and environmentalist writing in the early 1960s,
obscured the pursuit of productivity to meet created wants. Similarly, Galbraith
(1999), originally writing in 1958, referred to the way in which people create ‘needs’ in
order to provide useful employment as a source of social contentment, well-being
and income. He stressed this as the ‘real point’ (1999, p. 144) of productivity, with the
actual product being secondary. Schumacher (1993) raises similar concerns to those
voiced by Carson (2000) and Galbraith (1999). His ‘philosophy of materialism’ (1993,
p. 248) critiques western society’s apparent need to control nature, stemming from
our fixation with bigger and seemingly better methods of productivity to meet our
growing consumer demands, needs and wants. Decrying the logic of production as
being neither logical for life nor society, he contends we are deluded if we think we
can prevent pollution and preserve wildlife simply by more measures of control.

The anthropologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson (2000) considers the combined
interconnected effects of three major issues as the root cause of the world ecological
crisis: the rate of population increase, technological advancement and our continued
recounts the use of the insecticide DDT during the 1950s, which was eventually
discovered to be harmful to the ecosystem, as an example of an ‘ad-hoc measure’ to
which ‘the world became addicted’ (italics in original, 2000, p. 497). The
unquestioning use of this chemical illustrates action taken to address symptoms and
not root causes. In so doing, he suggests, we have set ourselves against each other
and the environment in a selfish, individualistic way; believing we could have
‘unilateral control’ (2000, p. 500). Capra (1989) recalls Bateson suggesting that in
order to address environmental issues we would do well to shift our thinking from a
focus on objects to one of relationships. By adopting a language of metaphor and
story, Bateson believed we would highlight the importance of relationships, and doing
so would mirror all biological forms, which are brought together relationally and not
as separate parts of a whole, enabling us to speak the language of nature (Capra,
1989, p. 80).
These authors share the same fundamental argument: the proliferation of needs and wants in modern society and the prioritisation of meeting these, coupled with an ad hoc approach to problem solving at the level of symptom rather than cause. This perpetuates the assumption that nature is a resource to be mastered, controlled, regulated and exploited for human gain. Current ways of responding to challenges in western society involve consuming more, and inflicting ill-thought-out solutions on an increasingly fragile environment. A conclusion to be drawn from this is that the ‘anthropocene’ era in the earth’s history places both historical and contemporary organisational practices at the heart, or root, of ‘unsustainability’.

To address the issues of ‘unsustainability’, the United Nations Environment Programme was established in 1972, and the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development were introduced to global politics. As we see from the literature reviewed below, the meaning, definition and use of these terms has engendered much debate.

2.2.3 The re-introduction of sustainability into modern society

During the latter part of the 1900s increasingly widespread global environmental concerns such as those outlined above eventually galvanised international government leaders to form the United Nations Environment Programme in 1972. The United Nations appointed a World Commission on Environment and Development who in 1987 produced a report officially entitled ‘Our Common Future’, more informally referred to as the ‘Brundtland Report’.\(^1\) Subsequently, the First Earth Summit was held in 1992; this in turn launched Agenda 21, an international community consultation project to plan for and promote localised sustainability, whilst simultaneously keeping global ecological concerns in mind.

The terms sustainability and sustainable development were originally used interchangeably in the Brundtland Report and Agenda 21 documentation. Baker (2006) notes how by adding the word ‘development’ to sustainability, we change the focus from ‘that of ecology to that of society’ (2006, p. 7). For the purpose of clarification, I will refer to ‘sustainability’ rather than ‘sustainable development’ as this

\(^1\) The report took the name of the commission’s chair, the then Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland.
would seem the most commonly used term in current leadership literature (Lazlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; Marshall et al., 2011; Redekop, 2010; Rimanoczy, 2013).

Robinson (2004) also expresses his preference for the use of the term ‘sustainability’ as this in his opinion ‘focuses attention where it should be placed, on the ability of humans to continue to live within environmental constraints.’ (2004, p. 370), whereas, he contends, ‘the rhetoric of sustainable development is about achieving sustainability for human purposes’ (2004, p. 376). He suggests the aims of ‘sustainable development’ – to integrate environmental, economic, and social considerations – create a ‘curious combination of radical and reformist elements’ (2004, p. 372). He further explains his choice of these terms; the ‘radical’ element being the way the Brundtland Report makes explicit the interconnected nature of the relationship between the environment and human development. The report argues that issues of increasing world poverty, continued economic growth, and development are not sustainable, are inextricably linked with the deterioration of the environment and pose incredibly complex, vast and radical issues for consideration. The ‘reformist’ element, on the other hand, highlights the ‘human-centred nature’ of the report. This suggests that the problems of both increasing world poverty and environmental deterioration can be resolved simultaneously by promoting more human development in an environmentally sensitive way. According to Robinson (2004), the commission notoriously ‘called for a “5 -10 fold” increase in gross world industrial activity over the next century to meet the needs of the poor’ (Robinson 2004, p. 372). The dilemma created by these proposals questions how, if both under and over development pose equal threats to the environment, doing either can help resolve the issues? The answer, he suggests, came in the notion of ‘sustainable development’ to meet this 5 -10 fold target increase:

…meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 54)

This definition links sustainability directly to economic wealth creation and the prioritisation of human needs. The report proposes to enable both human-focused economic development and environmentalism, resulting in the conundrum of how to achieve this ‘both/and’ scenario.
2.2.4 ‘Either/Or’ versus ‘Both/And’ thinking

Bateson (2000), Capra (1996, 2002), Hollender (2012), Parkin (2010), Senge (1992) and Senge et al. (2005) are just some of the authors who suggest that in order to live more sustainably we will need to make an epistemological shift in the way we understand reality. The anthropocentric worldview that prevails as the dominant social paradigm not only influences man’s domination over all other living things (Egri and Pinfield, 1996, p. 212), it also encourages a dualistic way of thinking about mind and matter as separate entities. Our inability, therefore, to think about, know and understand the world in terms of ‘whole systems’ (Capra, 1983, 1996, 2002) manifests in a propensity to separate, objectify, define and classify, disregarding the relational nature of everything. This is a major challenge, not to be underestimated; as Capra (1983) reminds us, the conventional wisdom of scientific thinking has been the dominant world-view since the 1600s. At that time in human history eminent scientists and mathematicians such as Descartes, Newton and Bacon enabled us to know and understand the world scientifically and mathematically. Their aim was to demonstrate mankind’s ‘control over’ nature, despite the fact that this thinking does not reflect the relational ways in which the natural world works. Ancient civilisations had always referred to Earth and nature as ‘female’, represented by the yin side of the Taoist yin/yang: integrative, relational and ecological. The shift to a more patriarchal focus, the yang, was probably, as Capra (1983) suggests, influenced by society’s deeply held religious beliefs at the time, the associated abhorrence of witchcraft and the view that all things female had to be dominated. He states:

The ancient concept of the earth as nurturing mother was radically transformed ... it disappeared completely as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to replace the organic view of nature with the metaphor of the world as a machine. (1983, p. 41)

Thus, in trying to reconnect to a more systemic view of the world, we are challenging a way of thinking, a paradigm that has been in existence for several hundred years. As Parkin (2010) notes:

It may seem a tall order to prescribe a wholesale rethink about the way we humans organize the way we go about our lives ... but nothing less will do if we want to resolve the ecological crisis. (2010, p. 65)
This itemised, polarised ‘either or’ thinking influences how we think about and promote sustainability as we weigh up some aspects of sustainability without considering the relational impact on others. As Hollender (2012) illustrates, we might consider the use of fuel made from vegetables as ‘good’ without considering the energy it takes to produce the fuel (2012, p. 26).

Similarly, we metaphorically classify the ways in which we think about the concept of sustainability into broad ‘camps’ at opposing ends of a sustainability spectrum, as O’Riordan (1981) and Kerry Turner (1988) illustrate. At one end of this spectrum we classify ‘environmental campaigners’ – people who seek to challenge any kind of further industrial development, while at the opposite end of this sustainability spectrum we classify those who believe technology will solve all our sustainability problems and describe their thinking as ‘techno-centric’. Blewitt (2008) also distinguishes these two extremes of thought using the terms ‘shallow and deep ecology’ (italics in original, 2008, p. 29), where ‘deep ecology’ takes an ‘eco-centric value position’ (p. 29.) from which the view is held that human existence is interdependent with all earth systems, whilst a ‘shallow’ approach takes the anthropocentric view that the earth’s resources are available for human exploitation and that technology and scientific expertise will enable a healthy environment for all human existence.

Attempting a more integrated approach, Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) identify three broad world-views of sustainability: ‘deep ecology, ecological modernization and the neoclassical perspective’ (2008, p. 513). Each of these, they suggest, contains ‘many schools of thought and subtle variations’ (p. 513). Stubbs and Cocklin (2006) note how ecological modernisation emerged during the 1980s and 1990s as a challenge to the more fundamentalist deep ecology movement. Their case study research explores how one firm sought to operationalise sustainability, taking an ecological modernisation perspective. They explored the extent to which the firm in question could work within the accepted capitalist, neoclassical economic system and limit environmental degradation (2006, p. 514). Their findings conclude that, whilst it is possible to make ‘significant progress’ (2006, p. 521) to operationalise sustainability from an ecological modernisation perspective, ‘fundamental changes are also required to the socio-economic system’ (p. 521) of which all business is a part.

Jacobs (1997) describes ‘ecological modernisation’ as a concept that attempts to combine technological advancement with social change to reduce the ecological
impact of economic activity. He notes this approach may slow down the rate of economic growth, but reminds us how capitalist economies ‘regularly undergo structural change’ (1997, p. 9) resulting from technological advancement leading to new lifestyle, resource and land use patterns (p. 9).

A critique of ecological modernisation is that it too tends more towards the ‘what’ questions of technology and science than the fundamental ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ more consistent with deep ecology (Egri and Pinfield, 1996). Ecological modernisation advocates replacing unsustainable materials and processes with sustainable alternatives (Jacobs, 1997, p. 9). Although this sounds sensible, one might contend we do not and cannot fully know the extent to which any product is sustainable. New information is continually available regarding the social, economic and ecological impacts of using a particular resource and the level of use deemed sustainable. One argument here is that we need to investigate ‘how’ new information can be considered and integrated into our understanding over time, and ‘how’ decisions are made to enable the most sustainable decision in the situated circumstances, whilst being continually open to change.

Fergus and Rowney (2005) argue how the meaning of a term is defined by the philosophical context into which it is introduced. The concept of sustainability has been introduced to, and thereby dominated by, the influence of the ‘scientific-economic paradigm’ (2005, p. 17). This anthropocentric worldview encourages a dualistic way of thinking, separating out rather than considering the relational nature of all things as parts of a whole. The next section illustrates how contemporary perceptions of sustainability are rooted in the economic functions that prioritise human wants and needs over nature.

2.2.5 Conventional approaches to sustainability

Vale and Vale (2009) argue how neo-classical economics, with its focus on short-term growth and the creation of wealth for humans, is in direct conflict with ecological sustainability and the systemic interconnectedness of all life forms on Earth. Statistics provided by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) covering the last 50 years show how an estimated 60% of the world’s ecosystems have been overused or degraded. This rate of change is more rapid and extensive than during
any other comparable time period in human history (Rimanoczy, 2013, p. 95). Environmental campaigners have made it clear that business and industrial activities are incompatible with maintaining the delicate balance of the eco-system (Carson, 2000). However, these activities are not only are legitimated, they are encouraged within the conventional wisdom of neoclassical economics enabling the current system to perpetuate in ways that are unquestioned (Capra, 2002; Galbraith, 1999; Hawken, 2010; Waring, 1995).

Waring (1995) provides numerous examples of the nonsensical nature of neoclassical economics. She explains how caring for a family has no monetary value and is therefore considered ‘economically unproductive’. She points to the Exxon Valdez oil spill that caused massive destruction to the natural environment and yet contributed positively to the Gross Domestic Product. The same ‘truth’ holds for any major incident that creates newsworthy material that can be sold, or employs a clean up or rebuild operation, be it a car crash or a tsunami. Such incidents are considered economically beneficial. As Hawken (2010) simply states, the world of commerce ‘is a system of production and distribution that leaves biology out of the equation’ (2010, p. 65).

Capra (2002) attributes this ‘major clash between economics and ecology’ (2002, p. 204) to the fact that natural systems are cyclical and, traditionally, business systems are linear. As he explains, there is no waste in natural systems, as ‘matter cycles continually’ (2002, p. 204), unlike traditional businesses, which, he argues:

... take resources, transform them into products plus waste, and sell the products to consumers, who discard more waste when they have consumed the products. Sustainable patterns of production and consumption need to be cyclical, imitating the cyclical processes in nature. (Capra, 1996, p. 291)

In sum, conventional neo-classical economics promotes the fulfillment of short-term needs and wants and allows these to completely overwhelm consideration of the implications of actions in terms of long-term sustainability. Rooting this research in an understanding of the clashes between ecological and economic thinking is important because it acknowledges the challenge posed to any business attempting to operate sustainably within the all-pervading global capitalist neoclassical economic system. Indeed, Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) acknowledge the impact of the wider economic context in their research case study and question the extent to which a firm can act
sustainably ‘through its own internal capabilities or whether it is dependent on changes in the socio-economic system.’ (2008, p. 512). This question is key to the prospect of leading an organisation in a sustainable manner, and empirical evidence of how people can actually do this remains sparse. For example, Jackson (2009) questions what he suggests is the ‘conventional response’ (2009, p. 67) with the notion of ‘decoupling’, where:

Production processes are reconfigured. Goods and services are redesigned. Economic output becomes progressively less dependent on material throughput. In this way, it is hoped, the economy can continue to grow without breaching ecological limits – or running out of resources (2009, p. 67).

He considers such notions as fanciful but he is optimistic, suggesting that – theoretically – ‘Another world is possible’ (2009, p. 171) and outlining proposals for change on three levels by establishing resource limits, fixing the economic model, and changing the social logic. He advocates we influence change ‘through the way we live … through our work’ (2009, p. 204); however, he offers little by way of practical illustration – how we might translate these sustainable ideals into everyday activity. Berners-Lee (2010) acknowledges that many of us want to do the ‘right thing’ in terms of limiting our ecological impact, but acknowledges the impossibility of this complex task (2010, p. 4). Rather than do nothing, he suggests we do the best we can in the circumstances and proposes that we compare rough estimates of the carbon footprint of basic everyday items.

My study does not aim to propose the ‘right things’ to do. However, I hope to provide an empirical example of how people in one business attempt to work in ways that enable them to minimise their negative ecological impact and highlight the role of leadership in this regard. This study will focus on behaviour and ways of operating in day-to-day situations, accepting this firm is operating within the confines of the wider global context where the neo-classical system of economics dominates.

As already briefly mentioned above, the literature indicates that efforts to address sustainability have to date mainly focused on technological change (Doppelt, 2012; Lozano, 2012; Marshall et al., 2011; Robinson, 2004). Doppelt (2012) puts forward an explanation why this may be the case and refers to Bateson’s (2000) proposition that three factors combine to create unsustainability, these being increased population size, increased consumption and increased technological capacity.
Doppelt (2012) comments on how any attempt to limit population is politically sensitive, and our entire global economic system is ‘predicated on the need for continual growth’ (2012, p. 76) so that any ‘proposals to limit consumption are usually quickly dismissed’ (p. 76). This leaves only one factor that is politically and economically suitable to address in order to seek possible solutions to the sustainability dilemma, that of technological advancement. Parkin (2010) suggests there is a ‘perverse logic’ (2010, p. 34) in focusing efforts on ‘end-of-pipe pollution’ (p. 34) or technological solutions to promote sustainability. She explains how dealing with waste ‘once it has been created’ (2010, p. 35, italics in original) increases opportunities for trade, even trade in ‘permits to pollute’ (p. 35), generating financial growth and benefitting the economy. As she rather scathingly comments, ‘Less may be more for the environment and even the quality of our life, but it is death to the way the current economy works’ (2010, p. 35).

Technological innovations can therefore be seen as a double-edged sword. There are technological advancements that have made an essential contribution, as Doppelt (2012), Lozano (2012) and Marshall et al. (2011) acknowledge, to sustainability and resource use, including the use of products and processes to minimise waste and improve efficiencies. However, given the overriding economic system within which the world operates many technological advancements actually increase consumption and ultimately cause further damage to the planet. Doppelt (2012) points out how ‘many new technologies actually reinforce the problems they were designed to solve by increasing global demand for raw materials and energy’ (2012, p. 76). Braungart and McDonough (2009) provide an illustrative example of a typical technological improvement for sustainability, where a photocopier might be chosen with better components, running faster on less energy. However they highlight how this technological approach overlooks the fact that the paper could still not be composted and thus re-enter the ‘biological cycle’. (2009, p. 5). Braungart and McDonough (2009) advocate a ‘cradle to cradle’ approach: this is more than recycling, and takes a long-term view of resources having an infinite capacity for reuse. ‘Cradle to cradle’ thinking applies the agricultural ‘law of return’ to production materials (2009, p. 4). The aim of this approach is to see ‘waste as food’ – not necessarily in the edible sense, but in the way the outputs of one system become the inputs for another in a cyclical fashion. Braungart and McDonough (2009) liken ‘cradle to cradle’ to ‘good gardening’ (2009, p. 11) in that we need to know more about, become closer to, and cooperate with nature.
Marshall et al. (2011) also emphasise that scientific knowledge has not enabled us to ‘make sense of the connection between humans and the planet that we rely on and are part of’ (2011, p. 15). In other words, we do not embody this knowledge, instead we think of our environment as a resource ‘to be controlled, exploited and consumed’ (p. 15). As such, they believe the problem lies in the way we think. If leading and organising are lived, embodied experiences, as Sinclair (2005, 2007) suggests, we also need research which explores the lived and embodied-ness of leading towards sustainability.

So far my review of the literature suggests we have addressed the sustainability agenda in ways that are not commensurate with natural systems. I question if there is some way of aligning predominantly linear, peopled systems with natural cyclical systems, and if so, what the implications are for leadership.

2.2.7 Summary

This first part of the chapter began by reminding us that sustainability is not a new term. Although recently introduced to modern society in the latter years of the 1900s via the Brundtland Report, one could say this was more a ‘reintroduction’ of a concept society has increasingly come to overlook, as anthropocentric systems dominate contemporary western lifestyles. Humans cannot live without the land and the literature reminds us of the ‘desirable objective throughout human history’ to use and replenish renewable resources.

Authors such as Bateson (2000), Capra (1989), Parkin (2010) and Waring (1995) have, each in their own way, criticised modern society’s ad hoc approach to problem solving and note how the proliferation of social needs and wants, and increased consumption to meet these demands, pursue the assumption that nature is a resource which is to be mastered, controlled, regulated or exploited for human gain. These assumptions are grounded in the anthropocentric worldview to such an extent that humans are having an enormous impact on the earth, so much so that it constitutes a new geological era – the anthropocene.

An argument central to this study is that, in transition to popular use in contemporary society, the concept of sustainability has lost contact with its etymological roots, grounded in ecological systems, pertaining to the ‘man-land’ relationship. It is not
known and understood in a way that is commensurate with the cyclical and relational patterns of nature. Authors suggest the term sustainability is becoming a cliché (Lélé, 1991) and is used in contradictory ways (Hutchinson, 1995, p. 87).

Increasing ecological concerns encourage passionate environmentalists to prescribe solutions that emulate nature. Whilst these are appealing ideals in principle, there is a rhetorical quality to some of these claims, which seem to dissipate when introduced to current organisational and economic conventions, as the work of Stubbs and Cocklin (2006) illustrates. There continues to be a focus on ‘hard techno-centric solutions … improving efficiencies and effectiveness’ (Lozano, 2012, p. 44) in addressing what actions we can we take, whereas Lozano (2012) suggests comparatively few organizations have focussed on “soft” issues, such as in philosophies and management practices’ (p. 44.). The latter approach asks ‘how’ might we approach an issue and be different, by taking an ecological perspective, as Bateson (2000) previously proposed. As a result, our current ways of responding to challenges in our society remain in lifestyle behaviours that consume more and adopt ad hoc, ill-thought-out short-term solutions which do not account for the multiple connected links between our actions and our fragile ecosystem. The era of the anthropocene places historical and contemporary organisational practices at the heart, or root, of unsustainability.

As is shown in this chapter, much of the literature on sustainability has focused on the impact of unsustainable lifestyles on our planet. Relatedly, although the social construct ‘sustainability’ has sparked debate, much of which centres on whether economic growth can be maintained whilst minimising the impact on global ecosystems, there is very little consensus about ‘how’ people might relate to these questions in their daily lives. Deep ecology writers have argued the need for greater awareness of the connectivity of ecological relationships, and pointed to the danger of linear assumptions about cause and effect. However, for the most part, the literature reviewed here has presented ‘sustainability’ as a disembodied term, dissociated from the practices by which people organise themselves. Whilst organisations and their members are significant actors within the anthropocene, it is left to these individuals, who remain rooted in capitalist, rationalist logics, to translate definitions and rhetoric relating sustainability to practice. There is very little research examining how this may be accomplished. This research seeks to develop understanding about the leadership implications of this challenge. As a result, in the
next section of this chapter, I review and critique relevant literature in the field of leadership, highlighting some key conceptual frameworks that underpin this study.
2.3 Leadership

This second part of the chapter considers leadership as an established discipline, acknowledging the plethora of literature that recounts a variety approaches, theories and styles over time. These have all left a legacy influencing current leadership thinking and practice. Consideration is given here to dominant leadership thinking during the latter years of the 1900s and how this may have influenced the way sustainability was perceived and accommodated by people in organisations at that particular time. I show how the historical scholarship on leadership is predominantly derived from the same anthropocentric and positivist assumptions that are embedded in many definitions and debates on sustainability. In particular, I draw upon Western’s (2008, 2013) discourse of leadership and Ladkin’s (2010) ‘leadership moment’ to show how, although the literature on leadership incorporates some understandings that are compatible with more systemic, holistic ways of conceptualizing the relationship between humanity and nature, these nevertheless remain at the conceptual level with little awareness given to how these forms of leadership are accomplished in practice.

Finally, a summary outlines current trends and themes in leadership literature and considers how these might influence the practice of leadership for sustainability in future.

2.3.1 Leadership as an established discipline

Leadership has been studied within the West for over 2000 years, since the philosophical writings of Plato around 400BC (Billsberry and Meisel, 2009; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008; Grint, 1997). Stogdill (1974) noted that the word ‘leader’ has been in the English language since 1300, although ‘leadership’ was not recorded until 1800 (1974, p. 7); interestingly coinciding with an era of major industrialisation in Great Britain and growing conviction about the importance of humans gaining mastery over nature.

There is an overwhelming amount of leadership literature, as numerous attempts have been made over time to define leadership, develop theories of and improve
leadership (Ford and Harding, 2007, p. 477). There are said to be are almost as many ways of defining leadership as there are people who have made attempts to do so (Stogdill, 1974, p. 7). A number of texts provide historical accounts of leadership theories, adately illustrated by the work of Bolden et al. (2011), Gosling, Jones and Sutherland with Dijkstra (2012), Grint (1997), Jackson and Parry (2008), Northouse (2007) and Stogdill (1974). Learning about leadership in this way, we are faced with a potpourri of atavistic, often-disembodied, decontextualised styles, traits and models. In constructing this review I began to question how new thoughts on leadership have emerged. Over time leadership theories seem to have drifted in and out of fashion. These have been influenced by major societal events such as the shift from a subsistence to an industrial economy, the military influence of world wars and subsequent era of material wealth, and consumerism and technological advancement in the mid-to-late 1900s. Faced with a collision of definitions and styles, I found it most encouraging to read and empathise with Grint (2000). He recalls how at the outset of his academic career, he found the literature added to his confusion rather than clarified his understanding. Furthermore, this challenged his assumption that having previously been a practitioner in industry for many years, he knew ‘all there was to know’ (2000, p. 1) about leadership.

Jackson and Parry (2008) suggest ‘Leadership is a phenomenon that everyone has an opinion on but few seem to agree exactly on what it really is.’ (2008, p. 12). Others concur: Billsberry and Meisel (2009) comment that leadership is in the eye of the beholder and Ladkin (2010) comments on the ‘very “indefinability” of leadership’ (2010, p. 2). Pye (2005) observes how leadership has an ‘ethereal’ (2005, p. 33) quality, that is impossible to pin down and define, however she suggests ‘you know it when you see it’ (p. 33). Pye (2005) acknowledges the amount of research time and effort that has been spent over the years searching for an answer to the question of ‘what’ leadership is, and suggests we are trying to solve the ‘wrong problem precisely’ (2005, p. 46). She observes leadership as ‘a form of social influence’ (2005, p. 32), a process that happens between people, in a context, as do most things that involve more than one person; and notes (citing Pondy, 1978) that, as such, leadership ‘is hard to distinguish from many other influences in relationships between people’ (2005, p. 32).

The multitude of definitions therefore point to the idea that leadership is not necessarily something concrete and ‘out there’ to be achieved as some hegemonic
practices would have us believe (Ford and Harding, 2007, p. 476). Instead, leadership is regarded more as a social relational construct, a point emphasised by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), Sinclair (2005, 2007) and Uhl-Bien (2006), amongst others, whose works are explored further below.

2.3.2 Leadership as a Socially Constructed phenomenon

Fairhurst and Grant (2010) note the ‘body of literature on the social construction of leadership’ (2010, p. 172) has now become extensive, but only relatively recently, since the mid 1990s. This recent acknowledgement can help us to know leadership going forwards, but how can we clarify our understanding of past theories and models by which current thinking is invariably influenced?

Grint’s (1997, 2000) approach to clarify his understanding of leadership is to objectively classify conventional leadership approaches into four categories, three of which are well established in leadership literature: Trait, Contingent and Situational, and a fourth he identifies as ‘Constitutive’. He positions these along two continuums, creating what is ostensibly a classic four quadrant model as depicted in Figure 2.1 over the page.

The two axes, ‘Individual’ and ‘Context’, range from ‘Essentialist’ to ‘Non-essentialist’ and illustrate the extent to which the essence of the individual and the context are knowable and critical in each of these four approaches. The Constitutive approach to leadership provides a conceptual foundation for a socially constructed approach. Grint (2000) challenges the notion of there being ‘one best way’ (2000, p. 3) to do leadership, explaining how both the situation and the most appropriate way of leading in a situation are both ‘interpretive and contestable issues’ (p. 3) not discernible by objective criteria.

Social constructions of reality are influenced and shaped by broader assumptions about how society and the world at large work. Previous dominant paradigms have continually positioned leadership as an individualistic phenomenon, the property of one person. This assumption is embodied in many common leadership frameworks including those identified by Grint (2000). The idea that an individual can master their environment sounds rather familiar given the anthropocentric assumptions embedded in the rhetoric of sustainability.
Grint (1997) makes the point that not all interpretations are equal, but are dependent on the perspective, power and influence of the person providing the account, the lens through which they view the world, and an appreciation of their unique interpretation of and influence on the situation; as he identifies, ‘what the situation and the leader actually are is a consequence of various accounts and interpretations’ (1997, p. 5).

![Figure 2.1 Essentialist and non-essentialist Leadership](image)

(Reproduced from Grint, 2000, p. 2).

Grint (2000) continues his proposal of leadership metaphorically, as not just an art, but a ‘fine art’ (2000, p. 16), suggesting the role of leadership is to ‘draw or paint or sculpt the future’ (p. 16) whilst also drawing on the past. Furthermore, he adds that leadership is not just about the ‘what’ to achieve; ‘leaders need to consider the how as well’ (italics in original, p. 16).

However helpful we may find Grint’s analytical model, in my attempt to make sense of how earlier approaches and theories shape and influence the contemporary
leadership landscape I was drawn to use another concept provided by Western (2008, 2013). I consider Western’s (2008, 2013) model makes a more explicit alignment between general societal themes and events through history and corresponding approaches taking place in leadership. Western (2008, 2013) uses the term ‘discourse’, for which he provides a definition taken from Wikipedia:

In the social sciences, a discourse is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic… the chosen discourse delivers the vocabulary, expressions and also perhaps the style needed to communicate. (2008, p. 80)

Chia (2000) explains how discourses can be understood to constitute our social world and explains by referring to the etymology of the term discourse:

... to ‘run, to enter, to and fro’. In other words, to discourse is to run to and fro and in that process create a path, a course, a pattern of regularities out of which human existence can be made more fixed, secure and workable. (italics in original, 2000, p. 517)

Ford (2010) notes how ‘Leadership as a discourse has become an increasingly central component in many organizational settings’ (2010, p.48) and highlights the socially constructed, situated and subjective nature of leadership. She goes on to explain how:

Greater awareness of the various discourses and subject positions that constitute leaders’ subjectivities enables consideration of the multiple constraints that inhibit thoughts and actions and of those oppressive discourses and subject positions. (p. 48)

From these explanations we can appreciate how discourses are subject–forming, simultaneously both emerging from and creating societal norms. Within this socially constructed reality leadership is shaped – both enabled and constrained – by the current pattern of regularities.

Western’s (2008) model, as illustrated in Figure 2.2 over the page, depicts a series of leadership discourses as overlapping waves, rising and falling in terms of their popularity, influence and significance over approximated periods of time. In this way,
and with the benefit of reflection, I suggest we can appreciate the social and historical influences of leadership in the workplace over the past century.

**Figure 2.2** Approximate timeline of leadership discourses

(Reproduced from Western. 2008, p. 82.)

Furthermore, I suggest one of the most useful contributions provided by this model is the way Western illustrates how the legacy of each leadership discourse underpins the emergence of subsequent discourses. As Western (2008) explains, these discourses do not follow one another in ‘clean succession’ (2008, p. 83), they ‘merge and blur in different scenarios’ (p. 83). Emerging leadership trends are inevitably influenced in some ways by what has gone before, and Western (2008) goes on to note how discourses can be beyond our consciousness. Sometimes we are confined to ways of being and communicating that have become normalised in a particular social setting. Such behaviours reflect and maintain commonly held perceptions and assumptions retaining ways of thinking without critique. In this way a discourse can have negative impacts, marginalising and disempowering others, sometimes unknowingly. It is not until we consciously step back to reflect and question or challenge our commonly held beliefs and assumptions, perspectives and associated
vocabulary that we can be made aware of the impact, and even the existence of a particular discourse, along with the opportunity for change. As mentioned above, Galbraith (1999) cautioned how ‘conventional wisdom’ enables neoclassical economics to prevail unquestioned. Bateson (2000) commented similarly on how society becomes ‘addicted’ (2000, p. 497) to ad hoc measures that seemingly resolve problems by addressing the symptoms, and in general we accept this without seeking further to ascertain the causes.

Western (2008) identifies four leadership discourses spanning the last one hundred and fifty years. He begins with ‘Controller or Scientific Management’, which accompanied the rise of industrialisation when the study of management was seen as a science, focusing on the individual nature of the leadership role and the importance of personal traits. This approach was ‘driven by the so called scientific-management school founded by Frederick W. Taylor’ (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1976, p. 27). Other contributors include the mathematician Charles Babbage, better known for his mathematical calculator ‘the difference engine’. Babbage was also interested in the ‘development of scientific principles to govern a manager’s use of facilities, materials, and labor to get the best possible results’ (1976, p. 33). Once again, there are clear links here between the ways in which these management scholars believed they could control the workplace and the workers and the wider assumption that mankind has control over nature, as explained in the previous section. Western (2008) depicts the phasing out of the Controller or Scientific Management concept in western society during the mid-1900s as values changed. He does, however, note how this approach can still be found overseeing manufacturing and production processes in China (2008, p. 82).

The ‘Therapist’ discourse or ‘Human Relations’ school emerged in the mid-1900s with the work of influential scholars such as Chris Argyris, Frederick Herzberg, Douglas McGregor and Elton Mayo, made famous by the Hawthorne studies (cited in Koontz and O'Donnell, 1976, p. 45). This particular school of thought concluded that people respond positively to being given recognition. The discourse of the ‘Messiah’, together with ‘Transformational leadership/Culture control’, emerged during the 1980s. Western (2008) describes how the Transformational concept attributed a higher purpose to leadership than merely managing performance, and this approach had elements of transforming organisations through vision and charisma, hence the use of the term ‘Messiah’ (2008, p. 109) to describe this discourse. Western (2008)
describes how Transformational leadership influenced all that was to follow, offering a major conceptual shift in leadership studies. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Throughout all of these earlier phases in leadership history there are elements of leaders and managers having control over others. More recently, there has been a shift in power and influence, probably brought about by the process of leadership and decision-making in organisations becoming more complex as problems span multidisciplinary teams and require leaders to incorporate wider stakeholder participation. Greater involvement of people and disciplines increases the variety of perspectives and points of view to be voiced, heard and taken into account. Drath (2001) draws attention to the paradoxes that can arise when we apply traditional logical and analytical leadership approaches to such situations comprising multiple perspectives and interpretations:

We need to work together but we also need to hold fast to our differing world-views. This would seem to make any possible direction in shared work equivocal, and yet is not leadership supposed to be about creating unity of purpose? (2001, p. 109)

This represents a real shift in power and necessitates a leader being able to admit they may not have an answer to a situation – as Wheatley and Frieze (2011) illustrate with their use of the term from ‘hero to host’ (2011, p. 188).

Many seemingly simple day-to-day decisions in multi-disciplinary situations require consideration from a number of perspectives. This invariably makes them complex, not ‘either/or’ – being right or wrong – but both right and wrong at the same time, having to incorporate ‘both/and’ thinking when considered in context from different points of view. This challenges conventional analytical, definitive and polemic ways of knowing and understanding that have dominated society over hundreds of years, as discussed in the previous section. In relation to this study we can ask, ‘how’ might leadership accept a position of ‘not knowing’ and engage a wider community in facing its problems and consider multiple perspectives? Or, to use Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) terminology, how might the doing of leadership enable us to appreciate the impact of actions taken in ‘my here’ upon the other person’s here which is ‘my there’?
Western’s (2008) emerging discourse of Eco-leadership is, as he explains, not just about ‘going green or taking an environmentalist stance’ (2008, p. 183). It is ‘a leadership perspective that understands how solutions in one area of business may create problems in another’ (p. 183). Western (2008) uses the term ‘eco’ to resonate with ecology, the study of interrelationships of living systems and their environment. This Eco-leader discourse therefore appears to be another attempt to modify our ways of knowing and making sense of the world in tune with natural systems, following an approach similar to those advocated by Capra (2002), Senge (1992), Wheatley (1994) and Wheatley and Frieze (2011), all in their different ways building on the seminal work of Bateson (2000), whose thinking Capra (1989) notes was ‘intimately connected with the importance of relationships’ (1989, p. 80). Western (2008) describes how he uses ‘the term “Eco-leadership” to refer to an emerging leadership discourse which is immersed in leadership practices, values, metaphors and language which resonate with the term ecology’ (2008, p. 183).

These shifts in leadership discourse are representative of phenomena beyond the field of leadership, reflecting wider societal issues of the times. The discourses range from a focus on the individual role and personal traits of the ‘Controller’ to leadership being a more discursive, distributed and relational activity as described by the ‘Eco-leader’ discourse. It is interesting and important to note, however, that all of Western’s discourses continue to root the practice of leadership in the individual ‘leader’ (whether they are therapist, messiah, or eco-warrior). An understanding of the eco-leadership ‘discourse’ is at this time limited to a conceptual one, so that it remains disembodied and dissociated from practice and context, similar to the conceptual-level arguments over definitions of sustainability and its possible solutions.

Understanding the shifting discourses within the scholarship of leadership illustrates how the contemporary leadership landscape is influenced by a complex combination of residual historical leadership approaches and the influences of contemporary society, as well as current contextual and cultural factors. Referring to dominant discourses in this way enables simplistic generalisation. However, this understanding neglects to offer an indication of how these forms of leadership are embedded in organisations or accomplished by individuals in their own situated circumstances.

Ladkin (2010), whose work is discussed in more detail below, refers to her own empirical studies of leadership in three contrasting organisations where efforts are
being made to work sustainably. She connects leadership with phenomenology, a perspective focusing on studying the subjective experiences of people that is, according to Cunliffe (2009), still in its infancy. That said, both Cunliffe (2009) and Ladkin (2008) suggest a phenomenological approach to leadership provides a more situated way of understanding who we are as leaders, enabling us to interpret and make sense of our everyday situated life experiences.

Before this chapter moves on to address more contemporary leadership thinking, the next section takes a step back to consider dominant leadership thinking during the latter years of the 1900s when the concept of sustainability was being reintroduced. Reflecting on the leadership agenda during the 1980s and 1990s I suggest provides an appreciation of the way sustainability was perceived and accommodated in organisations at that particular time.

2.3.3 Sustainability meets Transformational Leadership

The dominant organisational form around the time sustainability was becoming the focus of greater discussion during the late 1980s and early 1990s consisted of large-scale bureaucracies, silos of professionals working in hierarchies. This structure was prevalent across manufacturing, academia, health and local government, accompanied by cultures Schroder (1989) describes as fostering central control and ‘downward communication of policy, plans, procedures and decisions made at the top’ (1989, p. 38).

Working in local government with a role devoted to promoting ‘sustainable development’, I experienced a typical hierarchical and bureaucratic organisational environment. I recall it was a challenge for people to work across functional boundaries as Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1997), Schroder (1989), Senge (1992) and Toffler (1980) advocated. A general call was being made in the leadership literature to work holistically and systemically. This was mainly to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, as Schroder (1989) notes, given the ‘rapidly-changing, technological environments of the 1990’s’ (1989, p. vi), rather than in any way being associated with the development of ecological sustainability. However, the amalgamation of services and the blurring of professional boundaries with a view to working more holistically proved helpful in promoting the ethos of sustainability. This
enabled people to exchange and appreciate differing views and perspectives integral to developing more sustainable practices where a ‘Multi-sectoral approach’ (Martin, 1996, p. 68) was required.

This era witnessed the emergence of a ‘New Leadership’ paradigm (Bryman, 1992, p. 91); that of ‘Transformational leadership’, which Western (2008) refers to as the ‘Messiah discourse’ (2008, p. 82). The role of transformative leadership required visionaries and heroic individuals to lead culture change, encouraging monolithic organisational forms to be more flexible and responsive. Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) attempted to create strong company cultures fostering a sense of company community based around vision and shared core values.

To lead such culture change programmes in these organisations, which were often steeped in tradition, a leader was required to have charisma ‘to manage the task of successfully leading and motivating the workforce for the socio-economic conditions of the twenty first century’ (Western, 2008, p. 109). As Western (2008) suggests, this leader had to be a ‘true’ Messiah, and as such, Western (2008) notes that those ‘suspicious of leadership’ (2008, p. 105) could mistake the hype and prominence associated with a new ‘hero leader’ as a resurrection of the earlier ‘Great Man’ theories of leadership previously associated with the ‘Controller’ discourse (2008, p. 105).

In addition to creating a strong internal culture the competitive socio-economic conditions of the twenty first century demanded a change from a focus on merely being efficient to being both efficient and effective in the form of excellent customer satisfaction. Both internally and externally, the customer became king. As Peters and Waterman (1982) comment:

Poorer performing companies often have strong cultures … but dysfunctional ones. They are usually focused on internal politics rather than on the customer. (1982, p. 76)

If sustainability was on the agenda at all it was associated with longevity of business success by being profitable. This is summed up in a further comment from Peters and Waterman (1982): ‘A simple message permeates the atmosphere. All business success rests on something labeled a sale’ (1982, p. 156).
One way of perceiving this in terms of the sustainability agenda is that it raises concern about increased productivity using more energy, producing more emissions, depleting scarce resources and increasing waste. But as Jackson (2009) explains, the importance of consumerism goes deeper in our psyche than simply material consumption:

> Consumer goods provide a symbolic language in which we communicate continually with each other, not just about raw stuff, but about what really matters to us: family, friendship, sense of belonging, community, identity, social status, meaning and purpose in life. (2009, pp. 50-51)

On a positive note, the influence of transformational leadership on being customer focused and building a strong sense of community had value in supporting sustainability, particularly in local government:

> The urgent need to advance towards sustainable development offers a powerful stimulus for the revitalisation of local democratic processes... Agenda 21 calls on local authorities, as the level of governance closest to the people, to enter into a dialogue with citizens. (Martin, 1996, p. 67)

The ‘Excellence Model’ (Peters and Waterman, 1982) was just one approach interpreting the earlier work of Burns (1978) and later Bass (1985) and the development of transformational leadership during this era. Overall, a massive conceptual shift was taking place in leadership thinking and research. This shift built on the ‘classic “exchange theory” of sociology’ (Burns, 1978, p. 258) to link the roles of leadership and followership in such a way as to distinguish transformational leadership from all that had gone before. Burns (1978) referred to the previous relationship between leaders and followers as ‘transactional’, which he believed:

> ...must lead to short-lived relationships because sellers and buyers cannot repeat the identical exchange; both must move on to new types and levels of gratifications. Most important, the transactional gratification itself may be a superficial and trivial one. (1978, p. 258)

Jackson and Parry (2008) explain how a number of approaches to leadership emerged during the 1980s, attracting the label of ‘new leadership’ (2008, p. 28) and exhibiting ‘common, or at least similar, themes.’ (p. 28). The leader was someone who was able to define ‘organizational reality through the articulation of a vision, and
the generation of strategies to achieve that vision' (p. 28). Smircich and Morgan (1982) describe this as the ‘management of meaning’, where one individual is able to emerge as a leader given their ability to ‘frame and define the reality of others’ (1982, p. 258) by ‘articulating and defining what has previously remained implicit or unsaid’ (p. 258). In short, as Jackson and Parry (2008) state, the leader has the ability to transform ‘the attitudes and motivations, and consequently the behaviours of followers’ (2008, p. 29).

Gemmill and Oakley (1997) highlight the almost ‘magical qualities’ (1997, p. 277) attributed to leadership in some of the literature during this era, creating the mythical illusion ‘that “leaders” are in control of events’ (1997, p. 276). Doing so helps society to focus collective ‘uncertainty and ambiguity’ on the expectations of one person, overcoming our own feelings of ‘helplessness and powerlessness’ (p. 276). In particular they suggest charisma is most popularly embodied in approaches to leadership and highlight how charisma is often regarded as a ‘measurable attribute of the person to whom it is attributed that is entirely independent from the perceptual distortions of those attributing the “charisma”’ (1997, pp. 277–278). Bryman (1992) refers to the work and contribution made by House (1977) to the early studies of charismatic leadership and the number of effects he identified:

…trust shown by followers in the veracity of the leaders beliefs; creation of similarity of belief between followers and the leader; unquestioning acceptance of the leader by followers; affection for and obedience willingly given to the leader; emotional involvement of followers in the leaders mission; enhanced follower performance in relation to task; and a belief among followers that they will contribute to the mission’s consummation. (Bryman, 1992, p. 94)

Bryman (1992), noted that Bass (1985) acknowledged charisma as a prominent aspect of transformational leadership, suggesting that leadership charisma reduced resistance to change, and generated a sense of pride, trust and excitement on the part of followers (Bryman, 1992, p. 99). However, Bryman (1992) also notes an implication in Bass’s writings that, although he considered charisma to be a prominent aspect of transformational leadership, he considered charisma alone would not be sufficient to bring about wide-scale cultural change in an organisation (1992, p. 100). In addition to charisma, Bass (1998) himself emphasised the need for high moral and ethical standards, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and
individual consideration as necessary characteristics of the transformational leader (1998, p. 172). Based on these factors Bass, in conjunction with Avolio (1990), developed a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) that could be used to assess a person’s transformational leadership characteristics (Bass and Avolio, 1990, p. 203).

The common features of this leadership paradigm are of the leader as a visionary, someone who is able to create strategies to realize their vision. If transactional leadership was about ‘just getting the job done’ (Grint, 1997, p. 152), transformational leadership was about ‘motivating followers to go beyond their own immediate self interests’ (p. 152).

The ability to engage people beyond their own immediate interests in terms of the sustainability agenda is aptly illustrated by Ladkin’s (2008) study of leadership at the Eden Project in Cornwall:

… when Tim Smit pronounced in 2001 that Eden would be ‘an exemplar of sustainability’, he created a guiding vision for those associated with the project, as well as making Eden accountable to the myriad of stakeholders who would hold him to his word. (2008, p. 2)

Ladkin (2010) describes Smit as an ‘ebullient and forthright’ (2010, p. 116) figure: whether this constitutes a transformational leader is open to individual interpretation. Certainly, Ladkin (2010) found much more going on in terms of leadership behind the scenes at Eden that suggests there is more to leadership here than just the proclamation of a guiding vision by a charismatic leader. Ladkin (2010) discovered that people are encouraged to talk at Eden; to bring their own views whilst at the same time being open to having their own opinions challenged; to be curious, and open to new meanings; and the role of the leader in this process is to provide ‘a safe space in which inquiring conversations can occur’ (2010, p. 124).

Critics of transformational leadership suggest the views of the leader can go unchallenged and that the leader’s rhetoric can appeal to the emotions of followers and not their sense of reason – at worst, this can be considered as unethical (Bass, 1998, p. 188). Bass (1998) himself supplies a defence to this critique by suggesting transactional leaders ‘are more likely to engage in unethical practices’ (1998, p. 170) and not transformational leaders as they ‘concentrate on terminal values such a
integrity and fairness' (p. 170). However, he follows this by making the proviso: ‘Whether the actions of leaders are seen as good, right, and proper or bad, wrong, and improper depends upon their stage of development’ (p. 170). I suggest this weakens his defence and invites further critique, as the ethics of the transformational leader are open to interpretation of what constitutes mature development.

Gemmill and Oakley (1997) suggest we have developed a mythical quality to leadership, with great expectations. We idealise leaders and, by assessing leadership traits, we deskill others from thinking critically, ‘implying that only a select few are good enough to exercise initiative’ (1997, p. 281). Furthermore, transformational leadership encourages followers to ‘go beyond their own self interests for the good of the organization.’ (Bass, 1998, p. 180). This could be seen as subversive on the part of the leader. The implication here is that although transformational leadership may have the power to alter social consciousness in favour of the sustainability agenda, it might also prevent this from happening because it does not allow followers to actively think for themselves or to challenge the leadership by dissenting from the established organisation cultural norms.

Although the transformational leadership literature references the importance of ‘shared visions’, generally speaking it still relies on a single charismatic leader who can ‘transform’ social relationships and assumptions. As a result, it is rooted in the same heroic assumptions about leaders who conquer other people (and nature). It also speaks to our obsession with heroic charismatic leaders whose faces grin out at us from broadsheets and tabloids. In terms of relating transformational leadership behaviour to sustainability, what is right or wrong, good or bad is highly subjective and context dependent, and the extent to which sustainable practices are enabled or not in this context will be determined by the overarching leadership ‘vision’. Hierarchical bureaucracies maintaining top-down autocratic leadership and control over others are not conducive to ways of working commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of ecological systems, hence creating the potential for incompatibility between anthropocentric notions of sustainability and systemic, ecological views of nature and the environment.
2.3.4 A shift in leadership thinking?

According to the literature, over the intervening years since sustainability became a more common topic on the organisational agenda, approaches to leadership are said (theoretically, in academic spheres, if not practically in organisations) to have changed. Bolden et al. (2011) comment how current approaches to leadership have made a dynamic shift from ‘who is leading to how leadership is accomplished’ (2011, p. 6).

Critical approaches to management and leadership have argued the limited nature of rational, analytical decision-making techniques (Cunliffe, 2009; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Ford, 2010; Ford and Harding, 2007; Grint, 1997, 2000). Greater appreciation is now given to the ways in which reality is seen as complex and socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Ladkin, 2010; Western, 2008, 2013). Within that frame leadership is seen as a relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and distributed process (Bolden, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Gronn, 2000, 2002), focusing on the expertise of the many, not the few, and moving the focus from an objective to subjective perspective. Leadership is no longer about ‘a person in a role called a leader in order to improve the efficiency of another object, the organization’ (Western, 2008, p. 21). This reflexive and relational stance was taken up by Ford and Harding (2007) and later further developed by Ford (2010). As critical management thinkers they describe how, when working with managers on leadership development programmes, they encourage ‘them to reflect on their impact on other people and how this, in turn, is reflected back on them.’ (2007, p. 486). Cunliffe (2009) similarly takes a critical approach in her teaching. Commenting on the amount that is written about leadership that ‘takes a positivist or prescriptive stance in the form of theories, principles and techniques of ‘good’ leadership’ (2009, p. 88), she questions her right as an academic to ‘teach’ practitioners unless she encourages students to reflect upon their own situated performance as leaders.

These emerging approaches focus on understanding leadership as a shared process, as Smircich and Morgan (1982) describe in their seminal article on ‘the management of meaning’. They suggest understanding leadership as a phenomenon involves helping people to ‘frame’ issues in ways that lead them to ‘shared meaning that provides a basis for organized action’ (1982, p. 258). Western (2008) explains notions of shared or constitutive leadership sometimes adopt a more a critical approach, addressing the subjectivity-forming aspects of leadership and the
importance of ethics and accountability in leadership (Ciulla 2004). This involves taking wider responsibility for the collective, ‘the other [that is, society, community and the environment] as well as self’ (Western, 2008, p. 21). Leadership, then, is being recognised as a process generated by social interaction, as opposed to the property of an individual. These relational understandings of leadership raise the possibility that they are more commensurate with holistic, ‘ecological’ views on sustainability, and this is discussed in more depth in the final part of this chapter.

However, despite all the hype about how leadership thinking has changed, there are those who are still a little more skeptical. Rost (2008), for example, having reviewed the work of numerous authors who have attempted to define leadership, concluded that the majority of definitions are still within the ‘traditional heroic paradigm of leadership’ (2008, p. 98). Rost’s (2008) study did, however, point to an increasing number of writers and teachers questioning the ‘old paradigm’ (p. 98) over the last 30 years and he considered this an indication of the emergence of a new leadership paradigm, which he perceived as good news. A major influence in this regard is the work of Heifetz (1994), who is cited by Grint (1997) as ‘probably stimulating the most interest’ (1997, p. 6) as a writer and teacher around at the time.

Heifetz (1994) initially identified the increasing number of situations in contemporary organisations that had ‘no easy answers’ and the problems this posed for more traditional hierarchical leadership where people in organizations look to authority for ‘direction, protection and order’ (1994, p. 69). He recounts how this works well in response to problems for which answers have been established. People in authority will have had the chance, over time, to use knowledge and expertise to develop routine procedures and systems. Heifetz (1994) cautions how this perpetuates a sense of expectation, dependency, reputation and influence between managers and subordinates (1994, p. 70) as people look to those in authority to provide solutions. A sense of dependency can, in turn, lead to people feeling ‘vulnerable, controlled, or overwhelmed’ (p. 70). However, Heifetz (1994) points out that a great many problems prevail for which there are no established procedures and no one person, despite their hierarchical position, has the answer. Moreover, people in authority can then feel vulnerable if they do not have the answer. To continue to seek solutions from people in authority, Heifetz (1994) suggests, is ‘the essence of maladaptive behavior’ (1994, p. 73), not least because it prevents people working collectively to seek out new solutions, to undertake what he terms as ‘adaptive work’ (p. 73).
Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) further develop the practice of 'adaptive leadership', suggesting there are more and more situations facing leadership in contemporary organisations that have no easy answers. Their work is discussed again in the final part of this chapter and considered as part of a body of leadership literature that might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together.

The emerging leadership approaches described here highlight the importance of self-reflection being key to leadership – emphasising the ability to consider the task and the situated context within which things are taking place (Cunliffe, 2009, Ford and Harding, 2007; Ladkin, 2010, Sinclair, 2005, 2007) – whereas traditional, reductionist, positivist and objective views of reality influence leaders to focus on the role of the individual independent of (and capable of mastering) their environment; a role acknowledged by earlier conventions that demand the application of power and control over both situations and other people.

2.3.5 A phenomenological appreciation of leadership

Smircich and Morgan (1982) were some of the first authors to write about making sense of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon. They comment how:

...leadership situations may be conceived as those in which there exists an obligation or a perceived right on the part of certain individuals to define the reality of others. (italics in original, 1982, p. 258)

I suggest that on first reading this implies a certain hegemonic image of leadership. However, Smircich and Morgan (1982) continue by explaining how leadership as a phenomenon requires social interaction and dialogue by which differences and tensions are negotiated; that 'leadership involves a process of defining reality in ways that are sensible to the led' (1982, p. 259).

Ladkin (2010) acknowledges the contribution made by the work of Smircich and Morgan (1982), but then highlights the ‘unidimensional’ (2010, p. 10) nature of meaning-making as conceptualised in their paper. Ladkin (2010) argues that meaning-making is a multi-dimensional process and, building on the work of phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (2010, p. 17), she develops a different approach.
She explains how ‘phenomenology recognizes the subjective nature of knowledge and pays close attention to lived experience as a valid source of knowing’ (2010, p. 6). By studying leadership as a phenomenon, she suggests we can better appreciate ‘its lack of definitional edge’ (2010, p. 2) as '[p]henomenologists argue that the way any perceived phenomenon is known is entirely interwoven with the viewpoint of the perceiver' (2010: 17). She suggests:

... leadership emerges from a collective process created through the confluence of a particular situation or context, people involved in that process who take up roles as ‘leader’ or ‘followers’ and a purpose to which their collective action is directed. (2010, pp. 177-178)

She illustrates by providing the diagram below:

![Diagram of Leadership 'Moment'](image)

**Figure 2.3** The Leadership 'Moment'

(Reproduced from Ladkin 2010, p. 178.)

Ladkin (2010) provides further explanation of this concept by referring to ‘wholes’, ‘pieces’ and ‘moments’. In phenomenology, ‘wholes’ are considered as independent items and comprise ‘pieces’ (2010, p. 25). Given this explanation, I am led to understand that if one considers the desk at which I am sitting, the drawers and legs are ‘pieces’ of the desk, they exist and form part of the ‘whole’ desk. The colour, weight and size of the desk however are different, as these cannot exist without the desk. Ladkin (2010) refers to these as ‘moments’ created by the desk being there: the number of books on the desk adds to its weight; the sun shining through the window changes the colour of the wood. Ladkin (2010, p. 26) proposes leadership as
a “‘moment’ of social relations”, and argues that leadership cannot exist without the ‘pieces’, the people, the context, the purpose that bring it into being:

Leadership does not exist without people who are in some way identified as ‘leaders’ or people who they will lead. Neither can it exist outside of a particular community or organizational culture or history. (2010, p. 26)

Understanding leadership in this way, Ladkin (2010) argues how phenomenology enables us to ‘get a bit closer to an apprehension of leadership which takes account of its socially embedded nature.’ (2010, p. 21). She uses the cube shaped diagram seen in Figure 2.3 to illustrate the perspectives surrounding an issue. As a leader, we might see a situation from one ‘side’ or ‘aspect’; as such, we then imagine the other aspects, knowing them to be there, but not in view, not known to us, and she explains how we “co-extend” the other sides’ (2010, p. 22). The point to emphasise here is that ‘in order to gain a full appreciation of the phenomenon of leadership all of these sides must be taken into consideration’ (p. 22) and be known, rather than left to our imagination and assumptions.

Understanding leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon enables us to appreciate we cannot take leadership apart, it has to be understood in relation to the interactive network in which the doing of leadership takes place. Ladkin (2010) emphasises that the ‘leadership moment’ is not a time-related concept, but a view of reality that sees phenomena as totally dependent on other phenomena for their existence (2010, p. 25).

Perceived as pieces of a puzzle, layers of context or multiple perspectives, leadership for sustainability cannot be perceived as a ‘thing’ or ‘outcome’, but more as an ongoing process of social interaction. If one appreciated ‘leadership for sustainability’ as a ‘moment’ influenced by a myriad of ‘pieces’, many of the ‘pieces’ influencing this subject would, I suggest, be ‘moments’ in themselves given their phenomenological nature. For example, ‘leadership’ as a ‘piece’ contributes to leadership for sustainability, and it is also a ‘moment’ itself influenced by the history of leadership, current expectations of leaders, wider societal issues and contemporary trends, all ‘moments’ influencing the ‘moment’ influencing another moment! This is more akin to the nature of colours and sunshine than a writing desk and its drawers.
Uhl-Bien (2006) refers to the interdependence of organisational phenomena as the ‘relational perspective’ (italics in original, 2006, p. 655), describing an ongoing process of meaning making as having no beginning or end – socially constructed and ‘always in the process of making’ (p. 655). Leadership in this process is not about an individual, their attributes or behaviour, it is more that leadership is constructed resulting from the process of meaning making. A phenomenological perspective on leadership therefore requires more than abstract conceptualisations of leadership as individualistic or ‘shared’. It requires an appreciation of leadership’s situatedness and an awareness that the interpretive and contextual shaping of leadership moments is integral to its emergence as a phenomenon that is impactful on people’s lives and on the environment, which is worthy of study. Ladkin’s (2010) description of the ‘leadership moment’ offers possibilities for understanding leadership as situated, embodied, and collaborative. Her own research, observing and talking with managers of a project that described itself as an ‘exemplar of sustainability’ (2010, p. 116), begins to illustrate how this concept may work in practice and paves the way for more research of a similar nature.

Leadership, appreciated as a phenomenon, is an embedded process, which people experience sensually, physically, mentally and emotionally through their senses in their interactions with others. Sinclair (2007) emphasises this different way of knowing leadership as a ‘social idea’ (2007, p. 184) and proposes that it provides a ‘richer and more rounded account of our own and others’ leadership experiences’ (p. 184).

This study will aim to make a contribution in this regard, particularly in relation to working more sustainably. As we have seen in the first part of this chapter, sustainability is a complex issue in contemporary society, throwing up many paradoxical issues that require an appreciation of their situatedness, context, multiple perspectives and potential resolutions, and of emerging and evolving processes.

2.3.6 Summary

This second part of the chapter began by acknowledging the profusion of leadership literature recounting a variety approaches, theories and styles. This vast body of literature can seem overwhelming, creating more confusion than sense if one
attempts to order it by both logical sequence and chronologically. In this section I have examined this potentially confusing surfeit through the lens of Western’s (2008) model of leadership discourses. Western (2008) highlights the importance of context, situating the variety of styles and approaches to leadership in relation to wider trends, happenings and paradigms of thought prevalent over time. Western (2008) explains that discourses do not follow one another in ‘clean succession’ (2008, p. 83) – they ‘merge and blur in different scenarios’ (p. 83). His illustrative model provides an appreciation of leadership through the ages being influenced by all that has gone before, and all that is currently taking place in society. Appreciating leadership as a socially constructed phenomena, as explored here through the works of both Western (2008) and Ladkin (2010), helps us to understand the value of the claims made by Marshall et al. (2011) and Bolden et al. (2011) regarding the nature of leadership as ‘difficult and contested’. As a relational, embodied, situated and contextual phenomenon, leadership cannot be precisely defined or objectified, but remains in the eye of the beholder and rooted in the experience of the practitioner.

Western (2008) notes how members of an organisation or wider society may ‘have vested interests in maintaining certain discourses whilst marginalising others’ (2008, p. 81). As a result, a particular discourse may dominate and obscure other ways of understanding the world, and dominant discourses can therefore go unchallenged, and limitations and possibilities unquestioned. Reflecting on the dominant leadership discourse at the time sustainability was reintroduced to contemporary society in the late 1900s, this begins to make sense of the ways in which sustainability was ‘dealt with’ as a task for leadership. Hierarchical bureaucracies maintaining top down autocratic leadership controls were not conducive to ways of working commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of ecological systems, hence creating the potential for incompatibility between anthropocentric notions of sustainability and systemic, ecological views of nature and the environment.

The literature reviewed in this chapter documents an ever-growing multiplicity of ways in which scholars are coming to understand leadership, although these may be not be universally accepted in practice (Rost, 2008). There is a shift from knowing leadership as a role (sometimes heroic) to appreciating the phenomenological nature of leadership (Ladkin, 2010; Smircich and Morgan, 1982) and the adaptive (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009), embodied (Sinclair, 2005, 2007), distributed (Bolden, 2008), socially constructed (Grint 1997, 2000) and relational (Ford, 2010; Uhl-Bien,
2006) process of meaning making (Bolden et al., 2011; Pye, 2005; Western, 2008) through which it is accomplished.

As the basis of my research, I am appreciating the processual nature of leadership rooted in social interaction. As a socially constructed phenomenon, this trend in leadership would seem to be more commensurate with natural systems and more easily aligned with the requirements of sustainability. Both phenomena require an appreciation of multiple perspectives and an understanding of the relational, interconnected and systemic nature of all things.

The next and final part of this chapter asks what kind of literature exists which might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together?
2.4 Connecting leadership and sustainability in practice

The first part of this chapter reviewed literature pertaining to the origins and various definitions of the concept of sustainability. I then discussed the reintroduction of sustainability into contemporary society as a way to address the destructive impact of human activity on the planet. The second part of this chapter sketched out the cutting edge of the contemporary leadership agenda and research landscape. The literature here identified the contextual (Ladkin, 2010), socially constructed (Grint 1997, 2000) and situated (Western, 2008, 2013) nature of leadership that now proliferates in our thinking, and associated embodied (Sinclair, 2005, 2007) and embedded behaviours such as the ability to stand back to reflect on and appreciate different perspectives (Heifetz, 1994).

This third part of the chapter moves on to ask what literature exists which might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together to make their doing accessible, practical and down to earth? How can we root discussions about leadership and sustainability in an understanding that, as phenomena, both are dependent on notions of ‘my “here” is their “there”’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37). What approaches to leadership might we adopt that are more commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of natural systems? This is the field to which my research aims to contribute an empirical study. By observing ‘how’ people develop and engage in sustainable organisational processes, shaping meaning and future courses of action (Smircich and Morgan 1982; Weick, 1995), I hope to gain a better understanding of leadership practices that enable us to minimise our negative ecological impact.

2.4.1 Researching leadership for sustainability

There seem to be many voices in the literature calling for ‘more research’ to establish how leadership might be implicated in the challenge of moving towards more sustainable ways of organising. As a result, numerous texts have now been written and, as Bolden et al. (2011, p. 116) comment, we are almost swamped by the ‘veritable tsunami of leadership books, workshops and conferences’ on the subject.
An initial review of just some of this literature suggests that many of the studies undertaken are by management consultants. This is possibly a response to the demand for additional understanding of how to lead and implement sustainable business practice voiced by the business community. Leading an inquiry sponsored by EDF Energy entitled ‘Business in the Community Leadership Skills for a Sustainable Economy’ in 2010, Vincent de Rivaz, the then Chief Executive of EDF Energy, noted how very little research had been undertaken to ascertain leadership skills for a sustainable economy and that which had been undertaken focussed mainly on technical rather than leadership skills. Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) also make the point that our ‘understanding of how sustainability is operationalized in firms is weak’ (2008, p. 512).

As valuable as this expanding volume of literature linking leadership and sustainability may appear, I suggest that often, much of it is lacking in empirical or conceptual substance. Additionally, some of the empirical studies have not been through a peer review process. Cynically, one might suggest studies have been undertaken primarily for the purpose of selling consultancy services rather than for the purpose of academic research leading to wider knowledge and understanding. Bolden et al. (2011) emphasise the need for more empirical studies, whilst at the same time they acknowledge the impracticalities of studying leadership in action whilst continuing to fulfil the commitments of an academic career (2011, p. 8). The apparent lacuna in research in this field has led Goodall (2008) to ask why so few management journals have published articles in the area of climate change and sustainability; her conclusion being that the length of time taken to move an article from submission to publication has delayed the contributions of many academics.

Redekop (2010) has edited a scholarly contribution to literature on the subject of leadership for environmental sustainability. Part of his rationale for doing so derives from him having undertaken a ‘fairly comprehensive review of recent literature’ (2010, p. 2) on this subject, only to discover a distinct lack of texts that put leadership and the environment together for examination. He argues that ‘none has placed the relationship between leadership – as a general construct – and the natural environment at centre stage and examined it from diverse viewpoints’ (2010, p. 3), an argument I dispute, noting below that some endeavours do just this. Nonetheless, Redekop (2010) suggests that by considering leadership for environmental sustainability from a variety of perspectives we may find ‘unexpected insights and
intriguing parallels’ (2010, p. 2), helping us to think more deeply and reconsider the
nature of leadership for sustainability.

I consider Wheatley’s work (1994) as one example that does just as Redekop
suggests, bringing leadership together with the natural environment. Using nature as
a metaphor to help make sense of human organisation and leadership, she asks
‘What is it that streams can teach me about organizations?’ (1994, p. 15) and
identifies the diversity of living and non-living forms present in the stream. She
notices the adaptability of the stream and its capacity to create new structures, all in
the pursuit of the streams goal or mission to flow downhill and reach the ocean.
Wheatley (1994) admires the ability of the stream to create ‘temporary solutions that
facilitate’ (1994, p. 16) its journey. She compares this to her experience in business
and ‘the rigid reliance on single forms, on true answers’ (p. 16). She describes how
natural systems such as the stream work with other forces in their environment, in
contrast to business organisations, which she suggests take a more ‘defensive’ and
‘offensive’ stance using regulations and other forms of control. However, although
this approach may be thought provoking and innovative, it remains an abstract
concept and does not offer any empirical evidence to support the claims made. I am
left asking the question – how are people doing this in practise?

Further work by Wheatley and Frieze (2011) does provide empirical case studies
identifying leadership in seven ‘healthy and resilient’ (2011, p. 7) international
communities. The issues raised range from a discussion about power and motivation
to community toileting arrangements. Wheatley and Frieze (2011) identify
approaches to leadership that are more commensurate with sustainability and aim ‘to
address complex problems, such as health care, homelessness, poverty, public
safety, and more’ (2011, p. 9). They describe a shift in leadership thinking ‘from hero
to host’ (2011, p. 188), where ‘hosting’ describes facilitating a collective style of
leadership rather than perpetuating the more traditional, individual ‘heroic’ style. Their
study highlights the importance of appreciating a variety of views and perspectives,
acknowledging the socially constructed nature of realities and negating the need for
the leaders to persuade the collective to accept a unilateral decision. Instead, the
collective takes ownership of the problem and identifies solutions much earlier on in
the problem solving process, much as Heifetz (1994, p. 14) also advocates:

Imagine the differences in behaviour when people operate with the idea that
‘leadership means influencing the community to follow the leader’s vision’
versus ‘leadership means influencing the community to face its problems’. (1994, p. 14)

In the following section I explore further illustrations in the literature that root discussions about leadership and sustainability in an understanding that both are dependent on notions of ‘my “here” is their “there”’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37).

2.4.2 My ‘here’ is their ‘there’

Appreciating the socially constructed nature of reality and the notion of ‘my “here” is their “there”’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37) enables us to understand Braungart and McDonagh’s (2009) point about the prevalent practice in modern society of throwing things away. As they state, ‘there is no “away”’ (2009, p. 27), or to put it differently, my ‘away’ may not be the same as yours, it will always be somebody’s ‘here’, accepting that this may not be visible to me, a point Gore (1992) emphasises in his description of ‘wastelands’ being ‘out of sight, out of mind’ (1992, p. 145).

Hutchinson (1995, 1997), albeit as an environmental management consultant, made a valuable contribution to understanding ‘my “here” is their “there”’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37) and the role of leadership in this regard. His work highlights the inter-connectedness and interdependency of activities that would otherwise be ‘out of sight and out of mind’. He explained how global trade opens up vast geographical distances between the source of a product and its ingredients, production processes and eventual use. Contrary to Redekop’s (2010) claim that research connecting leadership and sustainability did not exist prior to his edited collection, Hutchinson (1995) places environmental issues firmly in the domain of management and leadership and, I suggest, was one of the first to do so. He drew on his experiences working with large international corporations such as Shell UK, British Petroleum, ICI and Hewlett Packard and made the bold proclamation that ‘Business is central to the problems that have been created and equally central to the search for solutions.’ (1995, p. 19). His work crosses traditional boundaries and schools of thought and takes a relational approach. He sets the context of environmental issues in relation to business and provides techniques for mapping
and making explicit the connections between business and society and global issues (1995, p. 101). Hutchinson’s (1995) work just began to make these links at a time when sustainability was initially launched onto the public agenda. Although useful as a starting point, I acknowledge his work provided only an abstract concept and lacked academic rigour and the value of an empirical study.

Braungart and McDonough (2009) advocate making sense of sustainability as a ‘local’ issue, and recommend we connect human systems with ‘local material and energy flows’ (2009, p. 123). They ask ‘What is the right thing for this place?’ (2009, p. 124) and explain how knowing sustainability in this way is about understanding the concept as it is situated, not about the application of a set definition, or a list of generalised guidelines. How people make sense of sustainability as a situated issue is the focus of this study, inquiring how leadership supports and enables a process of making sense and taking action to enable a successful business to have limited impact on ecological systems. Ladkin’s (2010) work on the ‘leaderful moment’ shows how a contextualised and practice-led understanding of leadership brings these issues to the fore. She explains that when as a leader ‘I intervene in a situation, it subtly shifts and the way in which it changes also exercises its influence on me’ (2010, p. 159), highlighting the localised, relational and reciprocal nature of leadership. Ladkin (2010) likens this close relationship to our surroundings with the concept of ‘dwelling’ tracing the etymology of the word ‘to be’.

So, how can we know the impact of our actions and the extent to which these activities might be considered sustainable in places other than our own locality? When we say sustainable, do we mean economically, socially or environmentally, and according to whose perspective? This is a challenging issue that has also been recognised and highlighted by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (2008/10) and discussed as part of their One Planet Leaders programme at the University of Exeter. WWF draw attention to the affects of actions taken in one place upon others around the world with whom we have little or no contact. WWF stress the complexity and enormity of the task involved in attempting to make connections and point out how this is seen as a barrier and often inhibits action to promote sustainability (2008/10, p.4). To develop more sustainable business, WWF posit it will be imperative to bridge this gap between individual behaviour, business ambition and resulting global impact for all activity (2008/10, p. 4).
As previously explained, Ladkin (2008) provides us with an empirical study highlighting these tensions in three very different organisations all working to promote sustainable practices. She suggests that before making any attempt to become ‘green’, an organisation should define for itself what is meant by the term sustainability. She explains how as soon as any action is taken to implement any one of the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social and financial considerations) this can conflict with either or both of the others. Her case studies provide practical illustrations of this. A project set up as ‘an exemplar of sustainability’ (2008, p. 2) to raise awareness and educate has to be financially viable to exist. To do so it has to attract a high number of paying visitors. Paradoxically, the financial success of this project threatens its environmental and social sustainability. The high number of visitors arriving by car and coach create traffic congestion and disrupt local journeys, such as parents taking children to school. Queuing traffic increases CO₂ emissions and disturbs the usual peace and quiet of the surrounding countryside. On the other hand, the project regenerated an old china clay pit into a horticultural paradise, turned waste ground into fertile soil and provides all year round employment for many local people. One can ask, is this project promoting sustainability? The answer to this question will depend upon what basis sustainability is being considered – socially, economically, environmentally or a combination of the three, and also on the impact encountered by the persons being asked and their own situated perspective.

Ladkin’s (2008) second example explains how a food retailer imports goods from other continents by airfreight: whilst this increases the carbon footprint of these items, it provides a means of making a living for people who would otherwise live in poverty. She asks: ‘How do organizations resolve such seemingly intransient tensions?’ (2008, p. 2).

Heifetz et al. (2009) identify situations such as these that pose what they refer to as ‘adaptive challenges’ in organisations, problems that have no known answer or resolution (2009, p. 10). They ask us to see ourselves as ‘systems’ (2009, p. 181), taking stock of the life experiences that have shaped us, and the situations in which we find ourselves that in turn influence our behaviour. Again, this is another approach that sees the role of leadership as rooted in context, inseparable from embodied practice, and impossible to render abstract.
There is no one answer to meet the needs of everyone, as Verweij et al. (2006) acknowledge, and they suggest that any attempts to define these problems by clearly separating out the facts and creating policies ‘are simply flawed’ (2006, p. 840). They recommend an acceptance of ‘clumsiness’, suggesting the only way to maintain democracy is to allow all voices to be ‘heard and responded to’ (p. 840). They highlight the value of debate – ‘the quality of the interaction between advocates of alternative views’ (p. 840) – over any compromise that may be arrived at, much as Wheatley and Frieze (2011) propose with their notion of ‘hosting’. Verweij et al. (2006) accept that people have always differed in their opinions of what is ‘right’, and recommend institutional arrangements that harness argumentation and contestation in ways that are constructive, but do not provide empirical examples of what this might look like. Ladkin (2008) did establish that people working in her case study organisations had to have ‘robust conversations which tap below the surface level to talk to really unearth the underlying assumptions informing each others’ views’ (2008, p. 6). When she asked one of the managers what was different about their organisation, he replied: ‘We talk. And talk. And talk’ (p. 6).

All of the authors referred to here suggest approaches that challenge us to consider the perspective of ‘the other’. To appreciate that we are coming from our own sense of reality, they highlight the need for and importance of being able to appreciate multiple realities of others who may have values, thoughts and ways of being and doing that are very different to our own.

2.4.3 The embodied nature of leadership

Sinclair (2005, 2007) builds an argument around her empirical case studies to revert the idea that leadership is a ‘disembodied’ activity. She explains how the latter has arisen to counter the idea that leaders are ‘born to lead’ (2007, p. 57) and comments how this is not only inconsistent with democratic ideals and ambitions to educate leaders, it also aims to ‘elevate leaders above the frailty of bodies’ (2007, p. 91). Sinclair (2007) looks at the embodied nature of leadership, in terms of values and behaviours, and refers to the evidence in earlier literature that ‘bodies have always been part of leadership’ (2007, p. 109). Even our breathing, she explains, effects our relationships with ourselves and others, making us more self-aware, connecting us to ‘life and mortality’ (2007, p. 112), for which one might read ecological systems.
Sinclair’s (2007) work highlights the very everydayness of leadership. There is very little literature available on how people experience the challenges of being sustainable in their everyday lives, and therefore, unsurprisingly, very little knowledge about how leadership might help to accomplish this. Being sustainable in our everyday lives suggests thinking about what we do, how our values and behaviours play out in our day-to-day activities.

Marshall et al. (2011) bring together a collection of stories told by a number of international managers from a range of industries and sectors following their completion of an MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice. Their situated stories ‘show the grit and determination’ (2011, p. 113) of personal efforts to influence ‘leadership for sustainability’ in a wide variety of settings. Marshall et al. (2011) pull out a number of reflections that include being true to one’s own values, appreciating the systemic and relational nature of everything, asking questions, acting beyond conventions and working with paradox and dilemma (2011, p. 221). These behaviours are not prescribed, nor are they rearranged to create a model or ‘stepped’ approach; they simply make sense when understood as situated accounts. The stories told exemplify the embodied behaviours that reflect the shift in current leadership thinking identified in the review of leadership literature above. The editors refuse to create a ‘how to guide’, explaining there are ‘no simple solutions to the dilemmas posed by trying to integrate ecology, sustainability and social justice with successful business practice’ (2011, p. 18), but rather that we need to learn more about leadership and sustainability as experienced by individuals in context.

Similarly, Hardman (2012) has engaged in one of the few research projects focusing on the leadership practices of individuals working towards sustainability. He interviewed leaders from a range of sectors, who were identified by their peers as being ‘increasingly effective in moving themselves and others in their organizations toward comprehensive or sophisticated approaches to sustainability’ (2012, p. 8). His research indicates that the terms sustainability and sustainable development are so human-centred that they no longer provide some leaders with ‘a satisfactory explanation for what they are seeking to accomplish’ (p. 8). Hardman (2012) suggests it is not enough to progress sustainability to achieve sustainable development if we have not first paid attention to healing damaged ecological and social systems. He claims that his term ‘regenerative leadership’ shifts the emphasis away ‘from the consequences of human activity on sustainable development to the
underlying causes and potential solutions to the problems’ (2012, p. 9). His regenerative leadership framework overlays worldviews conceptualised by other authors, including Otto Scharmer’s ‘Theory U’ (2007) and Abraham Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (1943) (2012, p. 18). Hardman (2012) has identified two ‘principal ways’ in which leaders engage in ‘regenerative’ work to ‘put back more than we take out’ (2012, p. 10). One is exemplified by the work of Braungart and McDonough (2002), to whom Hardman (2012) refers, emulating the cyclical systems of nature, and the other is to ‘shift the culture’ (2012, p. 11), promoting innovation and cross-disciplinary working to promote an appreciation of others’ perspectives.

Hardman’s resulting ‘framework’ acknowledges that sustainability ‘comes from within’ (2012, p. 30) and builds on the embodied nature of leadership. However, despite saying we need to go beyond definitions and rhetoric, Hardman’s doctoral research still results in a four-box model. He recognises himself that the nature of the sequential ‘stages of moral maturity’ (2012, p. 17) is not linear, but iterative, and describes the incorporation of feedback loops as people reflect and learn from experiences, taking on a more worldly perspective (2012, p. 13). Perhaps Hardman’s model is indicative of the very deep-seated nature of our desire for analysis, compartmentalisation, and the provision of an outcome such as a framework that can be learnt and has the potential to be applied. Perhaps it is no wonder that the majority of work linking leadership and sustainability has been done by management consultants, as practising managers and leaders seek answers and quick fix solutions.

2.4.4 The power and influence of narrative

The power and influence of creating narratives or storytelling is evident in much of contemporary leadership literature as a way of providing a framework for our understanding. Bolden et al. (2011) recount how we continue to recall the tale of ‘Drake playing Boules on Plymouth Hoe even after the Spanish Armada has been spotted in the English Channel’ (2011, p. 56). Such accounts could be said to encourage us to admire the value of patience and calmness in a leader and the importance of making ‘a timely intervention in leadership strategy’ (p. 56). Whether such action is ‘appropriate’ for the situation is a question raised by Grint (1997, p. 9) and as he explains is totally dependent upon the story or account that is told, as
there cannot be ‘objective or rational analysis’ (p. 9). Grint (1997) states that leadership ‘is what certain powerful “voices” make it’ (p. 9), but then adds the caution: ‘All voices may be equal but some are more equal than others’ (p. 9). Persuasive accounts of such heroic acts continue to create history – shaping our understanding of what has gone before, influencing how we are today.

Cunliffe (2009), Cunliffe and Coupland (2011), Ford and Harding (2007) and Ladkin (2010) all emphasise the importance of listening to people's own narratives that legitimise their course of action in situ, acknowledging leadership as an embodied process of sensemaking. Weick (1995) describes sensemaking as a cyclical ‘sequence of events occurring over time’ (1995, p. 4) as people experience events, consciously or subconsciously, and retrospectively seek an explanation or clarification, ‘namely making something sensible’ (1995, p. 16). Weick (1995) is quick to point out that sensemaking differs from interpretation in that it ‘is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery’ (1995, p. 8). He is very definite that sensemaking is ‘not a metaphor’ (italics in original 1995, p. 15) and has to be understood ‘literally’ (1995, p. 16).

Weick (1995) comments on the valuable role of stories in sensemaking, and notes the considerable attention afforded to this in the literature. He explains how stories enable people to ‘think narratively rather than argumentatively’ (1995, p. 127). The importance of this, explained in his earlier work with Browning (Weick and Browning, 1986), is that the discourse common to most organisations is ‘rational argument’ (1986, p. 246). Accepting this may be a valuable way of negotiating within organisations Weick and Browning (1986) identify that this form of communication ‘excludes a great deal of organizational life’ (1986, p. 248). Their rationale being that when people pass on information, one to another, qualitative meanings change, detail may be gained or even lost as further conversations ripple out. Their recommendation is that ‘we need to move from an emphasis on traditional argument to an emphasis on narration and storytelling’ (1986: 248) and acknowledge and enable this process of meaning making.

Cunliffe and Coupland’s (2011) empirical study sets out to extend the theory of sensemaking ‘to include the notion of embodied narrative sensemaking’ (2011, p. 64). This acknowledges the contribution made to sensemaking by our bodily senses, experienced as part of our everyday interactions. Conclusions drawn from their study are that we make sense of our experiences by using all of our senses, our living
bodies being part of the context, that we draw on ‘past experiences, present interactions and future anticipations’ (2011: 83) to create narrative and that we need to make use of ‘sensemaking to consider everyday, embodied moment-to moment ways of making life sensible’ (p. 83).

Sustainability itself is not a new concept, but putting leadership and sustainability together is and, as Drath (2001) explains, new subjects emerge when conversations, or even arguments, take place across existing world views, to ‘make sense of, a new subject’ (2001, p. 144) in relation to contemporary societal issues. He describes a process where people are prepared to ‘hold their own views lightly … and appreciate the capacity of other worldviews to make up truths as well’ (p. 144). He cautions this cannot happen if people are ‘stuck’ solidly in a particular way of knowing, as there has to be ‘space’ between differing world views for people to move into, bridge between and connect (p. 144).

From the literature, it would seem that one of the challenges for leadership is how to enable and encourage discussion, debate and storytelling in the context of busyness and quick decisions. Alvesson and Spicer (2012), drawing on the concept of ‘bounded rationality’ in organisations, explain how ‘the lack of time, information, and information processing capacity’ (2012, p.1197) forces people to make decisions within the bounds of what they already know. In other words, we follow learned patterns of behaviour or societal conventions such as the use of rational argumentation in busy organisations. Alvesson and Spicer (2012) acknowledge following learned patterns of behaviour or conventions can be seen as efficient, but propose it may be ineffective due to the way such approaches ignore reflection and questioning. Western (2008) raises the notion that some people in society or organisations will have vested interests in ‘maintaining certain discourses’ (2008, p. 81) or ways of thinking whilst ‘marginalizing others’ (p. 81). The literature illustrates that sustainability requires people to ‘think more deeply’ (Redekop, 2010, p. 2) and to ‘unpack the ambiguities and tensions, rather than attempting to either suppress or over simplify them’ (Connelly, 2007, p. 268). As Ladkin (2010) discovered during her research at the Eden Project, managers felt Eden differed from other projects they had worked on simply because of the amount of talking that took place. The talk itself was considered by the managers working at Eden to have certain qualities:

Those engaging in it must own their own prejudices and viewpoints and be willing for them to be altered. They must recognize each other as having
something valuable to contribute … Most critically, they must maintain a real
curiosity and openness to the possibility of completely new meanings and
understandings emerging from their engagement with others. (2010, p. 124)

Ladkin (2010) concludes that the role of the leader in such a process is not to have
the answer, or clarity of direction, but to provide ‘a safe space in which inquiring
cou...
2.5 Summary

This literature review, structured in three parts, has laid out the conceptual foundations that frame this research – ‘leadership’ and ‘sustainability’. It has moved on to explore what literature exists which might help to bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together in practice.

I began this chapter by reflecting on the historical ecological origins of sustainability, reminding us of the cyclical character of earth systems and the rootedness of human life in nature. The literature details the reintroduction of sustainability into contemporary society during the latter years of the twentieth century as a way to address increasing environmental concerns. I particularly focussed on the influences of classical wisdom, positivist-rational thinking and neo-classical economics and their propensity to objectify and quantify. I suggest this accommodation of sustainability is limited in that it distances the concept from our daily practices. Instead, we are encouraged to focus our attention on sustainability as a set of outcomes and measures, rather than treat this as a phenomenon that is relational, embodied in practice, and socially constructed. This has led to a linear, short-termist and ad hoc approach to sustainability in organisations. The continued disregard of the relational nature of ecological issues in contemporary thinking and ways of knowing results in sustainability remaining a contested social construct, resulting in much debate and few solutions about how to minimise our footprint on the earth.

Descriptions in the literature refer to the concept of sustainability as ‘difficult to pin down’ (Bolden et al., 2011, p. 116), contested (Ladkin, 2010; Marshal et al., 2011) or complex, ambiguous and vague (Connelly, 2007; Dresner, 2002; Jacobs, 1999; O’Riordan, 1988; Robinson, 2004). As Bolden et al. (2011) note, sustainability is not a predetermined set of skills, techniques or behaviours that can be adopted. Working sustainably has to be about the consideration of contested assumptions, being prepared and ready to reconsider and adapt our thinking, our values and our behaviour (2011, p. 117).

Modern definitions of sustainability continue to promote debate about the extent to which environmental concerns can be integrated into our consumerist lifestyle of increasingly inflated human wants and needs. The WWF (2008/10) suggests the sheer scale of ecological global issues is so vast as to inhibit individual action, and we are left to question what real contribution the actions of one person can make to
resolve such complex issues. Individual people can therefore feel disconnected and powerless to influence change, especially within the dominant economic system of contemporary society. As Brown, Harris and Russell (2010) explain, global issues ‘generate local issues’ and these are the sum of the local issues in the first place. It may therefore seem that we ‘are locked in an endless spiral from which there is no escape’ (2010, p. 3).

The steadfast systems of conventional wisdom, individualistic thinking and neoclassical economics which inform the way sustainability is interpreted, accommodated and practised have also informed traditional perspectives on leadership (Bolden et al., 2011). This is the focus of part two of this literature review. Leadership as a well-established discipline is now increasingly being considered as a socially constructed phenomenon (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009; Ladkin, 2008, 2010) in line with the current discourse – reflected in wider societal trends (Western, 2008, 2013) – of acknowledging the systemic and relational nature of all life forms. A shift is reported in the literature, moving away from historical perspectives of leadership that emphasised the individualistic, sometimes heroic and charismatic role of leadership, to a way of knowing leadership as a more relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006), embodied (Ford, 2010; Ford and Harding, 2007; Sinclair, 2005, 2007) and distributed activity (Bolden, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Gronn, 2000, 2002).

This shift in thinking influencing current trends in the practice of leadership is particularly relevant for my study, offering an approach that speaks to a more reflexive, embodied, practice-focused way of doing leadership to promote sustainability.

The third part of this chapter asked what kind of literature exists that might help bring discussions of both leadership and sustainability together? What approaches to leadership might we adopt that are more commensurate with the cyclical and relational nature of natural systems? How can we root discussions about leadership and sustainability in an understanding that both are socially constructed phenomena, and how can we move towards ‘doing sustainability’ as well as focusing on achieving sustainable outcomes?

There is movement towards a more connected and relational way of understanding and bringing together leadership and sustainability, examples being Ladkin’s (2010) phenomenological approach and Western’s (2008) ‘eco-leadership’. These are
relatively new ways of understanding and remain to some extent at a conceptual level, providing opportunity for further empirical support.

I have discussed three other approaches evidenced in the leadership literature that I consider are at the heart of the discussion to bring leadership and sustainability together. The socially constructed nature of both phenomena is eloquently captured in the phrase used by Berger and Luckmann (1967): 'my "here" is their "there"' (1967, p. 37) and I have referred to literature that helps to illustrate this concept. Leadership is now recognised in the literature as embodied and embedded and, likewise, being sustainable in our everyday lives suggests thinking about what we do, how our values and behaviours play out in our day-to-day activities. Finally, the power of narrative and storytelling is evident in much of contemporary leadership literature, helping us to make sense of our situated experiences. I suggest making sense of people’s experiences in day-to-day situations will help to understand and know sustainability in action and, as such, require an appreciation of personal stories above rational argumentation.

This chapter as a whole identifies a gap in our knowledge and understanding about how sustainability could become an integral part of not just workplace organisations, but our lifestyle. This questions how leadership might be integrated into processual, systemic and embodied ways of understanding people’s experience and actions relating to ‘being sustainable’ at work. My research aims to better appreciate what is ‘going on’ in a hotel workplace situation where the business is committed to working in ways that minimise its ecological impact. I hope to address the questions of how ‘sustainability’ might be more embedded in the day-to-day activities of running a business, beyond the rhetoric of strategic plans, vacuous mission statements and technological fixes. How can we actually influence behaviour and embody sustainable business practices? The overall purpose of this inquiry is to gain better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving ‘sustainable’ business.

The literature records a growing interest in the subject of ‘leadership for sustainability’, calling for more ‘in-depth’ research to question how leadership and business can move beyond ‘business as usual’, particularly in relation to small and medium size firms (Walker et al 2010). However, my literature searches have not revealed any previous study undertaken in the UK hospitality industry, or in any small or medium sized firms.
This is an empirical study in the field of leadership and sustainability, of which there are few, the most notable being those undertaken by Hardman (2012), Ladkin (2010), Marshall et al. (2011) and Stubbs and Cocklin (2008).

Otherwise, sustainability has been written about in a fairly technical and disembodied way, with much attention given to the rhetoric rather than the practice of sustainable business. As Western (2013) points out, there is ‘too big a gap between those advocating environmental solutions, and the networked and distributed leadership necessary to transform organizations and society’ (2013, p. 246).

Undertaking an ethnographic study, placing myself in the frame to observe and experience leadership for sustainability in situ, seems the most appropriate way to investigate how people grapple with the uncertainties posed by the amorphous concept of sustainability. By undertaking an ethnographic study, this inquiry aims to develop ‘thick description’ – so termed by Geertz (1973, p. 6) and described in the Methodology chapter below – of how one business operates in ways that minimise its ecological impact and the role of leadership in this regard. I also hope to capture and document leadership moments described by Ladkin (2010) and provide empirical support for this conceptual understanding.

The following Methodology chapter provides an in-depth explanation of why this approach was chosen and what the undertaking entailed in pursuit of a qualitative, longitudinal, ethnographic study of a medium sized hotel business in southwest England.
3. Methodology

Down by the Pond

I'm fishing.

Don't talk, anybody, don't come near!

Can't you see that the fish might hear?

He thinks I'm playing with a piece of string;

He thinks I'm another sort of funny sort of thing,

But he doesn't know I'm fishing –

He doesn't know I'm fishing.

That's what I'm doing –

Fishing.

(A.A. Milne, 1979, p. 58)
3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving sustainable business, by examining how people embed sustainability issues in the day-to-day doings of running a business.

The study takes place within an understanding that much of the literature on sustainability (and leadership for sustainability) is set out from a conceptual or even rhetorical level, leaving a gap in our understanding about the embodied practice of sustainability in the workplace. Authors are unanimous in their calls for further empirical research (Hardman, 2012; Redekop, 2010; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008; Western, 2008, 2013) and a Business in the Community report (2010) simply states ‘We need examples of business success with sustainability at the core’ (2010, p. 11). Meanwhile, Walker, Redmond and Giles (2010) also draw attention to the low volume of research undertaken in small and medium sized firms seeking practical solutions for behavioural change to reduce environmental impact. The intention of this inquiry, therefore, has been to contribute to this still seemingly under-researched domain, the relationship between leadership and ecological sustainability in a medium sized firm.

It is hoped that by focusing on the day-to-day accomplishment of leadership by practitioners the study will explore the challenge of being sustainable at work in a way that is accessible and understandable for other practising leaders. This is not, however, intended as a ‘how to’ guide, given the very situated nature of sustainability, and it is acknowledged that the findings may not be generalisable or directly transferable to other organisations; however, it is hoped they may stimulate ideas for change.

The field of study is one organisation, referred to here as ‘The Hotels’, comprising two luxury hotel establishments, set in close proximity in a small sea-side community on the north coast of the South West region of the UK. Both hotels could be described as ‘exemplary’ or ‘commendable’ (Jenkins, 2006) in terms of their sustainable credentials, having won a number of national and international awards (Appendix 1).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) refer to Bateson (1972) to support their claim that any researcher undertaking a qualitative study is a philosopher (1998, p. 26). As such,
the researcher has to qualify their basic principles of ontological and epistemological beliefs. To that end, this chapter commences by setting out my epistemological assumptions. It goes on to explain my decision to pursue an ethnographic undertaking and provide a brief history of this methodology. The recent resurgence and popularity of ethnography is acknowledged along with some of the associated questions and concerns this is raising amongst authors and practitioners. The section concludes with a short summary.

In the next section of this chapter, entitled ‘Conducting Ethnographic Research’, various components of an ethnographic undertaking are explored and considered in relation to the ethnographer's role. These include: the ability to see the familiar as unfamiliar, immersing oneself and maintaining the researcher role, gathering data and determining how long one should spend in the field in order to capture something of significance. Examples are drawn from other ethnographic studies by way of illustration, and their application considered in relation to this inquiry.

The chapter continues with ‘A Study of The Hotels’, providing a weave of theory and practical application in this situated account. I explain how the research was undertaken, from first encounters, gaining access and managing relationships, through to the collection, management and analysis of data.

The final part of this chapter entitled ‘Contribution to Knowledge’ explains how the traditional criteria of validity, replicability and reliability are not appropriate measures by which to assess an ethnographic study (Yin, 2009). Instead, the three dimensions of ‘convincingness’ set out by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) – authenticity, plausibility, and criticality – are followed to demonstrate how this work makes a valuable and original contribution to knowledge building in the domain of leadership for sustainability.
3.2 Epistemological assumptions

Venzin, von Krogh and Roos (1998) advise researchers to clarify their core epistemological assumptions at the outset by stating the domain of an inquiry, the basic disciplines that inform the project, the methodological approach taken and the purpose of the study. Having stated the purpose of the study above, this section of the chapter states the domain of inquiry and the disciplines that inform the research undertaking, moving on to clarify my epistemological assumptions. Details of the methodological approach taken to achieve the purpose of the study form the basis of the following section.

My understanding of the ‘domain’ of this inquiry is that of ‘leadership for sustainability’, a relatively new subject currently gaining recognition and attention in the leadership literature (Bolden et al., 2011; Hardman, 2012; Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; Marshall et al., 2011; Western, 2008, 2013).

Drath (2001) describes how new subjects emerge all the time as conversations take place across worldviews (2001, p. 145) and he provides the example of sustainable development as a new subject happening at the time of his writing. He explains how new subjects result from looking at things from new and different perspectives, amalgamating and merging previously identified subjects; sustainable development having emerged from ‘conversations across conservationist and economic development worldviews’ (200, p. 146). He suggests ‘Leadership … happens when a conversation … makes sense of, a new subject’ (2001, p. 144), albeit he notes this is ‘rarely if ever recognised as a process of leadership … as there is no knowledge principle yet by which such occurrences can be so recognised’ (p. 144). I suggest this illustrates leadership as a shared process of meaning making as conceptualized by Smircich and Morgan (1982, p. 261).

Western (2008) explains the importance of being able to look at the world from different perspectives:

> We all become familiar with the normative discourses which surround us in our own script or narrative so that we cannot ‘see the wood for the trees’.

(2008, p. 14)
He refers to the work of Zizek (1992) and the ability to ‘look awry and take a “distorted”’ view’ (italics in original 2008, p. 14). Western (2008) writes about the values that can be attributed to being “liberated” from a particular way of seeing’ (2008, p. 14) by taking a different perspective on the world. He suggests this makes new options and patterns of behaviour available, enabling us to see things that may previously have been hidden, creating greater awareness, adding depth to what is seemingly straightforward; a whole process of reframing that is valuable in many aspects of life, but as discussed here, particularly as an aspect of leadership.

By looking through a different lens or bringing combinations together that have not previously been linked we can challenge conventions, appreciate new options and, as Drath (2001) describes, appreciate the emergence of new subject areas. Redekop (2010) advocates taking a range of viewpoints on leadership for environmental sustainability, and to learn more about this challenging subject he invites contributions from other disciplines such as religion, politics and the arts as well as the business community. The disciplines informing this study are predominantly those of social science and critical studies, the latter being an approach to questioning the former, as Alvesson and Deetz (2000) describe: ‘Critical research generally aims to disrupt ongoing social reality’ (2000, p. 1). Critical approaches to management and leadership argue the limited nature of rational, analytical decision making (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Grint, 2000, 2005) and greater appreciation is now given to the ways in which reality, is seen as complex and socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999; Gergen and Gergen, 2003).

Authors such as Capra (1983, 1996, 2002), Hardman (2012), Marshall et al. (2001) and Wheatley (1994, 2005) suggest the ‘ongoing social reality’ surrounding leadership and sustainability has so far focused on taking a positivist, scientific stance. This is in keeping with a tradition of ‘scientific knowing’, the dominant model for understanding how the world works for over four centuries (Marshall et al., 2011, p. 14). Marshal et al. (2011) acknowledge how this scientific approach has been beneficial and enabled humanity to achieve many things (p. 14), but are quick to add that this way of knowing has ‘failed adequately to make sense of the connection between humans and the planet that we rely on and are part of’ (2011, p. 15). They suggest the “problem” of sustainability is partly a problem in the way we think’ (p. 15), and similarly Hardman (2012) recommends we redress the balance of the
‘reductionist tendency of reason in the search for a more holistic understanding of who we are and of our place in the grand scheme of things’ (2012, p. xii).

A paradigm shift towards systemic, integrated, relational thinking is taking place across a range of disciplines given the complex nature of the problems facing life on earth as we know it (Capra, 1983, 2002; Children of the World, 1994; Gore, 1992; Parkin, 2010). According to a growing number of authors, including Bohm (1996), Isaacs (1999), Parkin (2010) and Wheatley and Frieze (2011), this way of working calls for more discursive and integrated approaches to problem solving to be able to make sense of contextual and perceptual issues, in order to live more sustainably upon the earth.

Braungart and McDonough (2009) propose ‘All sustainability is local’ (2009, p. 123). Bearing in mind that ‘my local’ may not be ‘your local’, I suggest this requires an appreciation of sustainability in relation to each of our own realities, or in other words, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe, as ‘socially constructed’. Following this way of thinking, leading and decision making for sustainability would require us to acknowledge multiple diverse and varied realities, rather than there being one objectified view that is common to all.

To know reality as socially constructed is to appreciate that there are as many versions of reality as there are people viewing; no one absolute truth, only truth that is contextually dependent and interpreted through the perspective of the observer. Berger and Luckmann (1967) encapsulate this way of knowing clearly and succinctly:

My ‘here’ is their ‘there. My ‘now’ does not fully overlap with theirs. My projects differ from and may even conflict with theirs. All the same, I know that I live with them in a common world. (1967, p. 37)

This requires a ‘sense-making’ mindset to enable a process of making ‘common sense’, providing meaning, by accessing a point of view that may previously not have been articulated, or if it has, not heard and considered.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain ‘common-sense’ is ‘the knowledge we share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life’ (1967, p. 37). They illustrate this by providing the simple example of an ‘automobile mechanic’ (1967, p. 38) familiar with a certain make of car in his own world of ‘American made cars’ (p. 38) being asked one day to work on a different make of car, and how the mechanic...
has the opportunity to ‘enrich’ his everyday life and expand his everyday experiences with this new knowledge, broadening out into another’s everyday reality. The mechanic could perceive his situation as a challenge or an opportunity. His own familiar world of ‘everyday life’ tells him there are only American cars. Encountering a world with which he is not familiar, he could be curious or reluctant. Isaacs (1999) refers to our reluctance to move beyond the knowledge, routines and perspectives of our own familiar worlds as ‘myopic vision’ (1999, p. 32), noting how we become convinced that our own perspective of a problem is ‘essentially right’ (1999, p. 34) and that others will have got it wrong. Thinking in this way also prevents us from appreciating a wider perspective, therefore Isaacs (1999) proposes we should be asking, ‘Wait a minute, what are we doing here? What are we missing?’ (1999, p. 34).

An epistemology rooted in social constructionism views reality as multiple, produced through sets of (loosely) shared understandings through which it become objectified as truth or knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Appreciating reality as socially constructed challenges the ‘individualist perspective’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999) because our social worlds are not identical. My world is real to me, as yours is to you, but my ability to appreciate your reality is limited to our being willing and able to converse, empathise and appreciate each other’s situations. As Gergen (1999) illustrates:

If what is central to me is within – mine and mine alone – then how am I to regard you? At the outset, you are fundamentally ‘other’ – an alien who exists separately from me. (1999, p. 118)

Current conventional wisdom is dominated by this isolationist, dualistic, ‘either/or’ way of thinking and knowing the world. However, in relation to sustainability, we are encouraged to ‘think global, act local’ (Hutchinson 1995, p. 37), requiring an understanding of the connected but different ways of thinking, being and working that exist and impact on one another across the globe. To accommodate an appreciation of another’s worldview takes a certain selflessness and willingness. As Gergen (1999) notes, in a world where we see only our own reality, we act to meet our own needs and wants; in other words, I ‘look out for number one!’ (1999, p. 119). Asking people to appreciate my ‘there’ as someone else’s ‘here’ requires us to challenge the
strategy that, according to Gore (1992), we have relied on for too long, that of ‘out of sight, out of mind’ (1992, p. 145).

In studying leadership for sustainability my epistemological assumptions are influenced by these paradigmatic changes from a scientific positivist worldview towards a more interpretivist and relational way of knowing the world, acknowledging reality as subjective, contextual, socially constructed, given meaning by people. I explore beyond merely ‘what’ decisions are made, to establish ‘how’ decisions are made to take action. This approach considers the wider context within which issues are situated and the varying perspectives of people involved – how people organise and make sense of actions taken in relation to the many worldviews of others around them.

3.2.1 Why an Ethnographic undertaking?

Pratt (2009) suggests:

Qualitative research is great for addressing the ‘how’ questions – rather than ‘how many’; for understanding the world from the perspective of those studied (i.e. informants); and for examining and articulating processes. (2009, p. 856)

Exploring how sustainability issues are embedded in the daily practice of organisational life requires a qualitative approach, and as Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) note, the strengths of qualitative research lie in its ability to ‘understand people’s meanings, to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge, and to contribute to the evolution of new theories’ (2002, p. 42). Qualitative research has a long history of use in the social sciences, as Van Maanen remarks in his Forward to Gummesson’s (2000) work. He notes how it was the primary means by which social research studies were undertaken during the twentieth century, despite the dominance and prominence of quantitative methods during that time, and he cites the situated workplace observation of Western Electric’s Hawthorn plant by Frederick Taylor as a classic example (2000, p. ix).

However, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) comment that ‘qualitative research is difficult to define clearly’ (1998, p. 5), there being no one theory or paradigm with which it is distinctly associated. Nevertheless, they acknowledge how qualitative research is
utilised in many disciplines, and does not privilege any ‘single method over any other’ (p. 5); in fact they talk about the qualitative researcher being a ‘Jack of all trades’ (1998, p. 3), piecing together a set of practices or methods that emerge to meet the requirements of understanding a given situation. There are therefore, as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) recount, many challenges to the subjective and unscientific nature of qualitative research from those for whom positivist traditions and the search for assumed truths transcend personal accounts and interpretations.

However, rather than seek factual truths about leading for sustainability, my aim is to appreciate the many realities of people as they go about, as Pye (2005) refers to, their ‘daily doing of leading’ (italics in original, 2005, p. 33). I felt I could only know this by experiencing the realities of others for myself. Van Maanen (1979) places the ability of the researcher to tell the story themselves as being central to undertaking an ethnographic investigation in order to ‘explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation’ (1979, p. 540).

Having had some experience of working in the hotel catering industry earlier in my career, I felt I might be well equipped to work alongside and reside amongst the hotel employees for a length of time, to ‘live with and like them’, as Van Maanen (2011b, p. 219) proposes. However, ultimately this was not possible for practical reasons put forward by The Hotels’s managers themselves. Sadly, I realised my own knowledge and skills were woefully out of date, but as such I had little problem making the familiar unfamiliar (Reeves Sanday, 1979), an aspect of ethnography mentioned in the following section of this chapter.

To understand and appreciate beyond the worthy claims made in the literature and on the website of this firm, I felt it was necessary to talk to people, to observe and listen to their personal situated accounts. I began to realise an ethnographic approach would enable me to appreciate specific situated instances posed by their attempts to promote sustainable business. Watson (2012) calls for more ‘everyday ethnography’ (2012, p. 1) and I sought an approach that would enable me to access and experience everyday issues in the lives of people working for The Hotels. Geertz (1973) advocates the researcher look at what practitioners do in order to gain knowledge in social science research, and he states that any practitioner undertaking an anthropological study in this way is ‘doing ethnography’ (1973, p. 5).
I initially considered undertaking a comparative study and identified three very different organisations, an academic institution, the UK’s largest mutual business and a small to medium size hotel group. The choice of each of these organisations was very much influenced by the proclamations made in their literature and on their websites of their intentions to promote sustainable working practices. Having carried out trial research by meeting and interviewing managers from each organisation, I reflected on the progress I had made during the first few months of my research. I realised carrying out one-to-one interviews with selected managers provided rather a one sided view of what was going on in the businesses. This was not enabling me to get beyond the rhetoric, and to do this I felt I needed to obtain a range of views from all levels and perspectives to substantiate or counter the opinions I was hearing more formally put across in interviews. To do this in the time available I decided to undertake research solely with one organisation and chose the hotel group as my case study.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) pose the question of sample size, and whether the researcher chooses to investigate across a number of organisations or to focus on a single organization. For the latter they suggest a more ‘in depth’ (2002, p. 45) study is probable, ‘based on direct observation and personal contacts’ (p. 45), and this is likely to take place over a period of time and to include ‘live observations and retrospective accounts’ (p. 45).

My decision to select the small to medium sized hotel group was therefore supported not only by the literature, which identifies a lack of studies (Walker et al., 2010) undertaken in smaller firms, despite their significant cumulative environmental impact (Hillary, 2000); it was also influenced the by the number of personal contacts and ease of access I had been able to establish during the first few months of my trial research that were likely to enable an ‘in depth’ study of this one organisation.

3.2.2 Exploring the ethnographic tradition

I knew little of ethnography prior to my studies, and my initial engagement with the literature gave me the sense that I had lifted the lid on a jar of worms. There is no single concise definition of ethnographic methods, leading to quite an entanglement of issues here about what ‘counts’ as ethnography, and how its authority might be
judged. The history of ethnography could take a chapter or more in itself, particularly as its re-emergence and current popularity seem to have raised concerns about the value of ethnography, its uses and pedigree.

The origins of ethnography are rooted in ancient Greek anthropology (Reeves Sanday, 1979, p. 527) and, more recently, ‘British social anthropology and … American cultural anthropology’ (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 3). Tracing a brief history, Yanow (2012) recounts how anthropology and sociology ‘split their disciplinary and terminological terrain’ (2012, p. 2), resulting in anthropology taking ‘ethnography’ and sociology ‘participant observation’, but adds ‘there is little reason not to claim them as antecedents’ (p. 2).

Authors writing about the history of ethnography refer to the major role played by ‘The Chicago School of Sociology’ (Down, 2012; O’Reilly, 2009; Yanow, 2012) in the development of organisational ethnography. The influence of this organisation was brought about by virtue of its location coupled with the work of its key philosophers and researchers in the field of social science. Between the late 1800s and the mid-1900s, the City of Chicago experienced a period of rapid social change, as described by O’Reilly (2009), including:

... mass immigration, huge population growth, and a vast growth and development of urban areas, attended by the now predictable social problems of increased crime rates, poverty, and social inequality. (2009, p. 29)

Students of the Chicago School were forced ‘out of their classrooms and into the field’ (Van Maanen, 2011a, p. 18), encouraged by tutors to witness life on the streets, ranging from the luxury hotels to the slums of the City. As Schwartzman (1993) explains, during the 1930s and 1940s ethnographers in the United States were ‘developing innovative ways to use fieldwork techniques in some of the earliest behavioural science investigations’ (1993, p. 1). The approach to ethnography at the Chicago School recognised the value of observing people in their everyday situations and workplaces, generating knowledge about work as a social accomplishment.

O’Reilly (2009) identifies a number of influences emanating from the early social science studies undertaken at The Chicago School: one being the notion of ‘pragmatism’ – to ask if theory is practical; another the application of ecology to urban
settings; and, probably most influential of all, ‘a rich heritage’ (2009, p. 31) of research that focuses on the ‘intimate study of daily life’ (p. 31). Methodologies used to gather data were varied, including qualitative and quantitative techniques, but are particularly noted for the way in which the ethnographers ‘often lived in the settings studied’ (Deegan, 2001, cited in O’Reilly, 2009, p. 31).

Originally, anthropological and ethnographic studies involved observing a culture or community whilst the researcher maintained a separation between objective ethnographic and subjective autobiographical records (Tedlock, 2005). This approach showed little or no consideration for the impact of the observer upon the community under observation. This aspect of ethnography in particular appears to have changed considerably as ethnography has paradigmatically shifted from the more traditional ‘objective’ approach to a more ‘relational’ appreciation between the researcher and those observed. The observer is now encouraged to reflect upon their own participation within the ‘ethnographic frame’ (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467), creating ‘closeness, subjectivity and engagement’ (p. 467). Fine, Morrill and Surianarain (2009) comment how, in this way, ethnographers are able to produce ‘insights unavailable to scholars using other research methods’ (2009, p. 602). Watson (2012) notes the value of ‘ethnographic research, or research that adopts elements of field research’ (2012, p. 1) to organisational studies as being greater ‘than previously recognised’ (p. 1), providing ‘grounded accounts of “how the social world works”’ (p. 1).

A number of authors including Down (2012), Evans (2012), Fine et al. (2009), Yanow (2012) and Watson (2012) comment on the resurgence of ethnography in organisational studies. Fine et al. (2009) suggest this is both innovative and ‘a return to tradition’ (2009, p. 602), forecasting that ‘[e]thnography will surely have to change as the questions that are central to organizational studies change’ (2009, p. 616).

Down (2012) draws our attention to the increasing popularity of organisational ethnographies since the mid-1990s and cites ‘the creation of the Journal of Organizational Ethnography’ (italics in original, 2012, p. 1) as evidence of this. However, he notes the sad irony of the situation if the launch of this journal, as well as signifying the increased popularity of ethnography, also ‘marked the debasing of the currency’ (2012, p. 9) of ethnography. To counter this, whilst acknowledging the changes in workplace organising and the need for ethnography to ‘focus on new problems and adapt[s] research practices to suit novel, often virtual realities’ (p. 9),
he also advocates greater understanding of the history and practices of ethnography, and an appreciation of what these ‘have meant and should mean’ (p. 9).

‘Mis-packaged and sold cheap …’ is how Evans (2012) describes the current flurry of activity to use ethnographic methods for the purposes of marketing in ‘the bustling marketplace of the knowledge economy’ (2012, p. 1), adding ‘it is clear that ethnography is becoming rated too low and the rush is on to restore its exchange value’ (p. 1). She describes ethnography as a ‘beast … out there in the wild’ and suggests discussions should take place ‘between academics and between academics and research consultancies about what kind of methodological beast ethnography is becoming … and whether or not it ought to be tamed’ (p. 1). A contributing factor creating this beast in the wild is her point that British PhD students, unlike their American counterparts, are not taught how to undertake ethnographic fieldwork. She suggests ethnography is ‘Shrouded, to a certain extent, in secrecy and mythologized’ (2012, p. 2) and refers to participant observation as ‘a mysterious rite of passage, a prolonged period of “deep hanging out”’ (2012, p. 2), a term she borrows from Clifford (1997, p. 188).

To begin to clarify this apparent mysterious undertaking, O’Reilly (2009) defines participant observation as a method and ethnography as ‘a methodology – a theory, or a set of ideas’ (2009, p. 3) that have as their foundation a number of ‘fundamental criteria’ (p. 3). She acknowledges the very iterative nature of ethnography, suggesting ‘it evolves in design through the study’ (2009, p. 3). Furthermore, she suggests it ‘draws on a family of methods … watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions’ (embolden in original, p. 3), all of which ‘results in richly written accounts that respect the irreducibility of human experience’ (p. 3). If this all still sounds rather vague and mysterious, Stager Jacques (2006) provides some slight reassurance:

... today’s researcher who wishes to use ethnographic observation, participant research or open-ended interviewing has a virtual library of methods and methodology books available to help them establish that they are following a structured approach with concrete standards and not merely playing with the net down. (2006, p. 45)

My ethnographic research therefore coincides with this time of its resurgence and popularity, amid questions being raised about its value, use and purpose, with some
authors harping back to historical foundations for support as studies seek to keep pace with changing organisational forms and issues. I set out as a PhD student to explore the ethnographic literature to guide me through my undertaking, to ensure I am not playing ‘with the net down’.

3.2.3 Summary

In this first part of the chapter I have stated the aim and purpose of this study: to gain better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving sustainable business. I have identified the domain of this inquiry as leadership and sustainability and stated the basic disciplines that inform the project, these being social science and critical studies. I have clarified my epistemological assumptions, appreciating the socially constructed nature of reality as described by Berger and Luckmann (1967), Burr (1995) and Gergen (1999).

I have explained how a positivist approach is not commensurate with the contextualised framework around leadership and sustainability as discussed in my Literature Review in Chapter Two and summarised briefly here. My approach differs because I need to understand the subjective, situated multiple realities of people grappling with complex issues. As such, I have provided an explanation for my choice of an ethnographic undertaking and acknowledged the origins of ethnography, its uses over time and noted the current resurgence of ethnography as a research undertaking, and the associated questions and concerns this is raising amongst authors and practitioners.

In the next part of this chapter I attempt to uncover some of the ‘mysteries’ surrounding ethnography by setting out acknowledged techniques and approaches and citing previous ethnographic works that exemplify theory in use. In so doing I hope to illustrate how an ethnographic study is more than just ‘a prolonged period of deep “hanging out”’ and identify aspects of ethnography that will, hopefully, contribute to a rigorous undertaking.
3.3 Conducting ethnographic research

Evans (2012) suggests the ethnographic method is shrouded in mystery, recalling how postgraduate students in social science have been left ‘bemused about how they were supposed to learn intuitively how to do ethnography, as if it were a mystical rite of passage’ (2012, p. 10). As a PhD student I have not ‘explicitly’ been taught how to do fieldwork in this vein, as Evans (2012) suggests. I have, however, been fortunate to be able to draw on twenty five years’ work in the field of Organisation Development and Management Learning. During this time I have undertaken a number of studies that I now recognise (although I did not appreciate it at the time) that I can refer to as ethnographic undertakings. The most memorable of these was a week spent working the 6am to 2pm shift on the production line of a biscuit factory. This particular experience enabled me to know what it was like working on the factory floor. I learnt the terminology, and some of the skills. I made efforts to speak the language, use the jargon and know the practices that enabled me to be, albeit for a short time, an accepted member of the workforce. I began to appreciate what was important at various stages on the production line and how it felt to work in the hot, noisy and gloomy conditions. By the end of the week I had a better understanding of what things could be improved from the workforce perspective, and how. This study took place immediately prior to my designing and facilitating a supervisory skills programme and the whole experience was not only useful for my understanding, it also enabled me to be much more credible as a facilitator and tutor, simply because I had taken the time to experience the working lives of the people on the factory floor, albeit for just a short time. I had taken notice of them and learnt from them, before trying to ‘teach’ them anything conceptual and abstract. It has always felt important to me to be able to relate to other people’s situations when helping to apply theory and concepts to workplace practice. As such, undertaking an ethnographic inquiry seemed to me an approach that would give me access to multiple views and perspectives. Nevertheless, I wanted to learn more about taking an academically rigorous approach, rather than just undertake an unstructured and prolonged period of the ‘deep hanging out’ to which Evans (2012) refers, or, worse, be seen to be ‘merely playing with the net down’ as Stager Jacques (2006, p. 45) suggests.

A glance at the literature confirms there is a plethora of books and articles, and yet a structured approach with concrete standards for undertaking and writing up an ethnographic study seems elusive. Having read around the literature, I found
conflicting and vague advice, not least in how one refers to ethnography; is it a method or a methodology, or even a paradigm? It was therefore somewhat heartening to read Van Maanen's (2011a) comment:

... ethnographic writing is anything but a straightforward, unproblematic descriptive or interpretive task based on an assumed Doctrine of Immaculate Perception. (2011a, p. 73)

Watson (2012) suggests 'it is helpful to see ethnography as much more than a research method' (2012, p. 1) and in his earlier writing he actually states 'Ethnography is not a research method' (2011, p. 202) and refers to an 'ethnographic endeavour' (Watson, 2011, p. 204). This seems clear, and neatly side-steps the need to refer to ethnography as a method or methodology; however; the literature offers anything but the clarity I had hoped for. Rosen (1988) refers to ethnography as his 'chosen method of analysis' (1988, p. 464); Bryman (2004) cites Tierney (1987) listing ethnography as ‘method’; and Evans (2012) refers to method, albeit 'mythologized' (2012, p. 2). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) also refer to ethnography as a method and go on to suggest ‘for some it is even a paradigm’ (2000, p. 75), and this is also how Reeves Sanday (1979) refers to ethnography. Tedlock (2005) and O’Reilly (2009) both refer to ethnography as a ‘methodology’. Yanow (2012) describes ethnography as ‘a genre of writing’ (2012, p. 4) and, even more, as a ‘sensibility’ (p. 4) that informs the method and methodology.

Watson (2012) provides a way of defining ethnography as:

... a genre of social science writing which draws upon the writer’s close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred. (italics in original, 2012, p. 2)

In my own work, I have chosen to refer to my ethnographic undertaking rather than endeavour. From my reading around this literature, I am left with the impression that either of these terms will suffice as long as one avoids the use of method or methodology by which to classify this ‘distinctive type of research’ (Watson, 2012, p. 2). What is more certain throughout the literature is the intensive observational
fieldwork that is generally regarded, as Watson (2012) states, as ‘the sine qua non of ethnography’ (italics in original, 2012, p. 2).

A number of negative aspects are cited in the literature in relation to ethnographic research. Alvesson and Deetz (2000), for instance, note the ‘time consuming … personally tiresome and stressful’ (2000, p. 76) nature of undertaking such a study, with the added danger of the researcher going native, becoming caught up in the detail, unable to say anything of ‘wider theoretical interest’ (2000, p. 76). Added to this they warn of the risk of:

... being swamped by all the impressions and the enormous job of sorting out all empirical material may mean that the critical analysis is lost ... or that a researcher holds rigidly to a particular theory. (2000, p. 199)

I know personally that at times I have felt exhausted after only a few hours in the researcher role, listening, watching, absorbing, dashing off to find a private space where I could record a comment, where often the only place to find a bit of ‘me space’ was in the loo or by retreating to my car.

My impression from reading the literature is that the various authors, rather than providing ‘concrete standards’ as Stager Jacques (2006, p. 45) suggests, provide more by way of a shaded canvas upon which the novice researcher, such as myself, paints her own picture, or, more aptly, tells her own story (hopefully convincingly).

The various aspects I describe in the next section are just some of the characteristics of organisational ethnography that I have noted in the literature, having evolved to provide what seems a semi-structured approach for delving into situated circumstances to address the question – what’s going on here?

3.3.1 Making the familiar, unfamiliar

Reeves Sanday (1979) promotes the benefits of undertaking a study in an environment with which the researcher is unfamiliar, ‘based on the assumption that one comes to understand something by seeing it as an outsider’ (1979, p. 528); that is, making the familiar unfamiliar. In this way, she explains, the researcher is likely to be more sensitive and attuned to seeing the world ‘from another’s point of view’ (p. 528).
Seeing the world from the perspective of another, as an ‘outsider’, is poignantly and yet somewhat amusingly described in David Lodge’s (1988) novel, ‘Nice Work’. Czarniawska (2007) notes that Lodge’s novel has been cited by numerous other authors, as she suggests it captures ‘the very essence of fieldwork – its promises and its traps’ (2007, p. 10).

In ‘Nice Work’, Lodge (1988) recounts the exploits of an academic researcher, Dr. Robyn Penrose, a feminist specialising in Victorian novels undertaking a ‘shadowing exercise’ observing the Managing Director of a small engineering firm located in the industrial Midlands. They are both taking part, rather reluctantly, in an Industry Year shadowing scheme, the rationale for which was:

… the widespread feeling in the country that universities are ‘ivory tower’ institutions, whose staff are ignorant of the realities of the modern commercial world. (1988, p. 85)

Lodge (1988) describes how Penrose notices the unfamiliarity of familiar images as she travels to another part of the city in which she lives. He selects adjectives that convey something of Penrose’s feelings as she makes her way to the factory for the first time:

Shocking, somehow to come across … a gloomy Victorian gaol in the middle of an ordinary suburb where double-decker buses pass and housewives with shopping bags and pushchairs go about their mundane business … Robyn passes a cinema converted into a community centre, a Co-op converted into a Freezer Centre. This part of the city lacks the individual character of Robyn’s own suburb, where health food stores and sportswear boutiques and alternative bookshops have sprung up to cater for the students and liberal minded yuppies who live there. (1988, p. 97)

There are occasional strips of terraced houses, whose occupants seem to have given up the unequal struggle against the noise and pollution of the ring road … the curtains sag in the windows … ugly shoes, ugly clothes, and unbelievably ugly furniture, all plastic veneers and synthetic fabrics. (1988, p. 98)
It is within this ‘gloomy’, ‘noisy’, ‘polluted’ and ‘ugly’ environment, lacking ‘individual character’, that she encounters the factory, and this vividly sets the context for her reactions to what follows.

### 3.3.2 Immersing oneself

Schwartzman (1993) states ‘One of the defining characteristics of ethnographic research is that the investigator goes into the field, instead of bringing the field to the investigator’ (1993, p. 3). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) identify ethnography as ‘a longer period of fieldwork in which the researcher tries to get close to the community … being studied’ (2000: 75). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) endorse how:

> ... the researcher tries to immerse him or herself in a setting and to become part of the group under study in order to understand the meanings and significances that people put upon the behaviour of themselves and others. (2002, p. 49)

In a later edition, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008) refer to ‘complete participation’, where the researcher ‘works within the organization, alongside others, to all intents and purposes as one of them’ (2008, p. 156), suggesting:

> The role of the researcher may or may not be explicit and this will have implications for the extent to which he or she will be able to move around and gather information and perspectives from other sources. (2008, p. 157)

Van Maanen (2011a) describes how he managed his experience working with an American police agency:

> ... over a nine-month period in 1969–70. Approximately three months of this time were spent as fully participating member … Following the formal training phase of the initiation process, my fully participating role was modified. As a civilian, I spent six months riding in patrol units operated by a recruit and his FTO … from the outset, my role as researcher was made explicit. To masquerade as a regular police recruit would not only have been problematic but would have raised a number of ethical questions as well … . (2011a, p. 55)
Toynbee (2003) undertook a project approved and supported by Lambeth Council to live as a resident of Clapham Park Council Estate undertaking a variety of low-paid jobs as a dinner lady, hospital porter and cake packer, working undercover in organisations, to expose the plight of low-paid workers in Britain. She explains:

My experience was not of course, like that of many genuinely destitute people because I knew my way around the system, who to ask and how to ask for it. For me this was an interesting experiment, with none of the emotional desperation; I was not dragging small children along with me or unable to speak English. There was no way I could taste the crippling anxiety of teetering on the edge of an abyss, but at least I could test out how the system works. (2003, p. 39)

During 2004, Hawkins (2008) was employed as a full-time temporary member of an international recruitment agency to investigate the 'lived experience of recruitment consultants’ (2008, p. 422). Having obtained consent from all participants, she explains how she presents her data from her own perspective:

... as a female 'temp' in a team dominated by male consultants amongst whom I often felt uncomfortable and where I was acutely aware of the pressures to conform to certain gendered organizational values. Indeed, perhaps writing field notes was my own attempt to resist, as well as cope within, a corporate culture that challenged my sense of self. (2008, p. 423)

Undertaking fieldwork at The Hotels, the majority of my time was spent shadowing, interviewing, observing and listening. I experienced ‘complete commitment’, that is, being ‘part of the situation being studied in order to feel what it is like for the people in that situation’ (Reeves Sanday, 1979, p. 527) on just a few occasions. One of these occasions occurred when I was invited to facilitate the staff team days, and I refer to that in more detail in the following sub-section. The other occasion, described here in my field notes, occurred when I was able to work a shift in the hotel bar on 23rd February 2012.

When the two guys finish their cream tea, I notice there are other dishes in the back room stacking up, so I take some back to the kitchen, via the back corridor this time, negotiating my way through the heavy wooden doors with the laden tray. I can appreciate how things get disposed of in the wrong bins
as I am not sure where to put used tea bags and paper napkins, are these considered compostable? I would assume so, but there is nothing to tell me of this, and the guy on the pot wash is fearsome, he doesn’t speak, so I can’t ask him for fear of making him crosser than he already looks! (Field notes 23rd Feb. 2012: 4)

Just a limited time in this ‘fully immersed’ role provided significant insight about the way the architecture of the hotel building makes life difficult for bar staff to take heavy trays of dirty dishes back to the kitchen. This was interesting to experience personally as when I met with the building’s architect on 8th October 2012 he was passionate about the ecological ideals installed into the design of the building. I was left thinking that maybe the practicalities of the eco design have to be experienced personally for their functionality to be fully appreciated! Furthermore, when I arrived at the pot wash it was not at all clear where to put waste for recycling rather than general waste for landfill. This gave me a completely different understanding to that described to me by the Sustainability Manager. She was regularly frustrated by staff who as she saw it ‘put things in the wrong bins on purpose’ – despite her emphasising the importance of not doing so on numerous occasions. I wondered if she had asked the staff what they needed to know in order to be able to place things in the correct waste receptacles. This was one of my first experiences of the sheer complexity of sustainability as a situated, embodied accomplishment. We can set the rules and expectations for behaviour, but following these through in practice is quite another matter. Nonetheless, in my subsequent meetings with both the Architect and the Sustainability Manager I kept my experiences and thoughts very much to myself in my efforts to remain in the ‘researcher role’ as discussed below.

3.3.3 Maintaining the researcher role

There seems to be a balance to be struck by the researcher, between the ‘complete commitment’, ‘full immersion’ role of the researcher referred to by Alvesson and Deetz (2000), Easterby Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008), Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002), and Reeves Sanday (1979) and described above, and the role Fine et al. (2009) describe, that of being as ‘a fly on the wall’ (2009, p. 612), remaining passive, observing others going about their business.
The inability of the researcher to 'remain passive' – to understand what is happening in an unfamiliar culture and remain as a 'as a fly on the wall' – is illustrated once again in the novel by Lodge (1988). The role of the 'shadow' in the industry setting blurs as Dr. Robyn Penrose feels compelled to voice her concerns about the morality of a proposal to sack an operative of Indian origin for incompetence. As the (all male) management team discuss ways to contrive a situation to avoid a claim for 'unfair dismissal', she speaks up:

'Do I understand that you are proposing to pressure a man into making mistakes so that you can sack him?'

'I don’t think it is any of your business, Dr. Penrose' said Wilcox at last.

'Oh but it is,’ said Robyn hotly. 'It’s the business of anyone who cares for truth and justice. Don’t you see how wrong it is to trick this man out of his job?' she said, looking round the table. ‘How can you sit there and say nothing?’

'It’s a management matter in which you have no competence,’ said Wilcox.

'It’s not a management matter, it's a moral issue,’ said Robyn.

Wilcox was now pale with anger. ‘Dr. Penrose,’ he said, 'I think you’ve got the wrong idea about your position here. You’re a shadow, not an inspector. You’re here to learn, not to interfere. I must ask you to keep quiet, or leave the meeting.’ (Lodge 1988, p. 144)

Lodge (1988) illustrates how Penrose had clearly ‘overstepped the mark’ by engaging in the detail, allowing her own personal feelings to spill over into the situation. She is influencing the decision in a culture with which she is unfamiliar. She is passing judgment on the behaviour of the managers around the table with her challenge, ‘How can you sit there and say nothing?’ (1988, p. 144). She has lost contact with the bigger picture; she is there to observe the ‘how’, not just (or even) the ‘what’ of business being done in this industrial situation. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) warn of the danger of the researcher ‘going native’, becoming caught up in the detail and unable to say 'something systematic of wider theoretical interest' (2000, p. 76).
There were several occasions during this ethnographic undertaking when I felt challenged, in my role as researcher, to remain ‘passive’ and questioned the danger of my ‘going native’. One such occasion is referred to above, when I could have made comments from the perspective of a member of bar staff, both to the architect about the user friendliness (or not) of the heavy doors when negotiating a laden tray of dishes and to the Sustainability Manager about the confusion of where to dispose of waste items in the pot wash. Another occasion was when, having heard about the shutdown period at The Hotels after New Year 2012, I volunteered my services to undertake any cleaning or maintenance task as an opportunity to work alongside staff to better appreciate how it was for them during this time. Rather than include me in these tasks the General Manager asked me if I would be prepared to facilitate two ‘team days’ instead. One event would be for the whole staff contingent and the other day for the management team alone. I felt I was in a dilemma as I wondered how I could do this without influencing the situations. As it happened, I found the experience hugely valuable, providing me with a role where I could be part of the business and fully immersed, committed over a block period of four days. This enabled me to make the transition from feeling more comfortable ‘front of house’ to ‘staff side’ – eating in the staff room, using staff facilities and generally finding my way around with a purpose and ease. My ‘exposure’ to the whole staff team made me a familiar face around both hotels, and I felt a greater sense of engagement with the organisation than I had previously achieved.

Humphreys, Brown and Hatch (2003) cite three ‘central problems’ faced by ethnographers, two of which are appropriate to mention here as they underpin my experience:

(1) how to handle the delicate balance between the self and the other in fieldwork (and in writing;) and (2) how to engage in the everyday life of the culture being studied. (2003, p. 6)

A second dilemma in terms of my ability to remain ‘as a fly on the wall’ came about as I was invited to sit in on a meeting to discuss the purchase of new towels, bathrobes and slippers, the latter item having proven to be a long running problem in which I was particularly interested. Given my now familiarity around the place I was asked by the manager to comment on these prospective purchases. I did my best to remain neutral on this issue, but to my horror I heard myself when played back on the recording machine asking if the slippers under discussion were ‘compostable’ and subsequently realised this question was taken up by the Spa Manager and
influenced the remainder of the discussion! Fortunately, ultimately, my contribution does not seem to have influenced the eventual decision, as the General Manager made a different choice.

Latterly, as I approached the final stages of my data collection period, I was invited by the Board of Directors to coach the two General Managers. On a very positive note, this request displayed a level of trust and confidence in me by the Directors and Managers of the hotels, but also posed a dilemma in terms of my ability to undertake two roles simultaneously, that of coach and, in the short term, my continuing role as researcher. Humphreys et al. (2003) note the ‘dual quest for self-identity and empathy’ (2003, p. 6) and suggest it is timely to raise such issues as ethnography moves from approaches where a ‘previous generation of ethnographers’ acted with ‘confidence and certainty’ to a ‘more open and speculative approach … fundamentally creative, explorative and interpretive’ (2003, p. 21). I undertook the coaching role, but have been very careful not to include or disclose any details described to me during these situations in my research data. Shortly after beginning the coaching, my time ‘in the field’ came to an end.

3.3.4 Gathering data

Geertz (1973) suggests that what really defines ethnography, beyond the textbook methods and techniques, is ‘the kind of intellectual effort it is … an elaborate venture in (the writing of) “thick description”’ (1973, p. 6). He describes the making of ‘thick description’ as a process where the ethnographer ‘observes, he records, he analyzes’ (1973, p. 20). Van Maanen (1979) expands on this process by referring to ‘first-order and second-order concepts’ (1979, p. 540) in this writing and recording process. He explains:

... first order concepts are the ‘facts’ of an ethnographic investigation and the second-order concepts are the ‘theories’ an analyst uses to organise and explain these facts. (p. 540)

He uses the term ‘interpretations of interpretations’ (1979, p. 539) to describe the iterative way in which the researcher needs to ‘draw out’ the ‘second order concepts’ (1979, p. 541), a task he admits ‘is probably the most difficult yet most interesting
goal of the ethnographic enterprise’ (p. 541). He highlights the vital importance of recording ‘first order’ data accurately, suggesting:

... if they are mistyped, many second-order concepts developed by the ethnographer are likely to be rather thin, hollow, and perhaps altogether faulty. (1979, p. 542)

If I use the short extract from my field notes recorded during my shift in the bar and cited in sub section 3.3.2 above, I can begin to think conceptually about the ways in which sustainable working practices are communicated and explained. I recall on other occasions how I had listened to the frustrations of the Sustainability Manager and the General Manager when staff did not put things in the correct bins. I witnessed and photographed (Appendix 2) their efforts to make this clear, and yet here was I about to commit the very same act! I was really wanting to do the ‘right’ thing with the used napkin and tea bag, but I did not know from the situation I was presented with what that was. Conceptually, this becomes a matter of appreciating the other’s perspective, addressing the question of how this will make sense to the practitioner in situ. I felt there was a leadership question to be asked here.

In the production of data, Schwartzman (1993) refers to the ‘cyclical’ process an ethnographer undertakes of ‘asking questions, recording observations and analyzing data … repeated over and over again’ (1993, p. 48). O’Reilly (2009) also argues that ‘[e]thnography is iterative and inductive research … it evolves in design through the study’ (2009, p. 3).

O’Reilly (2009) presents ethnography as a ‘family of methods’ including observations, interviews, shadowing, collections of documents and historical analyses, described by a number of authors including Alvesson and Deetz (2000), Czarniawska (2007), O’Reilly (2009), Schwartzman (1993), Van Maanen (1979) and Watson (2011, 2012). I used all of these methods of data collection, and in addition took a number of photographs, some of which are attached at Appendices 2, 7 and 9. A sample of my first order data in the form of transcribed field notes is attached at Appendix 3.

How much data to collect, and how long to spend in the field in order to capture what might to be significant events, seems to be a variable for which there is no one answer. Trying to make ethnography about a length of time spent in the field, or number of interviews, is equivalent to trying to fit it into positivistic assumptions that
emphasise sample size. I discuss how ethnography is not rooted or measured by these criteria in the third section of this chapter, where the measures of authenticity, plausibility and criticality of my work are explained.

There is, however, general agreement that ethnography requires a length of time to be spent undertaking participant observation (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Fine et al., 2007; Reeves Sanday, 1979; Van Maanen, 1979); however, exactly how long is long enough seems open to debate. Bate (1997) is critical of what he refers to as ‘jet plane’ (1997, p. 1150) ethnographies where the researcher spends such a short amount of time in the field that it negates the need for them to take a toothbrush (p. 1150). Van Maanen (1979) advises:

… the amount of time an investigator spends constructing a theory by actively seeking the facts is a variable and one that presumably should be related to the quality of the theory that emerges from the field of study… Assuming an ethnographic stance is by no means a guarantee that one will collect accurate and theoretically useful data no matter how long one remains in the field. (1979, p. 539)

Referring to qualitative findings, Pratt (2009) writes:

There is no ‘magic number’ of interviews or observations that should be conducted in a qualitative research project. What is ‘enough’ depends on what question a researcher seeks to answer. (2009, p. 56)

Alvesson and Deetz (2000) and Bryman (2004) suggest the longitudinal aspect of ethnography can be seen to have drawbacks, as time spent generates enormous amounts of data and, as Alvesson and Deetz (2000) and Fine et al. (2009) point out, this then has to be managed. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) make a further point worthy of note that it is equally important for the timescale to include significant events. However, time spent does not necessarily guarantee interesting incidents that will provide valuable data. I first encountered The Hotels on 4th November 2009 and continued data collection until 8th October 2012, spending approximately one hundred and sixty hours in their company in a variety of observational roles. This timescale enabled me to observe several decision-making processes from start to finish. A case in point was a decision-making process involving the purchase of hotel bedroom slippers. This was first posed as a problem issue by the General Manager
in August 2011, was carried forward through several discussions with other managers and meetings with a supplier, checking out sustainability criteria, weighing up pros and cons, and ended with a purchasing decision being made in February 2012. I did not foresee, or appreciate at the time, what for me has turned out to be a significant event informing my study. It was not until all data was reviewed, patterns identified and concepts applied that the significance of the slipper dilemma became apparent. Not only did this event illustrate the powerful impact of ‘indecision’ on the part of the General Manager in influencing leadership, but also the significant connectivity between local decision making and global issues.

3.3.6 Summary

In this part of the chapter I have attempted to uncover some of the ‘mysteries’ surrounding ethnography by setting out acknowledged techniques and approaches and citing previous ethnographic works that exemplify theory in use. In so doing, I hope I have illustrated how an ethnographic study is more than just ‘a prolonged period of deep hanging out’ and identified aspects of ethnography that will hopefully contribute to my own study being regarded as a rigorous undertaking.

In the next part of this chapter, entitled ‘A Study of The Hotels’, I attempt a weave of theory and practical application providing a situated account, introducing the organisation, and detailing my ethnographic approach in relation to the theory.
3.4 A study of The Hotels

In this section I provide a situated account, explaining how the research was undertaken from first encounters, gaining access, forming and nurturing relationships, and the techniques I employed collecting data over a period of approximately three years.

I have created a weave of practical experience with theory to illustrate my recognition and understanding of theoretical concepts in practice. A final paragraph outlines how I will go on to manage and analyse the data.

3.4.1 First encounters

O’Rielly (2009) recounts a variety of ways in which the researcher might identify and access the community for study. She cites Thomson (1988) and the stage he refers to as ‘the general gathering stage’ (2009, p. 5), where one gathers information and generally ‘swots up on his or her topic’ (p. 5). My ‘swotting up’ extended over a period of several years, waiting for an opportunity to come along to utilise an accumulation of knowledge built up as a result of my continued interest in sustainability and leadership. I first encountered sustainable development as part of Local Agenda 21 whilst working in Local Government helping managers appreciate their role in enabling ‘sustainable communities’ around Devon during the 1990s. Since then I have explored opportunities to undertake further research and engage with the ‘leadership and sustainability’ agenda. Most recently, as a network member of the University of Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies Sustainability Cluster, this association has kept my interest alive, updated my knowledge and eventually afforded me the opportunity to apply for my current course of study and research.

My first encounter with The Hotels, on 4th November 2009, came about by chance when I came to the hotel as a day guest. I immediately noticed the signs of a sustainable business, and I recognised the opportunity this presented. From my first encounter I felt it was imperative to develop a relationship with the organisation. The challenge would be to establish and nurture a relationship that could be ‘put on hold’ for a year, until I obtained funding to study and was in a position to commence
research officially. In the meantime, I had the opportunity to experience getting to
know people and the challenge of finding ways to stay in touch.

Schwartzman (1993) promotes the value and ‘rich source of data’ (1993, p. 48)
provided by the experiences of seeking and obtaining permissions, gaining access to
and first encounters with the setting to be observed, suggesting the latter to be
‘probably the most significant phase of the whole ethnographic process’ (1993, p.
48). She recounts how this has not always been the case, as historically ‘researchers
regarded the problems of access and the experience of first encounters as “noise”
(p. 48) in terms of data collection and information. For me, it was a period of intrepid
excitement, as this could this be the key that would enable me to undertake my study
at last.

During this phase I established factual, contextual, historical, background information
whilst in discussion with the Sustainability Manager as we toured the hotels early on
in my association with them. Upon reflection, I can now appreciate this as detail to
which Van Maanen (1979) might apply the term ‘first-order concepts’ (1979, p. 540).
These are facts that do not necessarily ‘speak for themselves’ (p. 540), but which I as
the field worker have to check out using other sources. For example, the term ‘family
firm’ – how is this significant? Or the ‘personal values of frugality’ used by the
Sustainability Manager to describe the values of the hotel owners – would they
describe themselves in this way? And to what extent does such a value impact upon
the business? In the following data sample from my field notes, I have identified
‘phrases’ (underlined here) that I felt might need to be explored further, simply
because of the regularity with which people referred to these issues.

One of the hotels, the Beach Cliff has been owned and managed by the family firm for over 50 years, it is housed in an oblong, off white, block,
utilitarian style accommodation building that has been modified to accommodate as many sustainable features as possible, but the structure of
the building limits what is possible beyond grassing over flat roof space, installing double glazing and solar panels. The business itself has been built
on the family values of frugality and home-grown food. Over the last 50 years these values have become fashionable and suddenly the hotel was being
referred to as a sustainable business. The Beach Cliff welcomes families and has a focus on being child friendly as such it has been successful for
traditional sea-side, middle class family holidays but as times and fashions
change is now having to rethink its strategy and position in the marketplace. Realising the structural limitations of the Beach Cliff in terms of following their passion for creating a sustainable business, the owners used this hotel as collateral to enable The Hotels as a business to borrow £12 million allowing them to create from a brown field site a hotel that would meet as many sustainable credentials as possible. The Directors toured the world looking for a suitable site and eventually bought up a hotel right next door, raising the old building to the ground and erecting a new build incorporating many sustainable features, including building materials, insulating, heating, water, waste and energy systems. The business is now under huge pressure to be profitable having taken the risk to expand in challenging and uncertain economic times. The business promotes sustainable practice and in doing so says it ‘dares to be different’ at every opportunity.

Since this early encounter, I have taken opportunities to explore these phrases with managers in interviews and in casual conversation to check out differing views and perspectives. I wondered to what extent are these just ‘nice phrases’, or do they form an important part of how people work here?

3.4.2 Gaining access and undertaking the study

The Sustainability Manager became, as Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 75) and O’Reilly (2009, p. 133) recommend, a ‘close contact’, someone who guides the researcher to other sources and contacts. I needed her to enable me to gain eventual access to an Owner Director, one of the three sisters, and possibly the Human Resources Manager to secure their approval to undertake research in their hotels, as only once this was gained could my study get underway. Neyland (2008) suggests that questions about practical issues such as:

- What is my likelihood of access? What can I do to increase my likelihood of access?
- What do I want to ask the organization to let me study? What will the scope of the study be in terms of time – how long? – and type of participation which areas of the organization do I want to participate in and in what role?

shape the research in quite important ways. (2008, p. 63)
My relationship with the business was significantly challenged when the Sustainability Manager announced early in February 2011 that she was moving on, hoping to take up a new and, for her, potentially exciting post, to join an organisation where she would have opportunities to influence sustainable tourism worldwide. She had outgrown her role at The Hotels, having achieved a tremendous amount, but with a full agenda still to hand over to her replacement. I was really concerned about losing this vital contact, and I hoped this would not be a setback for my studies. I began to realise the Sustainability Manager was something of an ‘eco campaigner’ as she spoke of her frustrations and reasons for wanting to leave The Hotels. Being passionate about sustainability, forthright and opinionated and setting high standards to achieve she was not popular with everyone in the business. O’Reilly (2009) notes how the longitudinal nature of ethnographic studies in particular depends upon ‘careful access, and the establishment of long-term reciprocal relationships built on trust and rapport’ (2009, p. 60). How, I wondered, was my being associated with the Sustainability Manager as my first point of contact going to influence my reputation and enable me to gain wider access to owners and managers of The Hotels? Neyland (2008) notes how ‘[t]he ethnographer might want to reflect on their own status in relation to other members of the organization’ (2008, p. 51). At this early stage in my relationship with The Hotels I did not know how my association with the Sustainability Manager would influence other members of the organisation to agree to my having access, it was my only option and a risk I had to take. However, she was true to her word and secured a meeting for me with one of the three Owner Directors who had a particular interest in driving the sustainability agenda for The Hotels, along with the Human Resources manager, on 23rd May 2011. Having an opportunity to meet with two senior managers in the firm, the potential for my longer-term access seemed more secure.

At this point I was asking for a work placement, plying my somewhat outdated catering skills as a possible way of undertaking an aspect of ‘real’ work alongside hotel staff. I felt if there was maybe some way I could be ‘employed’ for a period of time this would enable me to have access and a position from which to observe whilst being accepted as part of the organisation. I had in mind an image of my ethnographic undertaking as a ‘fully submerged’ study, the likes of which are referred to by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), much like those embarked upon by Hawkins (2008), Toynbee (2003) and Van Maanen (1975). However, for a number of reasons, this was not possible; the distance from my home meant that I required
accommodation, and The Hotels has limited staff accommodation, preferring whenever possible to employ local people. The Hotels could not afford to accommodate me in the either of the hotels’ letting accommodation, so I looked into the possibility of staying locally, but eventually we all (Human Resources Manager, Director and I) agreed it would be best if I could be flexible and structure my data gathering in other ways. Flexibility is one of the criteria Reeves Sanday (1979) lists for judging a person’s qualifications for undertaking an ethnographic study, having an ability to respond as the ‘unexpected occurs’ (1979, p. 528). We discussed that I could be given access to a number of managers initially and how this might lead on to further access to others and maybe some shadowing. This approach is described as ‘snowballing’ and referred to by Fine et al. (2009) as using ‘social network logic, whereby one informant is asked to help the researcher find other informants’ (2009, p. 611).

Schwartzman (1993) highlights how ‘First encounters are also the first time that informants and researchers have to observe each other’ (1993, p. 48) and notes that whilst the observer is familiarising herself with the setting, the informants will be speculating as to who we are and what is our role, forming their own impressions of us. I think during this initial phase of negotiating access, having interests and experiences in common helped significantly. The Human Resource manager and I had both spent much of our careers in industry managing training of one sort or another. Similarly, with the Director, we were both passionate about our gardens and composting and quickly developed a rapport based on these activities. Van der Waal (2009) highlights the importance of the researcher’s own social skills in gaining access to an organisation; being genuine, giving time and being patient, showing an interest in others. He suggests these qualities will enable the researcher to build ‘long-term relationships conducive to open dialogue … [and] lead to unexpected opportunities’ (2009, p. 36).

### 3.4.3 Research ethics

In addition to the personal relationship-building aspect of enabling and gaining access to an organisation, there are more formal arrangements to be considered, most notably those of the ethical codes that will guide the inquiry. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) note ‘that discussions about research ethics are most frequently held in
relation to the use of qualitative methods’ (2002, p. 76). One of the reasons for this, they suggest, is ‘because qualitative researchers are more sympathetic and sensitive to human feelings’ (p. 76). O’Reilly (2009) suggests consideration should be given to the ethical implications of all forms of social research, but adds that ethnography ‘raises important and profound issues of its own’ (2009, p. 57), particularly due to the longitudinal and more intimate nature of such an undertaking. Van der Waal (2009) raises a further ethical consideration, that of the privileged dimensions which may accompany the close and long-term relationships that the ethnographer has to carefully build and manage (2009, p. 36).

My meeting with the one of The Hotels’s Owner Directors and the Human Resources Manager on 23rd May 2011 was my first opportunity to discuss and confirm the ethical guidelines that would direct my study and safeguard all parties. I had previously mentioned research ethics to the Sustainability Manager, but I considered that I needed to obtain permissions and agreement at a more senior level in order to proceed comfortably and assuredly around The Hotels. I was informed that in principle the owners and managers of The Hotels were very willing to allow me free access to roam and speak with whomsoever I chose. I proposed the use of pseudonyms for the hotels and their location, and although O’Reilly (2009) writes that ‘[I]t is always best to use people’s real names and details where possible, as long as permission has been granted’ (2009, p. 62), I felt it would be best to disguise the identities of employees by referring to them using job titles in place of names, and if this were not possible or too confusing using just an initial. I suggested this to the Director and Human Resources Manager and they agreed. A formal ‘Mutual Non-Disclosure’ agreement was signed by the Human Resources Manager on behalf of The Hotels as ‘the supplier’ and myself on 6th July 2011; a copy of this can be viewed at Appendix 4.

I also created a ‘Consent Form’ that each person I spoke with, shadowed or interviewed was asked to read and invited to sign giving their agreement. Items on this form included the theme of the inquiry, and it stated that the interview or discussion would be recorded and provided an opportunity for the respondent to ask for any recording device used to be switched off at any time. It also stated how the information would be used. By providing respondents’ agreement to contribute and answer questions, it was understood the details I gathered may be used in my report and/or may be published. This is an important factor illustrated by an example cited
in Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) where a Charitable Trust denied a researcher publication rights following his study (2008, p. 136). A further clause stated that I would make every effort to protect the respondent’s identity. A copy of this form can be viewed at Appendix 5.

This documentation was drawn up in accordance with the University of Exeter Ethics Committee guidelines, and was viewed and approved by a member of the University of Exeter Legal department. The documentation also complies with the British Sociological Association guidelines.

As I gathered data and made notes in the field of inquiry I kept these notes close to hand at all times, often retreating to the privacy of my car to record or jot down detail. These field notes have not been disclosed or shared, and all transcriptions have been carried out privately, off-site.

3.4.4 Collection, management and analysis of data

The period of my data collection spans from 4th November 2009 – 8th October 2012; more precise details of dates and time spent and with whom are provided at Appendix 6. I have transcribed meetings and conversations with thirty people working for or with The Hotels in a variety of capacities and roles. These include, but do not specifically focus on, directors and senior managers, acknowledging aspects of leadership taking place throughout the business (Ford, 2010). My exposure to the business, in addition to one-to-one conversations, included shadowing activities, a six-hour shift working in the hotel bar, and two full days facilitating staff and management team events, for which I also have extensive field notes. I attended daily meetings on six occasions, heads of department meetings for both hotels and purchasing meetings with two suppliers on three occasions. I took meals in both staff canteens and hotel restaurants. Overall, I have approximately one hundred and sixty hours of contact time recorded as field notes and interviews. I have also taken photographs as these can help to convey further detail and understanding of the site (Yin, 2009, p.110); a selection of these are attached as appended items at Appendices 2, 7 and 9 and are referred to where they help to illustrate aspects of the text. In addition, I have email exchanges, guest feedback from Trip Advisor, supplier
information and press articles, hotel brochures, policy and procedure documentation and general literature including website content.

I have retained transcribed field note data systematically in chronological order, making this large amount of paperwork ‘readily retrievable’, as Yin (2009, p. 120) recommends. Retrieval of specific transcripts was aided by my keeping a list of dates when interviews, meetings and shadowing activities took place (see Appendix 6); these could then be cross-referenced to my filed field note data. Keeping data in chronological order also enabled me to follow through issues that arose and developed over time, making it easier to ‘find specific detail … and to see the emerging patterns in the information’ (Van der Waal, 2009, p. 35). A separate file houses hotel documentation bearing details that would enable the business to be recognised, these include policies, various internal memos and advertising material.

In beginning the process of data analysis and the drawing out of themes from the 'wondrous volume' (Brewer, 2000, p. 109) of data collected, the first step, as suggested by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), is to become familiar with the data. I found that in personally transcribing the recorded field notes, this aided my familiarisation with the content, albeit this was a time-consuming and arduous process for someone with limited audio typing skills! Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) acknowledge the amount of data at this point can seem overwhelming and that trying to ‘make sense of it seems an impossible task’ (2008: 178). I re-read the transcripts and listened to the recordings several times over, checking my typing accuracy, the importance of which Van Maanen (1979, p. 542) emphasises to aid accurate understanding of the issues. By reflecting on the questions that initially prompted the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 178), considering insights formed during data collection, listening to recordings and reading the transcripts, I was able to begin to identify a number of recurring patterns of speech, behaviour and comments made by people as they undertook their various duties. Aronson (1994) and Brewer (2000) describe this approach of drawing out repeated patterns of behaviour as a ‘thematic’ approach to analysis.

Early noticeable patterns emerged around the use of language, metaphors from nature, and storytelling similarly used either to illustrate a situation metaphorically, as in the ‘family tree’ or ‘starfish story’, or by way of an explanation of how things are done at The Hotels – for example, the telling of the ‘family history’ and the values placed on ‘home grown food’ and not being ‘wasteful’. The process of identifying
themes and patterns was significantly aided by regularly presenting my progress to fellow students, testing out my ideas, and making more formal presentations as part of the process of being a postgraduate research student. Critical feedback enabled me to question the themes I was pulling out and reconsider, for example, the influence of ‘family history’, probably better described as the influence of ‘family values’.

I experienced conceptualisation as an emergent process. The practical research in the field was ongoing over time, accompanied by the typing up of notes and reading the literature. These aspects of my inquiry were not mutually exclusive activities. As such, I found I was able to conceptualise, much as Van Maanen (1979) suggests, by identifying and using second order concepts or theories to make sense of, organise and explain the first order facts that I was witnessing going on at The Hotels.

One of the first conceptual understandings I identified was the similarity between problematic decision-making processes at The Hotels as a result of their efforts to work more ‘sustainably’ and the concept of ‘wicked problems’ as described by Rittel and Weber (1973). I pulled examples from the data of various decision-making situations that I had witnessed or that had been explained to me, and I was able to notice further patterns that surrounded their resolution. People admitted to ‘not knowing an answer’ and created ‘space’ for groups of people to come together to share ideas and perspectives about the issues of concern. Conceptually, these behaviours aligned with Weick’s (2009) ‘legitimacy of doubt’ (2009, p. 263) as a sign of ‘strong leadership’ (p. 263) and Ladkin’s (2010) notion of making space as a ‘key leadership activity’ (2010, p. 115).

In addition to initially feeling overwhelmed by the amount of transcribed data, I also experienced a stage in the process where I felt I had too many concepts, all of which helped to make sense of the data in one form or another. Again, I found the act of tidying my findings into some presentable form, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) advocate, trying out my ideas on others (2008, p. 179) and the process of writing up the Discussion chapter all helped to sharpen my use of second order concepts. Through this emergent and iterative process I was gradually able to conceptualise a clear leadership process that is regularly taking place at The Hotels, one that enables them to work in ways to minimise their ecological impact, but more of that to follow later in the telling.
3.4.5 Summary

I set out in this section to provide a situated account, explaining how the research was undertaken from first encounters, gaining access, forming and nurturing relationships. I have provided a weave of practical experience and theory to illustrate my recognition and understanding of theoretical concepts in practice. In so doing, along with the detailed ethnography that follows in Chapter Four, I hope to have conveyed to the reader an impression of my having actually ‘been there’ (Van Maanen, 2011a, p. 47). I have described the techniques I employed to ensure my work is ethically sound, and how I collected, managed and analysed data over a period of approximately three years to address the questions posed: ‘What is going on here? How does leadership enable this business to minimise its ecological impact?’

In the final part of this chapter, entitled ‘Contribution to knowledge’, I outline the measures by which my work can be assessed as making a valuable and original contribution to knowledge in the domain of leadership and sustainability.
3.5 Contribution to knowledge

In this final section of the chapter I begin by explaining how the four criteria applied in conventional positivist social science studies – internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 186) – are not appropriate measures by which to assess an ethnographic study (Yin, 2009). I then move on to explain how, instead, the three dimensions of ‘convincingness’, authenticity, plausibility, and criticality, as set out by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), are applied to demonstrate how my work makes a valuable and original contribution to knowledge building in the domain of leadership and sustainability.

3.5.1 Validity, reliability and objectivity

The results of positivist research are assessed by the extent to which they reflect reality with respect to their validity, reliability and objectivity. Brewer (2000), Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), Denzin and Lincoln (1998) and Yin (2009) refer to the importance of both internal and external validity. Internal validity ‘requires the elimination of plausible alternative explanations’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 87) and external validity requires generalisability or ‘the degree to which findings can be generalized to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 186). This study is specifically set in one organisation; as an ethnographic case study, the context is specific to that setting and does not imply transferability or generalisability.

Yin (2009) explains how ‘internal validity is mainly a concern for explanatory case studies’ (2009, p. 42) where the researcher is attempting to prove a causal relationship between two factors. If, as Yin (2009) points out, a third factor unknown to the researcher has influenced a situation, this can be seen as a threat to internal validity. Interestingly, I notice the factors cited as ‘threats’ to validity appear to be the requirements for an interpretive study: context, historical setting, the uniqueness of the group of people chosen (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) states the test of internal validity is not appropriate for a descriptive study such as this, as, although I am looking for relational issues between factors, I am not seeking to suggest that x causes y. Instead, this study is asking what might be the
implications of making efforts to do x? Inviting rather than eliminating alternative explanations, an interpretive study invites options and alternatives to be explored.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggest ‘trustworthiness’ has been argued by many researchers to be ‘a more appropriate word to use’ (1998, p. 287) than validity as it gives consideration to the credibility and plausibility of the researchers account and takes into consideration the influence of context (1998, p. 288). Locke (2011) states that validity is a concern in ethnographic work and should not be set aside; however, she argues ‘that validity is not the heart of the approach. Discovery is.’ (2011, p. 640).

A test of reliability is described by Yin (2009) where a piece of research can be undertaken by another researcher, ‘conducting the same study all over again and arrive at the same findings and conclusions’ (229, p. 45). In sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 I referred to authors (Reeves Sanday, 1979; Tedlock, 2005; Van Maanen, 1979; Watson, 2012) who describe how in an ethnographic study the researcher becomes part of the process. The lens through which I observe the setting is a complex mix of my previous experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) such that I may notice certain instances and consider certain questions that others may not. In this way, another person coming to the same situation might notice other factors that had not stood out for me, leading to slightly different findings and conclusions.

Objectivity is ‘the extent to which findings are free from bias’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 186) and they describe the struggle experienced by interpretivist researchers attempting to balance a ‘first person, subjective experience’ (1998, p. 223) with a need to ‘disengage … and objectify it’ (p. 223). I reflect how this struggle resonates with other aspects of balance associated with an ethnographic undertaking referred to earlier in this chapter, such as that of maintaining one’s ability to remain ‘as a fly on the wall’ as described by Fine et al. (2009) and the ‘complete commitment’, ‘full immersion’ role of the researcher referred to by Alvesson and Deetz (2000), Easterby-Smith et al. (2002, 2008) and Reeves Sanday (1979).

3.5.2 Authenticity, Plausibility and Criticality

Golden-Biddel and Locke (1993) argue that the generally accepted standards associated with assessing the ‘convincingness’ of positivist, quantitative studies
become increasingly difficult to apply’ (1993, p. 595) to interpretive ethnographic studies. Primarily, they describe how the facts are not ‘out there’ (1993, p. 596) to be understood by the reader of the story or text produced by the ethnographer; instead, the story is open to interpretation by the reader, fitting with a socially constructed view of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) advocate the researcher demonstrates ‘authenticity, plausibility and criticality’ (1993, p. 597) in writing their ethnographic study to demonstrate ‘convincingness’ to the reader. Van Maanen (2011a) suggests the field worker has the expertise because he or she is the only one who has actually ‘been there’ (2011a, p. 47). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) suggest ways to demonstrate one’s authenticity – of having actually ‘been there’ – include the researcher showing familiarity with terminology and language used by members of the organisation and intimacy with daily life.

My familiarity with terminology and language used at The Hotels is evidenced in my recorded and transcribed conversations. For example, I have had to ask for clarification of spelling and meaning of terms used throughout the hotels, such as on 13th December 2011 when talking with the Executive Chef at Beach Cliff about a process he refers to, and he explains:

‘Sous-vide’ first came around when they used to cook items in waxed muslin cloth in the early 1900s. It was the way to stop wastage of any items …

The spa treatments are described on the hotel website as ‘Ayurvedic’ and this is a term regularly used in The Hotels’s spas, as the Spa Manager explains:

‘Ayurvedic’ medicine is one of the oldest surviving holistic systems dating back 4,000 years, combining health, medicine and spiritual awareness.

The 10.30am daily morning meeting, held in the staff room at Golden Sands, is referred to as ‘Morning Prayers’. When I questioned the reason for this it was explained to me that people respond to a higher ‘calling’ to go to the meeting. (Albeit that no-one calls anyone, or checks who’s actually there!) Furthermore an agenda item at this meeting is entitled ‘Escapees’. When questioned I was advised by the House Manger in an email that:

An escapee is someone who wants to get away from it all and has booked into the spa as an “escapee” i.e. leaving everything behind and going on a
In terms of my intimacy with daily life, in my field notes from January 25th 2012 I noted how I became a more familiar face around the hotels and more comfortable ‘staff side’, behind the scenes, rather than ‘front of house’, able to use the staff facilities, such as making myself a cup of tea in the kitchen.

Plausibility asks if the story makes sense to the reader and in that regard Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) cite two interconnecting components: ‘To make sense the work must deal with common concerns’ (1993, p. 600) whilst at the same time making a distinctive contribution to research. My study observes the daily activities of running a hotel business, purchasing everyday products such as toilet rolls, tissues, soap, tea, and foodstuffs in an attempt to ascertain how these purchases and other decisions can be made in ways that promote sustainability by minimising the ecological impact of the business, and in particular the role of leadership in this regard. These decisions tie in to world concerns about waste, scarcity of resources, deforestation, climate change and pollution to which I hope the reader can also relate. Academically, these issues are conceptually framed as aspects of leadership and sense making (Pye, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005) and aim to contribute to closing a gap in the leadership and organisation literature by describing how managers and leaders of small and medium sized businesses embed and embody concepts and theories associated with sustainability in practice.

Golden-Biddel and Locke (1993) describe a measure of criticality: ‘to actively probe readers to reconsider their taken-for granted ideas and beliefs’ (1993, p. 600), encouraging people to stop and reflect for a moment. I hope to achieve this on two levels:

First, by describing ways in which The Hotels challenges ‘taken for granteds’ in its practice. For example, Golden Sands has no reception desk in its entrance hall, and there are no tea and coffee making facilities in the bedrooms, some of which have the bath and shower in the same space as the bed with no dividing wall. Shampoo at Beach Cliff is in the form of a tablet of soap; chefs have discussed reducing the protein (meat) content served; and there are no set times for meals so that families can eat at whatever time of day suits them. The Hotels considers all of these approaches to be part of their ‘daring to be different’ philosophy, challenging
traditional thinking and expectations, encouraging people to stop and think about their expectations and try something different for a change; a philosophy to educate and enlighten.

Second, in my writing, I hope the conceptual framework I have outlined above – leadership as a shared undertaking and process of sense making and the appreciation of reality as a social constructed phenomenon, as in my ‘here’ is your ‘there’ – will challenge my readers’ thinking and consideration of multiple perspectives. To date, society has dealt with the issues posed by sustainability using our rational, ‘apparently value-free scientific knowing’ (Marshall et al., 2011, p. 14), counting, measuring, analysing, which has, as Marshall et al. (2011) acknowledge, provided many benefits. However, I have argued that this way of thinking does not enable us to connect with the earth’s natural systems and maintains an anthropocentric agenda.

As I pointed out in my Literature Review, I perceive a ‘gap’ in the literature describing ‘how’ managers and leaders of small and medium sized businesses embed and embody concepts and theories associated with sustainability in their daily work practices. The identification of such a gap warrants a ‘theory-building’ rather than ‘theory-testing’ study (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 26) to address the questions posed. Undertaking an ethnographic case study in a small to medium sized hotel business in the south west of England I hope to build theory from empirical evidence.
3.6 Summary

This chapter began by stating the purpose of this inquiry: to gain better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving sustainable business. I inquire how ‘sustainability’ might be more embedded in the day-to-day doings of running a business, beyond the rhetoric of strategic plans, vacuous mission statements and technological fixes, asking how can we actually influence behaviour and embody sustainable business practice?

In the Introduction I briefly explained how data was gathered by undertaking an ethnographic study in one organisation, and provided a short description of ‘The Hotels’, highlighting one of the reasons for my choice being their ‘exemplary’ or ‘commendable’ sustainable credentials, having regularly won a number of national and international awards, year-on-year.

This chapter was then structured in three parts. The first set out my epistemological assumptions, and explained why I have chosen an interpretivist ethnographic approach. A discussion about ethnography followed, acknowledging the origins and uses of ethnography over time.

Delving into the abundant and growing literature evidenced by the launch of this discipline’s own journal in 2012, I have described how an ethnographic undertaking is much more than just the ‘prolonged period of deep hanging out’ to which Evans (2012) refers. To achieve this, I described techniques and approaches with examples drawn from existing studies by way of illustration. There is, as Stager Jaques (2006) suggests, a ‘virtual library of methods and methodology books’, and yet what exactly constitutes a ‘structured approach’ to ethnography seems to be far from a ‘concrete standard’ (2006, p. 45). I concluded this part of the chapter by addressing questions that remain about ethnography being referred to as a method, methodology or paradigm, establishing that it can be referred to by any and all of those terms and also as a ‘genre of writing’ (Watson, 2012) and a ‘sensibility’ that informs the method and methodology, ‘intertwined with a particular kind of voice’ (Yanow, 2012, p. 16).

I know there is ‘no magic number’ (Pratt, 2009) of interviews or observations or length of time spent to determine the quality of an ethnographic study, as these do not guarantee interesting incidents and valuable data to support the questions being asked.
My impression from reading the literature is that authors, rather than providing ‘concrete standards’ as Stager Jaques (2006) suggests, provide more of a shaded canvas upon which the novice researcher, such as myself, paints her own picture, or more aptly, tells her own story – hopefully convincingly (Van Maanen, 1979).

I have described the techniques I employed to ensure my work is ethically sound, and how I collected, managed and analysed data over a period of approximately three years to address the questions posed: ‘What is going on here? How does leadership enable this business to minimise it’s ecological impact?’

In the next section of this chapter, entitled ‘A study of The Hotels’, I created a weave of theory with practical illustrations taken from my own ethnographic undertaking. I described my ‘First Encounters’ (Schwartzman, 1993; O’Reilly, 2009), and the ways in which I negotiated access by initially identifying a ‘close contact’ (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). I then set out the specific techniques I employed to manage and analyse data, interpreting and making sense of the material by adopting a thematic approach.

In the final part of this chapter, entitled ‘Contribution to Knowledge’, I outlined the measures by which my work can be assessed as making a valuable and original contribution to knowledge in the domain of organisation studies, leadership and sustainability. I have explained how my work meets the three dimensions of ‘convincingness’, as set out by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), of authenticity, plausibility, and criticality to demonstrate a valuable and original contribution to knowledge building.

My work is ‘authentic’, in that I have spent time ‘being there’ (Van Maanen, 2011a) and can show familiarity with the everyday life and language of the hotels. My story is ‘plausible’, making connections between day-to-day decisions and the growing concerns of wider global issues shown in comments made and actions taken by the management team at The Hotels. I am not claiming ‘generalisability’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Yin, 2009) to prove validity. I hope instead that my investigation will provide illustrative examples in one situation that can be considered thought provoking, thereby challenging ‘taken for granted’ ways of doing business in other contexts.
The purpose of my study is to inform both leadership practice and theory and to contribute to a growing body of knowledge in the domain of organisation studies, leadership and sustainability, as I perceive a ‘gap’ in the literature describing ‘how’ managers and leaders of small and medium sized businesses put the concepts and theories associated with sustainability into practice. The identification of such a gap warrants a ‘theory-building’ rather than ‘theory-testing’ study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Conceptually, my study makes an original contribution, making sense of the wicked challenges posed by efforts to work more sustainability in the context of reality as a socially constructed phenomenon.
4. Analysis

I'm just sitting watching flowers in the rain

Feel the power of the rain

Making the garden grow.

I'm just sitting watching flowers in the rain

Feel the power of the rain

Keeping me cool.

The Move, Flowers in the Rain. 1967
4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter, ‘Research Methodology’, set out the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying this study, and described an ethnographic fieldwork undertaking in general detail. Humphries and Watson (2009) suggest it is helpful to separate out the ‘intensive fieldwork that ethnographers need to do from the written ethnographic account that follows from it’ (italics in original, 2009, p. 40). They concur with Geertz (1973) when they explain how the written account is actually the ethnography, providing details of the “cultural whole” of the business’ (Humphries and Watson, 2009, p. 41), setting aspects of life in the community under study in context. This chapter, then, rather than carrying the title of Analysis, is more accurately, according to Humphries and Watson (2009), entitled the Ethnography. However, these authors make one proviso; in order to use this label the writing should be characteristic of ‘thick description’. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2009) refer to ‘thick description’ as:

... the detailed descriptions of settings, events, activities, interactions, persons, language, and so forth, in such a way as to explicate the contents of the ‘lived experiences’ of the people studied. The wealth of detail conveys a sub text: that the researcher was actually present on site as an eye witness – in the originating case of ethnography, the ‘being there’ that is distinctive of such research. (2009, p. 59)

This literary style most notably demonstrated by and attributed to Geertz (1973) and his account of a Balinese Cockfight (1973, p. 412) is characterised by ‘rich story telling’ setting the context, providing the backcloth against which one develops an ‘understanding of what is going on’ (Neyland, 2008, p. 17). Geertz (1973) explains how ‘thick description’ requires ‘Thinking and Reflecting’ (1973, p. 6) on the part of the observer to determine what might be happening in any given situation. He refers to the ‘piled up structures of inference and implications through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way’ (1973, p. 7).

My account may not live up to the intricate level of detail provided by Geertz’s Balinese Cockfight, nevertheless I do hope to differentiate it from the ‘quick description’ studies much criticised by Bate (1997) and caricatured as ‘jet plane’
(1997, p. 1150) rather than ‘tooth brush’ ethnographies, a differentiation attributed to
the time spent by the researcher in the field. The former is often associated with
some management and organisation studies (Neyland, 2008, p. 18) and considered
by Bate (1997) as being ‘rather half-hearted’ (1997, p. 1150).

Humphries and Watson (2009) identify four ‘ideal type forms of ethnographic writing’
(2009, p. 43). Regardless of this, they recommend the new ethnographer avoid ‘any
rigid set of procedures’ (2009, p. 42) and find their own way to practise the craft,
albeit taking guidance from those who have more experience in this art. Neyland
(2008) explains ethnography requires the author to use a reflexive process to make
sense of the world, creating a subjective version of reality, reflecting upon how, as
the author, one is ‘involved in the production of the ethnographic text’ (2008, p. 53).

The style crafted here attempts to emulate ‘Enhanced Ethnography’ as described by
Humphrey and Watson (2009, p. 43), weaving together extracts from field notes,
documentation, websites and transcripts of conversations, aligning empirical data
with excerpts from existing theory. Contrary to the suggestion by O'Reilly (2009) that
such a layered mix of ‘disparate passages of data … paint a rather abstract theory
rather than tell a coherent story’ (2009, p. 170), the weave of data here seeks to
provide the ‘thick description’ to which Geertz (1973) refers, ‘a multiplicity of complex
conceptual structures … superimposed upon or knotted into one another’ (1973, p.
10). The aim is to paint a detailed image, to give the reader a feeling of actually
‘being there’ (Humphreys and Watson, 2009; Van Maanen, 2011b; Watson, 2011),
enabling an appreciation of how things work in the day-to-day doing of leadership for
sustainability within the domain of one organisation.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state it is not possible to write an ethnographic text that
does not contain traces of the author: ‘All texts are personal statements’ (1998, p.
413). I am aware that, when embarking upon this research undertaking, my thinking
and approach was influenced by my reading sustainability and leadership literature. I
identified a number of recurring themes, summarised above at the close of Chapter
2, and reiterated in more detail here:

1. An argument central to this study is that in transition to popular use in
contemporary society the concept of sustainability has lost contact with its
etymological roots, grounded in ecological systems. Anthropocentric linear systems
described as ‘take make waste’ are out of kilter with natural cyclical ‘borrow use
return’ systems – there is no waste in nature and no ‘away’ in our shared world. There are calls in the literature for approaches ‘beyond technical fixes’ creating an ‘industrial–ecological tension’ subsumed by the dominant system of neoclassical economics fixated on continuous growth, of which there are limits in nature.

2. The overriding assumption that nature is a resource which is to be mastered, controlled, regulated or exploited for human gain in order to provide for the continued proliferation of social needs and wants.

3. Modern society’s ad-hoc approach to problem solving is not commensurate with the cyclical and relational patterns of nature.

4. Sustainability and Leadership are described in the literature as difficult and contested terms (Marshall et al. 2011; Ladkin, 2008). Authors suggest the term sustainability is becoming a cliché (Lélé, 1991) and is used in a contradictory way (Hutchinson, 1995).

5. Increasing ecological concerns encourage passionate environmentalists to prescribe solutions that emulate nature. Whilst these are appealing ideals in principle, there is a rhetorical quality to some of these claims, which seem to dissipate when introduced to current organisational and economic conventions (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2006). As such, a ‘how’ gap exists between those who advocate the rhetorical ideals of sustainability and managers and leaders of organisations who have to achieve sustainability.

6. There continues to be a focus on technological solutions to improve resource use and make efficiency savings. Authors such as Lozano (2012) suggest comparatively few organisations have focused on softer behavioural approaches to implement philosophies in managerial and leadership practice. The latter ask ‘how’ might we approach an issue and be different by taking an ecological perspective, as Bateson (2000) previously proposed. As a result, our current ways of responding to challenges in our society remain in lifestyle behaviours that consume more and adopt ad hoc, ill-thought-out short-term solutions that do not account for the multiple connected links between our actions and our fragile ecosystem.

Collectively, these themes provide with me a sense of disconnection between techno-centric and eco-centric discourses and set me on a mission to investigate
embodied and embedded behaviours that may contribute to more sustainable business practice.

This Ethnographic account tells the story of how I first encountered The Hotels ‘quite by chance’, presenting them as an ideal setting in which to undertake this inquiry. I introduce the company, describe my first impressions and recount a short family history illustrating the impact of family values on current business practice.

The main body of this chapter recounts ‘first-order’ (Van Maanen, 1979) data, details and information I heard, observed and recorded as people went about their everyday work providing various aspects of hotel services whilst at the same time considering the values and philosophy of the business ‘to minimise their negative impact on the planet’ (hotel website).

The paragraph subheadings used here are a first attempt to analyse, organise and make sense of first order data by the identification of themes. The subheadings are populated by examples pulled like separate strands here and there from extensive field notes, transcripts, observations and other documentation. In some ways these themes create false demarcations as these ‘bits and pieces’ of data could be classified under multiple headings simultaneously. In the messiness of day-to-day life these themes weave and blend together as events play out over time.

A summary draws the chapter to a close, reflecting on the main themes identified by way of preparation for taking these themes forward for further discussion and conceptualisation in the Discussion chapter that follows.
4.2 Ethnography

4.2.1 Entering the field

I first encountered ‘The Hotels’, as I refer to the business, quite by chance when attending a conference in November 2009. Early field notes remind me how my attention was quickly drawn to the grassed over flat roof spaces, Fairtrade tea and coffee, and eco-friendly pens and pencils made from recycled CD cases. Beyond these technocentric objects, my attention was also drawn to the literature in the conference room. The conference room brochure outlined how the people working for this hotel business were operating ‘with care for their local environment’ and promoting ‘101 ways to be sustainable’. The hotel brochure, printed on ‘100% post consumer recycled paper using vegetable based inks’, also informs the reader very quietly in pale small print inside the back page: ‘The CO₂ value of this brochure, after minimising all environmental aspects of its production, is 1.55 grams CO₂.’ The brochure itself feels chunky to hold, measuring approximately 6x8 inches. It is colourful, with simple ‘child like’ drawings of seaside-related paraphernalia, as well as photographs of local scenes. It describes The Hotels’s Food Philosophy to ‘Feed the Soul’ and encourages the prospective guest to ‘Inhale’, ‘Live life to the full, to make life taste even more delicious’, ‘Breathe easy’ and ‘Dare to be different’. I felt the language had a particular style, familial and emotive, and this captured my interest to know more about the business behind the promotional material.

Neyland (2008) recognises:

An important first consideration for ethnographers can be the moment when they first encounter an organization. In selecting an appropriate location for
addressing their research question, ethnographers may come into contact with an organization's advertising, branding or other promotional material … this can be the start of the ethnography. The very first contact with a form of the organization can tell the ethnographer something about the identity the organization wishes to portray. (2008, p. 76)

In line with Neyland’s remarks, my observations on this first visit indicated how this could indeed be a very ‘appropriate’ organisation in which to undertake a study of leadership for sustainability. I immediately had the impression of a hotel ‘quietly’ promoting sustainability as ‘the way things are done around here’.

Before I left that day I had made myself known to the Sustainability Manager, registering my research interest to explore leadership for sustainability. She was very keen to talk and impress upon me the things the business was doing to be sustainable. She spoke of the grey water systems, the solar panels heating the swimming pool, the recycling of ‘waste’ energy from the backs of fridges used to heat water. In addition, she also proudly described how for instance, when clearing the site for the new building, the reptiles living in the old stone walls had been carefully collected up and re-homed in one of the director’s gardens. I could only wonder if they are doing, as they say, these ‘101 things’ to be sustainable, how does leadership enable and support such activities?

The company, known here as ‘The Hotels’ for reasons of anonymity, is owned by three sisters and operates two luxury hotels that I shall refer to as the ‘Beach Cliff’ and ‘Golden Sands’. Both hotels are situated on the outskirts of a small seaside village popular with holidaymakers and surfers. The Beach Cliff is a 50 year old, family friendly hotel with 100 bedrooms, an indoor spa, swimming pools, and conference facilities. It occupies a windswept site high on the crest of a hill above the village. The sister hotel, Golden Sands, was designed and built more recently, opening to its first guests in 2009. This 37 bedroom hotel incorporates numerous sustainable design and build features, also has spa and pool facilities, and specifically caters for adults only, who may be accompanied by their dogs, but strictly no children. This building blends into the curve of the landscape halfway down the hillside, situated on a narrow road surrounded by residential dwellings. Both hotels have commanding and uninterrupted views of the bay and out to sea.
Between the two establishments, The Hotels have attained numerous national and international awards for sustainability (Appendix 1). Nevertheless, I set out to research in skeptical mood, wondering to what extent and how the statement on the hotel website – ‘we have a responsibility to minimise our negative impact on the planet’ – would be lived out in everyday business practice?

4.2.2 First impressions

Neyland (2008) recommends the ethnographer should observe ‘everything … nothing should be taken for granted … and assumed to be uninteresting’ (2008, p. 18). He suggests first impressions provide an opportunity for the unfamiliar to be interesting, noting that the longer one spends in the field, the more people and activities become familiar (p. 18).

As I walk across the windswept car park that dominates the front of the Beach Cliff hotel on my first official visit I notice the rows of ‘family size’ Volvos and Audis lined up in the car park and wonder how much it costs a family to stay here for half term? As a building, the Beach Cliff can best be described as utilitarian; with flat roofs, the white exterior is stained by the salty atmosphere, a row of metal framed uniform windows are dressed with net curtains, not particularly inspiring. The façade appears weatherbeaten and nothing out of the ordinary as a family seaside hotel, apart from the spectacular views, as it sits atop this exposed cliff top.

If the exterior was initially unpromising, once inside I felt the hotel oozed with warmth and welcome, deep pile carpets, lavender smelling – a little secret here … the housekeeper’s office is by the main doorway, she stores the soap supplies and the scent overwhelms her office and wafts through the reception hallway every time someone opens her office door!

I walk down the carpeted stairs and eventually discover a typically formal hotel reception with solid wooden counter. Lying open on the counter top is a folder packed with information about local walks, places to go, things for people of all ages to do and see. Display racks hanging on the white wall behind the reception desk are full of large size, colourful artistic postcards depicting local scenes around the coast, beach sand castles and seascape designs for both children and adults. This is overtly so much a ‘family friendly’ hotel, evidenced not least by the chunky wooden
toys that are scattered about the lounge area (Appendix 7) inviting play and a ‘ride on’ toy train and wooden giraffe standing in the corridor. Just an aside here, but on every subsequent visit my field notes record hearing children’s voices, parents carrying and herding children, counting the steps up and down the stairs, families with buckets and spades in hand, or mackintoshes on, children singing, crying, laughing, lots of noise. Once, on a particularly wet and windswept day, I found hoards of children crowded around specially erected bench tables in the lounge, making sweets with one of the hotel chefs overseeing and parents helping out.

There is something about the postcards, the artwork, the shoal of metallic mackerel on the wall as you walk in (Appendix 7), handmade ‘quirky’ jewellery, arts and crafts created from driftwood and natural resources, local pottery in the little shop. These artifacts all provide a sense of pride of place, being so representative of this particular county famous for its artwork and local craftsmanship.

I also notice how the place is ablaze with blocks of colour, in dramatic contrast to white painted brick walls are ruby reds, plum purples, heady turquoise, deep blues and sunny yellows. These colours announce the spacious, deep and comfy sofas arranged around the lounge; contrasting cushions mix up the colours like a giant patchwork quilt (Appendix 7). The Beach Cliff gives me the first impression of being solid, warm and friendly, it smells fresh and feels clean to touch. I later find out that the housekeeper here is very strict on hygiene and cleanliness, but more detail of that to come later in the telling. Wood fires stand waiting to be lit for chilly evenings, when its dark outside this place feels cozy and warm – as the wind whips up the sea and rain lashes the floor-to-ceiling windows, heavy curtains can be drawn to shut out the pitch black seascape and blustery weather.

First impressions of the sister hotel, Golden Sands, provided an interesting, somewhat stark contrast. The entrance driveway slopes down below road level to a small car park tucked around and under the backside of the building. There is not much to see of the hotel building from the front entrance; as the architect later explained to me, to make the hotel unobtrusive to local residences, it is built on five levels following the shape of the hillside down towards the beach. The shape of the building is therefore difficult to comprehend from the front, part clad with wood, a small window up high, the name of the hotel emblazoned in red scrawled across white walls. Red metal artwork stands to attention beside glass front doors, red
flowering plants in red pots stand in planters filled with two-tone grey pebbles arranged in a yin–yang symbol line the entrance hall.

As I walk through the hotel front door I enter a high-ceilinged, light-filled space with colourful sofas to one side. There is no reception desk apparent or sign indicating where one might find reception. No deep pile carpets here, the grey stone floor in the entrance continues in wood to meet a massive floor-to-ceiling window, a stunning vista of the bay dominates the scene in front of me. This spectacular view is framed by a sheet of copper outside as high as the building itself on the right hand wall, its rusty colouring reflected in a shallow pool of water formed on the roof of whatever is below. The pool of water makes an interesting illusion of the blue and white sky and seascape filling the whole space – wow, this view is breathtaking!

This hotel is intended ‘for grown-ups to eat, dream and play in peace’ (hotel website) – promoting itself as ‘adult friendly’ means that it does not permit children. The atmosphere here is very different from the Beach Cliff. Hushed, somehow more artistically and architecturally sophisticated, I notice this difference the moment I step inside, as my field notes record:

Unlike the sister hotel, there were no directional signs at all and I wonder where should I go? I put my bag down on a colourful sofa. It’s quiet, a few voices heard from some distant place, but no one immediately about. Not sure what to do here, I feel slightly anxious – should I go looking for someone? I can’t actually identify anyone who looks like a member of staff to ask, the people I do see are dressed very casually. Do I explore and poke my nose into an office area that looks like a place for staff to be? Or should I sit on the comfy sofa, and wait? Will anyone know I’m here? I stroll over to the window and absorb the spectacular scene of the beach and seascape to the horizon, I tell myself to relax and take some time to enjoy just being here, this is after all a holiday destination, albeit I am here on business with an appointment to meet!
On reflection, I can appreciate how my sense of security was challenged (Giddens, 1986, p. 282) here for a moment by the informality of the entrance to Golden Sands. This was not how I expected a hotel reception to be and it made me feel slightly uneasy; I wondered how guests reacted upon arrival? The lack of a formal reception has a potential to influence everyone entering this hotel. At a later stage I explore the thinking behind this influential design feature in depth with managers, staff and the architect; as a first encounter, it certainly made an impact on me, challenging my conventional expectations.

My first impression of Golden Sands is of light open airy space where expansive windows allow the outside inside at every opportunity, contrasting with darker ‘cave like’ corners, in places away from sources of natural light, such as the bar area on a balcony above the restaurant which gives the impression of being high up on a cliff above the sea. Mostly hard angular surfaces, the lack of carpets or thick curtains make for a more windswept feel, especially when looking out to sea, the exception being a library lounge tucked away with comfy sofas, carpets and an open fireplace. The contemporary works of local artists are exhibited throughout the building, sculptures, paintings, collages and pottery.

People appear relaxed, the atmosphere is calm and sedate, guests wander through casually dressed in bathrobes to and from the spa, catch the attention of staff, who deliver trays of tea and coffee or make arrangements, such as booking the hotel dog for a walk on the beach. An interesting contrast here compared to the Beach Cliff where the attention of adults is very much given over to the children and their needs, guests here seek their own needs and requirements being met, there is something of a self-indulgent air.

4.2.3 Identifying themes

The precise details of my ethnographic undertaking are set out in Chapter Three, amassing data over a period of one hundred and sixty hours spread over almost three years. Identifying themes from this mass of first order data I felt could be likened to untangling a mass of coloured threads. I knew I had to begin to answer the question, ‘what is going on here?’ What role is leadership playing in enabling The Hotels to be a successful business whilst at the same time paying attention to their
sustainability credentials? The threads of descriptive data that would enable me to make sense of the situation and conceptualise answers seemed at times to be completely knotted together. However, I reread and reflected on my field notes and identified a number of recurring themes represented by the section sub-headings below that might begin to make some sense of the situation. The following sections are populated by threads of data pulled from the pile, snipped off at varying lengths, short extracts from the tangle of data on my office floor. The themes overlap; in setting out these headings, I realise I have created false demarcations as the boundaries blur, the situations I observed are messy and the actions and behaviours do not neatly fall into clearly defined and independent categories. But as Weick et al. (2005) note, ‘sensemaking occurs when a flow of organizational circumstances is turned into words and salient categories’ (2005, p. 409). People at The Hotels tell stories using language that reflects their values, some of which may push boundaries and dare to be different. My selections have left other themes and threads unexplored that others may have noticed as being more significant. I have scooped up the threads that were most noticeable for me given the considerations that influenced my thinking, falling from the pages of the literature review and set out at the beginning of this chapter. I have not focused on the technological aspects of sustainability evident at The Hotels, almost accepting these as a given. Instead, I have noticed behaviours that promote cyclical patterns that are more commensurate with natural systems. I have explored how sustainability is embedded and embodied by people working at The Hotels, and noticed ways of being and doing that enable this.

I begin by recognising the prolific use of stories and metaphor to describe ‘how’ things are done at The Hotels, the influence of the philosophy and values, referring to people and events in the past and how they shape present day behaviours.

4.2.4 The Role of Storytelling

On my first ‘official’ visit to The Hotels as an ethnographer, on 23rd February 2011, the Sustainability Manager told me two short stories using two powerful metaphors for the way this company does business. The first story involved an imaginary walk along a beach strewn with hundreds of stranded starfish. As you walk along, she said, you throw as many starfish back into the sea as you can, you can’t save them
all, and every starfish thrown back has another chance of life. She explains this represents the Hotels’ acceptance that they cannot do everything sustainably and she uses this story to convey this message to all new staff as part of their induction.

The second story uses a tree as a metaphor. The parents of the present owners, the founders of the business, are represented by the roots and early growth of the tree and now the staff are the branches. On another occasion, one of the directors referred to this family tree, laughingly describing herself as an acorn, buried underground with no idea of what was going on up in the canopy above her head! (13th June 2011).

The family history of The Hotels was recounted to me on several occasions, from a variety of perspectives. This illustrated to me the extent to which The Hotels’s family story has significance amongst the staff, influencing present values and behaviours. As Gabriel (2000) notes, ‘stories are attempts to humanize organizations’ (2000, p. 57). The telling of the family history at The Hotels seemed to suggest the feeling of family extending beyond immediate relations, incorporating staff into the family fold.

In the Literature Review I referred to the work of the philosopher Gregory Bateson (cited in Capra, 1989). Capra (1989) recounts how Bateson suggested that, in order to address environmental issues, we would do well to shift our thinking from a focus on objects to one of relationships, as he believed relationships to be ‘the essence of the living world’ (1989, p. 80). By adopting a language of metaphor and storytelling, he believed, we would be better equipped to ‘speak nature’s language’ (p. 80). There has been a tendency in contemporary organisations to refer to mechanical and military metaphors to shape our thinking and understanding about the structure, relationships and nature of organisational forms. I felt it was significantly different and worthy of note that people at The Hotels made use of language and images from nature in their storytelling.

Parry and Hansen (2007) consider ‘organizational stories as leadership’ (2007, p. 282) and contend people will follow a story, more than the person telling it, especially if the story is memorable and has impact. They suggest ‘[o]rganizations have, tell, and are stories’ (2007, p. 283) citing models of behaviour as well as providing entertainment value. According to Parry and Hansen (2007), stories reflect norms and values and are capable of provoking thought and promoting action, providing a process for making meaning and sense-making. Boje (1991) emphasises the
importance of storytelling even more strongly, stating: ‘In organizations, storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders’ (1991, p. 106).

Symbolic storytelling is also evident throughout The Hotels: the home made beverages on the lounge bar and locally produced jams at the breakfast table invite conversation about where the fruits were picked and who engaged in this process. An explanation and illustration of the materials to be used in the refurbishment of the dining room at the Beach Cliff was displayed in reception during the rebuild to inform and educate both staff and guests of their source, explaining the particular properties that had influenced the selection of each product. The artwork too has stories to tell, as illustrated by the example in Appendix 9.

Ploughing through first order data, I realise staff members regularly recounted stories to me of their own experiences working at The Hotels and knowing the family. Their stories explain how the values of working sustainably make sense for them. Individuals interpret The Hotels values according to where they happen to be situated in the business, and examples of these stories are included in section 4.2.5 below, entitled ‘Living The Good Life’. But first, more of story of The Hotels and its founding family …

4.2.5 Living ‘The Good Life’

In the 1960s, the Beach Cliff hotel already had turf roofs, a spa heated by solar panels and the family grew vegetables to supply their hotel kitchen. This was not because it was considered ‘sustainable’; the concept was not on the public agenda until thirty years later. This was more because, as two of the owners explain, their father was an architect, a keen gardener, and had a love of good food. So, a green roof was aesthetically pleasing to him and he knew about insulating; he also enjoyed growing and producing foods he was not able to buy easily locally.

One of the owners reflects:

I don’t think he thought ‘I’m going to save the world’ he thought ‘this looks good and it works’. (27th Sept. 2011)

Her sibling recounts:
We had a market garden so he used to grow a lot of vegetables for the hotel … back in the 60s you couldn’t get red peppers, aubergines and basil and things in (County). Because he was an engineer he designed all the greenhouses to work from solar energy, but just using the simplest things … he would find oil drums that people had thrown away, paint them matt black, fill them with water and they would absorb heat all day and give it out at night which allowed him to grow tomatoes without using any electricity, because he didn’t have much money . . . . (13th June 2011)

Today, these actions are identified as ‘sustainable practices’ or labelled ‘eco friendly’, back then, as she recounts her parents just ‘did a bit of the “Good Life” … Richard Bryers and Felicity Kendal thing … to get better flavours’. Her sister explains their intentions were more about getting a better quality product than about being environmentally minded: ‘making our own bread meant we could cut out the rubbish chemicals … you can taste the difference’ (27th Sept. 2011).

Their story continues…

we had solar panels on the roof of the house, back since I was born really … we used to go on wild foraging food walks and he was always trying to make us like nettle soup [we share laughter] and we used to … for pocket money pick muscles for the hotel, and its always been like that, I think the values come through really, it’s all part of that … he was always into mending things, recycling things and never throwing anything away … I always used to spend a lot of time in his workshop doing much the same. (13th June 2011)

This extract illustrates how being connected with the natural environment has not been an ‘add on’ but an integral part of family life for these people. This is how the siblings learnt to behave, their ‘conventional way of being’ reinforced, as one sister explained, by their education at Dartington Hall School in Devon, where the philosophy emphasised a process of practical learning and ‘closeness to nature’. (Kidel, 1990, p. 13).

The family situation of The Hotels’s owners is complex. There are relational connections to a number of hotels across County. Another non-family member director refers to a book written by an aunt of the sisters telling the story of the .

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To ensure anonymity of place and people the names in direct quotes have been substituted.
extended family and their involvement and influence in the hotel and hospitality business around the county. Apparently, some years ago a split in the family between those who wanted an ‘exciting business risk’ and those who preferred to opt for a ‘quieter life’ divided up the parents' original business. ‘The Hotels’ as a company was created around the time of building Golden Sands to create an overarching company name and brand. Three siblings remain as Directors of The Hotels, sharing their common bond of wanting to do something ‘daringly different’. One sister is the General Manager of the Beach Cliff, another contributes as a design consultant, and the third oversees the marketing side of the business. All three are renowned for having copious quantities of new ideas, wanting to push traditional boundaries, and trying things that are a little different in some way. They live by this shared family motto – to ‘dare and do things differently’ – that is now part of The Hotels’s philosophy (Appendix 8).

One of them explains:

_I think our business model was quite risky actually and we certainly don’t have the luxury of not having these businesses pay for themselves. [Golden Sands] cost £12 million … that’s a very large bank loan … it’s a commercial business, it’s not a charity … This has actually really got to work and keep everyone employed and provide them with year round employment. There are some things we do where we choose to earn a little less … to get other benefits, so if you want to look at the business model … We choose to open in the winter because it allows us to employ people year round and give them a lot of training in the winter, it would save a us a bit of money if we shut, but we would not have such good staff, we would not keep our staff, we would not have such well trained staff They would not be so satisfied with their lifestyle, because they are living in (County) and wanting to be here … We sacrifice short term gains for long term benefits, part of the benefits for our lives are that we have a fantastically loyal team who tend to stay with us and that’s worth more to us as individuals as it reduces the stress of our lives, than a few pounds saved here and there because we’re taking short term decisions – does that make sense? (13th June 2011)_

The family history and values have a significant influence on everyday activities. On reflection, I realise I witnessed evidence of these values in action on my very first
visit. As I was shown around on that first day by the Sustainability Manager we met a Chef in the car park who proudly presented his hands full of locally foraged mushrooms, picked on his way into work that morning. He took time to describe his intended recipe for cooking them. I thought little of this incident at the time, appreciating it only later, when I spoke with one of the sisters, who explained the important role foraging food had had in her childhood, influencing her values, and now as a hotelier promoting locally sourced foods.

The parents influenced their children, who have carried on the behaviours of being close to nature, growing vegetables, wild food foraging, baking bread, making, mending and recycling, not being wasteful, and above all ‘daring to be different’. This has been their automatic way of being and doing things. Then one day the sisters recognised their familiar ‘taken for granted routines’ had become fashionable. Increasingly, recycling and sourcing local produce was being encouraged as a popular trend across mainstream society and referred to as ‘sustainability’. One of them explains how this realisation came about:

I am not a great industry magazine reader but I did see something … an article on a German hotel … that was doing a lot of things that really inspired me and this would be possibly as long as 20 years ago…?

I took it to [name of her sister] to show her and at the time she wasn't as enthusiastic … or she was gently but she certainly wasn't fired up like she is now, it was a sort of 'lovely but not now darling' response.

I kept this article in my drawer for a long time and we were both very very busy trying to develop the hotel in many different ways and then one day [name] came forward and said ‘this is what we must do, I want us to do this’ and I said ‘great this is what I've been waiting for’ for however long it was, and at that time my role was getting ever bigger as I went into my leadership and tried to get the best out of our people and there’s an awful lot to do here, looking after the customers … it was easier for [name] to pick it up as a challenge as she was so obviously passionate about it … for me it is instinctive rather than … I don't need to go to seminars and things. I'm interested in them but … it's just common sense really … I don't need to be an academic to know … you can’t plunder, you have to sustain in order to move forwards and on lots of levels I believe … you know natural; and not
fiddled around with is best, and um supporting people locally so all sorts of things … just natural and instinctive things for me. (27th September 2011)

Rather than refer to a specific definition of the clichéd term ‘sustainability’, The Hotels uses a short phrase to describe their approach: ‘we have a responsibility to minimise our negative impact on the planet’, and the two establishments approach this in slightly different ways. In part, this reflects the influence of the sisters’ characteristics and preferences as well as the hotel buildings themselves differing in major ways architecturally.

The Beach Cliff is often referred to metaphorically as the ‘shabby auntie’ and Golden Sands as the ‘funky niece’ between the sisters. Over the years the Beach Cliff has been refitted to incorporate and enable ‘sustainable’ features such as under-floor heating and solar panels, but there is only so much that can be achieved practically and physically here within the confines of a utilitarian mid-1900s style building. The philosophy, however, goes deeper than the fabric of the building. The General Manager of Golden Sands, who is not a family member, describes how she felt about her time working at the Beach Cliff, prior to taking on the role of General Manager at Golden Sands. She refers to the ‘heart and mind’ of the business:

I got a feeling that when people started to talk about doing business more sustainably that felt like exactly the right thing for them [Beach Cliff] to do, and rather than just going through the motions of picking up those guidelines that started to be out there, they literally grabbed them, embraced them and actually then started to challenge them and push them forwards even further … this just felt like this is naturally what we should be doing – because it is at the heart of our business … we want to really grab hold of it and make sure we are doing it, because it was their values it is at the heart of those three sisters. (10th August 2011)

The sisters continually seek and promote new ideas for making changes, daring to be different at every opportunity, challenging the status quo, pushing out the boundaries of what is possible whilst thinking and acting sustainably. The family values provide a stable ‘core’ and new challenges and ideas seem to stem from these, very much as Naess (1989) advocates:
... thinking of the landscape first, before human needs and then devising technologies, and management, that stem from a rootedness in place and nature. (1989, p. 15)

The values pursued by The Hotels management stem from the current owners’ parents, ingrained in the siblings as they grew up. Hearing all these stories, I wondered how these values influenced day-to-day practice for staff. In the next section, I recount stories told by a number of staff, their personal interpretations, what the values mean for them and how they influence their work at The Hotels and their own lives.

4.2.6 Values influencing behaviours

When I met the Child Care Manager, she recounted to me how she initially came to work at the Beach Cliff when she and her now husband were both 21. They left The Hotels to travel and train professionally, but over the years have kept in touch with the owners and returned to work here eight years ago. Along with her husband who works in the maintenance team, they are one of several couples employed by The Hotels.

The Child Care Manager explains how the Child Care department likes to ‘do things slightly differently’ by taking ‘controlled risks’ such as encouraging children to play outdoors in the local environment, taking them on cliff walks, making shelters on the beach and lighting fires. At Christmas children were encouraged to make rockets that got fired by an air pump, however, due to the bad weather these eventually had to be let off indoors, which, as she described, caused great fun, some risk and general chaos!

We are a different hotel and we do dare to be different … so you can’t have a children’s club where there is mass produced whatever … is that really fitting the criteria? … I’m not going to go out and buy all the monsters and things that are on CBeeBies all the Pepa Pigs and those kind of branded products, um because sometimes that isn’t quite what we are … (21st Sept 2011)

She energetically describes the situation she found when she first took over the department some years ago…
Our store was just full of that kind of mass produced rubbish … all you could do was make this goddam thing and that was it, so no inspiration. The packaging … was you just wanna scream because … how many sets of instructions? Every packet had a set of instructions in it, and then that’s all in a plastic bag, and then there’s 40 if them in another plastic bag in a box! [by now we are both laughing] and you want to go ‘aaahhh! – who the hell bought that? … nobody had thought … stood back and went ‘I’m sure we could make picture frames out of something else’. (21st Sept 2011)

We laugh at the absurdity, but realise this represents the majority of ‘packaged’ toy products for children.

Talking with one of the Chefs on 12th September 2011, he recounted how, when looking for a job in the industry, he had not really considered The Hotels as a suitable employment prospect. There were two very practical reasons for this: first, they were situated an hour and a half drive from where he lived, and second, the salary offered was lower than he had previously earned. Despite these practicalities, he was persuaded by the Head Chef at the time to do a trial in the kitchen. He tells me how he was so excited and interested by the ‘eco side of it’ that he took a job. Having been told by the Head Chef at interview that The Hotels were ‘all about promotion within house’ he has now had five since he started, so is on a realistic wage and in addition has moved house to reduce his travel to work time. He waxes lyrical about the local growers and suppliers and how they are ‘full of knowledge’ and proud of their quality produce.

Staff communicate with guests using short stories that illustrate the embeddedness of The Hotels’s values, an awareness and appreciation of the connection of doing business within the wider context of nature. Examples include the chef, who explains his choice of fish on the menu by describing how the sea conditions on any one day determine opportunities for fishing. He also recounts how the local farmer captures rainwater to grow asparagus and how this is more ecologically sound than buying asparagus from Peru where water is diverted from local provision to supply crops grown for export. A guest may note the absence of orange juice at breakfast, only for a member of restaurant staff to explain why The Hotels prefer to serve apple juice from local orchards instead of imported juice made from oranges grown in countries where water may be scarce. The House Manager commented to me how it had been
'quite easy to have the “eco” conversation’ with guests to explain why and how the choice was made to purchase rubber flip-flop style slippers made in China.

The absence of a reception desk at Golden Sands purposely involves guests being greeted by a ‘host’ and taken on a personal tour of the hotel en route to their bedroom accommodation. This detailed attention is intended to replicate welcoming a visitor to one’s own home. During the guided tour the host explains and describes the various services and facilities and something of The Hotels’s philosophy and how this manifests in the architecture, fixtures, fittings and displays of artwork; every picture and sculpture has a story to tell (Appendix 9).

On another occasion, one February evening in 2012 I again sat in the bar at the Beach Cliff. This time, as the daylight faded outside, the hotel staff prepared for evening activities – lights on, fires lit and curtains drawn. The barman, who claims he has been here ‘forever’ (‘38 years in fact in a variety of roles’), was setting up the lounge bar, drew my attention to the sloe gin, plum vodka and lemon cello standing on the bar counter (Appendix 9), all made from locally foraged produce – ‘well, apart from the sloes the hotel manager just had to stop and pick as she was on her way to London one time’, he explains. (So maybe not all quite so local!)

He tells me how the strawberry syrup, elderflower pressé and elderflower champagne are available for people to ‘have a little taste, and if they like it buy a glass, if they don’t well it’s educational’ (9th February 2012). I ask him about stock control, and he replies how you can’t always go by the measure as some cocktails have a quarter or half a measure – this all seems very relaxed! He went on to explain how he grows mint outside the patio doors and collects other herbs from the hotel garden for the cocktails. He recounted with a real sense of pride all the jobs he has done for the family over the years, even projectionist for the one time ‘in house’ cinema that once occupied the room that is now the children’s ‘soft play’ area. He recalls how this used to be the only local bar around, really popular with locals as a pub. Nowadays, he explains the locals continue to use the gym for £35 a month plus all the other facilities as well.

There seems to be a theme of ‘being part of the local community’, as one of the directors also describes:
So far we are helping finance a community shop ... we are building an eco classroom for the local school ... and we are buying some allotments. (13th June 2011)

The director goes on to tell me how, when The Hotels replace their curtains, they offer them to local residents. She proudly comments they have ex-hotel curtains ‘hanging up in houses all around the village’.

Another community activity is illustrated by the number of occasions throughout the year when the hotel staff undertake a beach clean (Appendix 10). I took part in one of these exercises on 24th May 2012. The Hotel staff were joined by a number of hotel guests and another local hotelier with whom I paired up to wander and litter pick the length of the beach. She felt this was a really good community activity to be doing, filling black sacks with mainly discarded fishing line, nylon netting and other general rubbish. All the sacks of rubbish are weighed and there is a small prize for the most collected.

The General Manager explains how working at The Hotels has influenced her own values and behaviour:

If you are gonna be the leader you have to totally embrace the values and you have to live them, you have to live by them ... there are so many things those values have inspired me to do personally in my life ...

As an example, she describes her dilemma when she first came to work for The Hotels. She had not seen herself as some ‘eco warrior’, nevertheless she had thought carefully about the car she would feel comfortable driving:

At the time in our family we had a Land Cruiser Colorado that guzzled fuel and we had a sports car ... and I said there is no way I am going to work in either of these cars at that hotel – I can’t ... I’ve got a Fiat 500 now ... it’s the greenest engine you can buy ...” (10th Aug 2011)

From these illustrations, a familial style of leadership emerges, one that values relationships, informality, shared experiences, being part of and building a sense of community. The overall impression here is that the values actually do matter and are lived out. To this end, I am reminded of occasions when I have personally been aware of the values. On two occasions I was due to meet with the director who is
also the manager of the Beach Cliff, but she delayed her appointments with me as she was spending time ‘going for a walk with staff members who wanted to talk through personal problems’. This same General Manager regularly told other staff how I was ‘one of them’ and in so doing enabled me to feel part of their community.

One morning I sat in the lounge reading the newspaper whilst waiting to attend a meeting, and my field notes record how over a time span of approximately twenty minutes I was personally greeted, kissed on the cheek or hugged by three managers who happened to walk past. I had not been at The Hotels for a few weeks, so they asked about my studies and showed a genuine interest, making me feel very welcome.

4.2.7 Appreciating ‘the other’

I was interested to appreciate how the family values are reflected more formally in personnel policies and practices, and a conversation with the Human Resources manager provided a number of examples. What was more interesting, however, was the way in which these policies have encouraged staff to widen their horizons:

*We have introduced a contributory pension scheme to which we contribute after twelve months which is ahead of the legislation, it has been available for 2 years already, we also utilise ... a money back cash plan for health for things like dental care and chiropractors that sort of thing ... we pay the basic level and they can upgrade if they wish ... we have a development grant so people can apply to do something outside work that they have always wanted to try ... people have done things like creative skills, creative writing courses, advanced driving, somebody went on a week’s sailing course ...*

Furthermore, these formal policies actively encourage staff to appreciate perspectives other than their own.

*We offer a free night’s stay and free meals in the restaurant for new staff once they have passed their probationary period and that’s really two-fold, so they feel welcomed but also they can experience what it is like genuinely to be a guest and be able to talk about this with other guests. (6th July 2011)*
This aligns with the importance, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) stressed, of experiencing the everyday life of another’s reality in order to appreciate the perspective of ‘the other’. Brown, Harris and Russell (2010) stress how important it is for decision makers to ‘use their imagination to place themselves in others’ shoes’ (2010, p. 5). At The Hotels staff are genuinely encouraged to swap jobs to enable this to happen in reality, not just as a figment of someone’s imagination. The Human Resources Manager also explains this makes staff more versatile, helps to reduce staffing costs, offers promotion prospects and prevents people from leaving with the added expense of recruitment. Examples I noted during my association with The Hotels include a Head Chef who wanted to reduce his working hours to spend more time with his young family. He was actively encouraged and supported to establish a ‘Production Department’ making jams and other products using locally foraged foods (a passion of his) for both internal use and to be sold separately. This enabled him to work straight shifts and have a more family-friendly work pattern. Another Chef at Golden Sands was thinking of leaving for a new challenge; he was offered a Head Chef job at Beach Cliff, where the ex-Chef took on the role of Restaurant Manager. The Front of House Manager at Golden Sands spent time as a Restaurant Supervisor within the same hotel before moving across to take up a position Front of House at Beach Cliff. These moves also enable staff to appreciate how other departments operate. To further this appreciation, the Head Chef and Food and Beverage manager at Golden Sands described how they had manufactured job swaps. They actively arrange for kitchen staff to wait on table and restaurant staff to work in the kitchen. The two managers were working together to prevent classic catering trade ‘them and us’ attitudes building up across the service counter. I know from my own experience in the industry how this can happen, particularly during busy periods. If staff can appreciate the tensions on ‘the other side’ of the counter, they are more likely to be tolerant and prevent tempers flaring up, and this can be vital in a busy service environment.

Conversations I had with two members of staff, one from each of the hotels, interestingly both housekeepers, illustrate the concept of valuing another’s perspective, and are examples of seeing things differently in practical day-to-day situations.

The first account is by ‘J’, who talked to me about his experiences working at Golden Sands, he had taken up a temporary job when the hotel first opened, initially
employed as a Night Host. He explains one of the tasks of a Night Host was to clean windows in the pool area, and unless you have ever tried to clean windows at night you cannot possibly know how difficult this task is. Having encountered this challenge for himself, when he later became the Night Host Supervisor, he instigated the purchase of halogen lamps to make the task easier for his staff. Reflecting on his own experiences working shifts he was able to appreciate the impact of work undertaken by one shift on by those taking over on the following shift, at either end of the day. Again, he was able to make improvements to the system by making sure there was sufficient ‘hand over’ time for staff to make the shift transitions smoother, rather than leave jobs half completed or in a mess for staff on the incoming shift to pick up. In addition, he successfully proposed splitting the Night Host role into two jobs, noting how the unrealistic workload was creating inefficient levels of staff turnover. All of these changes have financial implications, but as a result of being able to appreciate the situation fully from personal experience he was able to put forward a strong case for the changes. He explains how the job of ‘Host’ is to look after guests 24 hours a day, and he describes the role as ‘like the glue between the services, holding it all together’ seamlessly, so a major part of this role is to know most of what is happening in the hotel at any time. Using this experience, J has gone on to be Housekeeping and Host Manager, with a team of 23 when fully staffed, and has fulfilled his ambition to undertake Duty Management. He continues to consider the views of others, as this comment illustrates:

I remember the sweltering heat that I would feel running about on the 12 hour shifts when I was Day Hosting & so am thrilled to be able to offer shorts to the hosts!! This week I sourced a pair of shorts for each of them to wear in the ‘heat-wave’ that this summer has been nicknamed locally! (email 18th July 2013)

An interview with the Executive Housekeeper at Beach Cliff enabled me to appreciate how someone could reflect on and challenge their own strongly held views as a result of being able to accommodate the perspective of ‘the other’. During her time at The Hotels she has had to make some significant changes in her thinking and housekeeping practices to accommodate those of a more ecologically sound nature.
I met the Executive Housekeeper in September 2011, closeted in her small office filled with boxes of lavender-smelling soap. She recounted how she joined the Beach Cliff in 2005, moving from a local ‘exclusive’ hotel owned by the Rocco Forte family, where, she proudly describes, she gained experience of high customer expectations and ‘exacting’ housekeeping standards. She very determinedly tells me how ‘you cannot take a risk with hygiene, especially where there are children’. Apparently the Beach Cliff had a scare at one time with a prolific virus forcing the closure of the hotel in mid-season, with the loss of thousands of pounds of income, as well as reputation. She uses this as her reasoning for why she still encourages her team to use a ‘little bit of bleach’ now and then, knowing this is ‘possibly a swear word’ within The Hotels, and much disapproved of by the Sustainability Manager. However, she defends her decisions by adding:

... we have trialed every eco system known to man quite frankly ... I just cannot take that risk ... I’m sorry but coloured water ain’t gonna do it for me and that’s what I believe. (13th Sept 2011)

She wrestles with her concern to protect guest welfare whilst working to uphold eco values. In addition, her own exacting housekeeping standards were learnt in exclusive, luxury hotels where linen would normally be changed every other day, and bath robes, slippers and an array of toiletries would all be provided. She describes – quite dramatically, huffing and puffing slightly with the indignation – her reaction when she was first informed that the linen was not to be changed so regularly here:

Well, you might as well have told me to chop my arm off ... I was like ... what! There’s no way, no way, ... four star hotel, I’m not having this, not having it ... oh my god ... I could not ... it took me ages to get to the point where ... because for me the drop in standards ... because of the expectation ... (13th Sept. 2011)

She tells me how one of the directors explained to her ‘really calm and quietly ... it will be fine [name], it will be fine’, and then logically they discussed how you wouldn’t change your own linens at home every other day, so why, just because people are on holiday, have they established an expectation to do so here?

As Isaacs (1999) notes, ‘petty misunderstandings’ can escalate into bigger issues that are avoidable if ‘people would only talk to each other with a different kind of
conversational presence’ (1999, p. 32). I suggest this was just the style used by the
director, who was able to change the Executive Housekeeper’s perspective about the
regularity of linen changes referred to above. Isaacs (1999) points out how we
become convinced that our own view of a problem is ‘right’ and that others have it
‘wrong’, and he advocates we say, ‘Wait a minute, what are we doing here?’ (1999,
p. 34). Instead, by making a point ever more strongly, we personally illustrate an
unwillingness to consider the views of others, exactly the behaviour we are ourselves
trying to change in ‘the other’.

The other change the Executive Housekeeper had to accommodate in her
department was when the General Manger ‘broke the news to her’ that they had
decided to supply fresh milk in the bedrooms, as, unlike the sister hotel Golden
Sands, Beach Cliff do still provide tea and coffee making facilities in the bedrooms.
Each room has its own kettle and small fridge, a practice Golden Sands refused to
accommodate on the grounds of energy use, instead providing complimentary room
service. The Executive Housekeeper describes the individual portions of UHT milk
that have become popular in hotel bedrooms as ‘absolutely vile’ and is pleased with
the response small bottles of fresh milk have received from guests – ‘it’s a tiny thing,
but it seems to be a real winner’ – going on to proudly explain how the bottles they
use now are ‘recyclable’ (13\textsuperscript{th} Sept. 2011).

I ask her in what ways having ‘sustainability’ as an overriding principle changes
things and she replies:

\textit{Oh considerably, because you have to justify every decision you make, it’s
not just about pick up the ’phone and ordering 10 cases of whatever. You
actually have to stop and think about what you do and why you are doing it …
I’ve been talking toilet rolls for 6 years … and the other big one … is products
… shampoo … (13\textsuperscript{th} Sept. 2011)}

She explains how guests staying in 4 star hotels expect to have a full range of
toiletries supplied, often in small bottles, and the many hours that have been spent
looking into soap dispensers. She enthusiastically describes how The Hotels works
with a local soap company who supply bars of both soap and shampoo. One of The
Hotels’s directors suggested she provide some feedback to the soap company and
they now use her testimony on their website, it reads:
I was actually the one that was incredibly skeptical when the issue was first raised, as I was one of the ‘old school’ housekeepers who believed that you needed a minimum of at least four little plastic bottles full of ‘stuff’ to impress four star guests...

After much research into other products and companies aspiring to be ‘local’ and ‘green’, we kept coming back to your products...

I have been delighted with how well the products are received in the hotel guest rooms...

We have won several awards for our sustainability here at [hotel name] and having your products as part of what we do here has been a very large contribution to that.

There is a certain irony in that one of the more skeptical members of staff is now publically recorded advocating and promoting sustainability. Behind the scenes she still uses that ‘little bit of bleach’ now and then, and longs for her ‘J’ cloths to replace the odd bits of rag made from recycling old towels that she is encouraged to use by the hotel management. That said, she has appreciated another perspective, she has been gently encouraged to ask why guests would expect linen changes every other day. In addition, she has received positive feedback from guests about fresh milk and local soap/shampoo bars. She has been persuaded to rethink and modify her own views.

Finally, as testimony to her changing views, she describes the convoluted discussions that have recently taken place between housekeeping and catering staff. This surrounds an attempt to solve the problem of how to put fresh, home-baked cookies in the rooms in place of a bought-in, wrapped, albeit locally-made variety of biscuit. The issues this has raised make it a problem that is ‘not easy’ to solve at all, as she explains: ‘you’ve got key ingredients, labelling, hygiene, handling, and freshness … it’s all about a standard, so it’s a challenge’, but she adds she would really like to see this change happen.

This final example is just one illustration of how staff at The Hotels make efforts to ‘challenge conventions’, building on the core family values of fresh, homemade foodstuffs without wasteful wrapping, seeking ways to challenge the thinking that has led to wrapped processed food portions becoming the norm in the catering industry.
They have successfully achieved this in many areas of the business by working with local food producers to supply bulk produce such as breakfast cereals and jams in large reusable jars which are returned to source for refilling when empty. This solution for The Hotels has led to other hoteliers in the area who use the same suppliers adopting similar practices. The jams are served to the customer in small dishes, despite the Automobile Association star ratings demanding jams purchased in small sealed glass pots that are not recyclable. This thinking and decision-making process, challenging convention and sometimes legislation, reflects The Hotels’s value statement ‘Dare to be Different’, as illustrated by further examples in a subsequent section below.

Commodity purchasing decisions consider the origin of materials, the lifespan of products, the durability of products and their impact in use as well as what will happen to a particular commodity when discarded. This is evidenced by the curtains hanging up in neighbouring houses, the rags made from old towels for cleaning, the effort involved in the practice of refilling small shampoo bottles and the little bags provided for guests to take their leftover soaps home. Add to these examples the composting of organic material and they illustrate the efforts that are made to create cyclical patterns of product use. These actions attempt to offset the more typical linear path of ‘take-make-waste’ that Braungart and McDonough (2009) explain has traditionally been the foundation of industry and economics. Take-make-waste processes emphasise getting goods to the customer as quickly and cheaply as possible with few other considerations (2009, p. 26). The aim at The Hotels seems to create a more ‘borrow use return’ process, as advocated by Braungart and McDonough, (2009) and Vale and Vale (2009), to lengthen the useful lifespan of a product.

The examples above are plucked from a number I could have chosen. That said, all is not ‘perfect’; as one director comments, ‘as a family we do always “want to do better”, and we recognise there is a lot we do not know’ (3rd October 2012). One director tells me ‘we particularly like the directors to be challenged too, because that’s sometimes where the decisions come from …’ (13th June 2011). The sisters themselves admit they make mistakes, as a wall in the Beach Cliff spa bears witness to, made from ‘very beautiful and very tactile, and not sustainable in any way at all’ pebbles shipped in from Indonesia: ‘ooh it was very, very awkward and we have all learned from that … it’s still a very delicate subject’, she adds with a laugh (13th June
On passing the offending pebbles, I noticed a small explanation provided alongside, explaining, to any passing guest who may seek to question it, the error of the purchase.

Although The Hotels enjoys and celebrates winning awards, they avoid being held up as an exemplar to other hoteliers, although this does not prevent people actively using The Hotels’s material, cutting and pasting stuff from their website, and one director laughs as she tells me how another hotelier actually left The Hotels’s logo on their own environmental policy by mistake!

The sharing of values is illustrated by the examples above, allowing people to make their own interpretations of sustainability in relation to their particular situation. As one manager commented, sustainability is ‘not about thinking about everyone else but thinking how do I do it?’ (25th June 2011). The use of language and behaviour plays an important part, shaping people’s realities, as described in the accounts below.

4.2.9 Language shapes behaviour

The use of emotive, familial and spiritual language was one of the first things I noticed when I encountered The Hotels, making an immediate impression as I picked up and read the hotel brochure. Words and phrases such as: Love Life, Feed the Soul, Fun, Laughter, Families, Luxury, Fresh locally farmed food, Free and easy living, conjured up a particular image. In the brochure, a short poem reads:

‘Catch life’

*We feel in love with what we do*  
*In love with how we feel*  
*We need the things we do to matter*  
*To light fires beneath our blood*  
*To go beyond the bottom line*  
*To cause hearts to palpitate and thud;*  
*That way we know it’s real.*
And similarly the website reads:

As a place influenced only by the natural rhythms of Mother Nature, The [hotel name] aims to do all that it can to reduce its negative impact on the environment, without compromising the experience or service guests receive. The ‘Cherish our World’ ethos, carried by all of the [company name] team, is not simply something that we feel is right; it is a necessity and our way of life.

These words purposely portray a particular image to the prospective guest, shaping their expectations. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, I use the rather plain pseudonym of ‘Golden Sands’ here, which belies the actual significance of the name of the hotel, which is itself in keeping with its ‘funky’ image. Having deliberated about a local County name, the directors eventually chose something that was, at that time, unique to any hotel in the UK. Avoiding the green colouring normally associated with anything ‘eco’, they emblazoned the hotel name in bright red, declaring:

[name of hotel] reflected our boldness, perhaps madness, in trying to build a hotel that might change perceptions of what was possible. We also wanted this hotel to be warm, deeply comfortable and welcoming, very different to the slick but elitist hotels that pass as luxury. We loved the contrast of a rich red colour with our green ethos. (Hotel website)

Giddens (1986) suggests ‘Language use is embedded in the concrete activities of day to day life and is in some sense partly constitutive of those activities’ (1986, p. xvi). Language shapes a reality that the hotels wish to convey. As Weick et al. (2005) suggest, ‘[s]ituations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence’ (2005, p. 145).

The hotel personnel procedures are also shaped by the same discourse. There are eighteen philosophies, depicted as baubles hanging from a mobile entitled ‘Cherishing our World’. There is no priority order, as all are considered of equal importance, and they include: Beautiful Relationships, Actively Caring, Discovering Simple Pleasures and Guided by Conscience (Appendix 8).

These terms are heard regularly being used by staff in their daily doings and, as Gergen (1999) comments, ‘to use a form of language is itself to engage in a practice, and this usage can have widespread impact’ (Gergen, 1999, p. 167). Prospective staff attending interview are asked what the value ‘Cherishing our World’ means to
them, and how this might affect them on a daily basis? There is an Actively Caring Charter for Staff, which is simply a list of short phrases, suggestions such as ‘Be Genuine’, ‘Make time to actively listen’, ‘Surprise and Delight’; how these values are interpreted is very much left up to each individual in their particular service situation.

A number of managers comment on their abhorrence of what they describe as ‘corporate language’ and how they avoid the use of such terms. An illustration of this came during a conversation with the Children’s Centre manager, when I asked her about the language used in the Caring Charter:

Yes, we’ve had quite a thing about using language and using language that is appropriate to people. If you had to pull somebody in and tell them that they are having a … um … formal appraisal it’s your yearly appraisal, well my girls are absolutely bent at the knees … so we changed it and because we are a “[company name]’ Hotel we called it ‘How “[company name]” am I? … and writing up records … we just put down the things like ‘who was there’ rather than ‘people present’ so … who was there? Where did you have it? And when ya gonna do it again? So just simple kind of colloquial talk rather than kind of make it sound too … posh and too corporate …

In a way it makes it more real doesn’t it? … rather than ‘attendees’ and ‘venue’, which has become the language that we would see on a solicitors’ … house document or divorce paper … all official. (21st Sept 2011)

During my early days at Golden Sands I heard staff talking about attending ‘Morning Prayers’ at 10.30am and I began to wonder if I had missed an underlying religious belief and ceremony? It wasn’t until I attended the daily 10.30am meeting that I appreciated the significance of the title. People respond to a communal ‘calling’ to attend the meeting, they describe sharing a collective summons to attend but this does not appear to come from any one person in particular as the Duty Management role to facilitate the meeting is taken by different people daily.

I attended ‘morning prayers’ at Golden Sands on several occasions. The gathering follows a very regular, albeit short, ritualistic routine. On one occasion I attended whilst shadowing the General Manager. As the Duty Manager that morning she collected an A4 sheet of specially prepared information from reception, and we made our way ‘back of house’, mugs of tea or coffee collected from the kitchen in hand, to
the staff room. This is a bare, light and airy room, dominated by a square white table surrounded by chairs. The General Manager wiped the table and cleared away dirty dishes to the sink, other staff wandered in, also with mugs in hand and pen, paper or diary ready to take notes.

The meeting always starts with a ‘good news’ item and on the 24th May 2012 it was the prospect of a ‘sunny day for the Beach Clean’ that afternoon. I did wonder what it would be that day, as the main topic of general conversation amongst staff on that particular day was of the tragic death, the day before, of a member of the housekeeping team in a motorcycle accident.

I had been made aware of the motorcycle accident just prior to the morning meeting when I walked into the housekeeping department to find the staff room full of flowers. The whiteboards, normally used to post the cleaning duties for the day, were instead scrawled with personal messages of remembrance. The housekeeper was overseeing people’s welfare whilst at the same time doing his best to get the housekeeping duties allocated and carried out for that day. He then attended the morning meeting, where the accident and death were acknowledged and concerned questions asked around the table as to the well-being of the rest of the team and how they were coping with this news and the loss of one of their team, the incident was noted there, but not dwelt on. In this way personal practices of remembrance were incorporated into daily life, acknowledged and validated, whilst at the same time balanced alongside the business of maintaining busy operations. One did not take over from the other and as a result illustrates how life’s complexities are encountered and acknowledged rather than ‘managed out’.

The meeting continued with staffing duties and business details, the number of rooms sold, yesterday’s restaurant and bar takings, numbers of arrivals and departures, expected lunch and dinner numbers, details of guests, VIPs, dogs, special diets, cakes, allergies, all noted. Great significance is given to this meeting and the way the information contributes to the effective and efficient running of the hotel. I personally appreciated the significance of all this detail when one evening I carried out bar duties, being able to refer to a guest by name, knowing not to provide nuts as nibbles with aperitifs if someone has a nut allergy, being aware if the guest is celebrating a special occasion. The underlying ‘theory’ of ‘morning prayers’ is the creation of a whole team approach. All departments share their particular bits of the overall information, working across teams in an effort to create a seamless
experience for the guest. The staff share great joy if they surprise or delight someone by placing a birthday gift in the guest room, or know the name of a guest’s dog on arrival.

‘Morning prayers’ as a gathering of staff from all departments of the hotel also provides an opportunity to celebrate successes and reflect upon mistakes. The diverse representation makes it possible to investigate and sort out what went wrong. For example, how the stray toothpick ended up being poured into a restaurant water glass on 23rd May 2012 (Field notes 24th May). This was deemed to be possible as a result of washing empty water bottles in the same machine as glasses, which may contain used toothpicks. Refilling the bottles on site, rather than buying them in as sealed units from a manufacturer, the stray toothpick might not be noticed, hidden by the curvature of the glass. It was generally agreed to be more vigilant in future and to load the bottles upside down in the dishwasher.

The nature and style of ‘morning prayers’ seems to reflect the culture of The Hotels, there is an air of informality as people chat casually coming in and leaving, but the tone and atmosphere noticeably changes when the business of the day commences. The A4 sheet of information becomes the focus and drives the meeting, albeit for only 15 to 20 minutes in duration.

The use of the word ‘prayers’ serves as a metaphor. According to the shorter Oxford English Dictionary, a metaphor is ‘a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable.’ To liken a meeting to ‘prayers’ suggests a communal activity, and we pray about things that are important to us, about those we care for and love and what we hope for. The use of this metaphor brings with it, if not a religious connection, a sense of shared spirituality.

Using emotional, familial and spiritual language in a business setting is just one example of how The Hotels pushes the boundaries of conventional business practice to challenge the status quo, living out the family motto of ‘daring to be different’.
4.2.10 Daring to be Different

One of The Hotels’s eighteen philosophies upon which the whole business is founded is entitled ‘Daring to be Different’ and reads:

We must be willing to undertake things that involve risk; to find new ways of making progress and of achieving extraordinary results. We must inspire and enable others to do the same. All this should be done with our eyes open to the risks and the ways of controlling them. (Hotel literature)

The phrase ‘dare to be different’ is used and can be heard around The Hotels regularly, albeit there are a variety of situated interpretations. This is one of the overarching themes emerging from the data, pushing the boundaries of taken for granted conventions, architecturally, in the catering and hospitality industry itself, as well as linguistically and behaviourally.

The General Manager of Golden Sands explains to me:

What we want to do is ‘dare to be different’ challenge, things evolve, you know? As an evolving business that wants to continue doing that you have to make some mistakes and then go ‘right how do we do that differently?’ (10th August 2011)

In line with their parents’ motto of ‘daring to be different’, the sisters wanted to create a ‘funky’ hotel to promote sustainability in ways that any number of retrofits at Beach Cliff could never do, given the structural and architectural limitations of the existing ‘lumbering’ building. They searched all over the world for a suitable site, as a director told me, ‘and eventually realised there was a site right next door looking for redevelopment’ (9th Feb 2012).

The Architect describes how the original brief for Golden Sands was quite unlike any other brief their architectural practice had taken on:

It was like going back to college … there weren’t any schedules, it was about each room being different … and in the build up to it we had … what to call it? … fact finding … They did two events that they organised at (Beach Cliff) … I remember we did yoga … there were events that had free thinkers … meditation events, they got lots of people in the mix to find out ‘What it is that makes a hotel? What is a hotel? What makes it different?’ Lots and lots of
build up it wasn’t just let’s get the plans and start drawing … a lot of stuff that was really enjoyable actually and I think moved things like ‘do we do a reception desk?’ Or ‘what did we learn from the process?’ Some of the process was really important before we even started drawing … (8th October 2012)

If this all suggests a completely free hand, that was not the case; as he explains, there were parameters: to create a minimum of 35 bedrooms, a building that used as many sustainable or ‘eco’ practices and principles as possible, on the brown field site, ideally placed facing due west, albeit within an existing residential area. The brief was about a balance between financial, sustainable and social issues. The Architect explains how all this was carefully managed:

I think one of the things that was really important, from a planning point of view was scale … if you are looking at the building, next door it’s one and a half levels, it’s really quite a small building, and our building is on 5 levels, but it’s no higher than the adjoining, and one of the reasons for sweeping the roof down was to try and respect the domestic architecture around it and to create a road frontage that was quite modest really. (8th October 2012)

As he explains, significant attempts were made not to block scenic views for neighbours and to blend the building into the surrounding landscape. A guest made a comment about the site of the hotel:

The building has the least visual impact of any building in [place name] when viewed from the cliff path. It looks to belong there and has obviously been built to ‘fit in’. (Trip Advisor)

This attempt to ‘fit in’ was also portrayed by the General Manager’s efforts to ‘be neighbourly’. She recounts how she invites locals into the hotel and visits them in their own homes, sharing an artistic interest, for example, with the person next door, or meeting other locals who walk their dogs on the beach. This was also confirmed to me by the Property Manager, whose parents own a holiday house locally and were amongst a group of neighbours raising objections to the redevelopment of the site. The Property Manger tells me about the significant efforts the Beach Cliff staff went to to pacify the concerns raised by neighbours, getting them ‘on side’ during the two years it took to build Golden Sands. Although The Hotels as a business strives to
challenge the status quo on many issues, this is done with an appreciation of the likely impact of their actions on others.

The Front of House Manager and the Architect both explain to me about the absence of a ‘proper reception’, how this had been a deliberate design and build feature with significant consequences for guests and staff, influencing the style and provision of front of house service. There is an element here of challenging expectations right from the moment the guest arrives, as the Front of House Manager acknowledges:

*In an average hotel you have a reception desk, you have a barrier there which helps you … but without a desk there is no understanding of what order is and you know at a desk people will queue? With no desk everyone doesn’t know what they are doing so the staff have had to learn how to deal with people.* (9th August 2011)

The omission of a reception desk is intended to create a more informal atmosphere, as the Architect describes – arriving guests, transfixed by the fantastic view, are captured on a monitor in a back office and the idea is for a member of staff to appear ‘as if by magic, although I’m not sure is always happens as smoothly as that’ (8th October 2012). He explains how most guests will have pre-booked and their arrival is expected. The concept of welcoming them as one might receive guests into one’s own home would be impeded by a more formal desk gathering ‘office clutter’. He admits some people seem slightly ‘lost’ as to where to go and what to do if they are not immediately swept up by a member of staff appearing ‘as if by magic’ to welcome them! The absence of a formal desk and the use of first names by way of introductions again pose a challenge to social norms of hotel service.

Feedback on Trip Advisor reads:

*This hotel is truly amazing. The atmosphere from the minute we checked in (where the staff come to you rather than you stand at a desk) was so chilled, and yet attentive at the same time.* (Trip Advisor, June 2013)

The Architect elaborates on the design of the hotel again in a ‘storytelling’-like fashion using metaphor, explaining how people come to County for exploration and adventure, seeking out beach coves and cliff caves. He explains how the design of the entrance hallway mirrors this sense of ‘places to explore’, providing just a glimpse of a retreat lounge upstairs through a small window, a bar area just visible below the
stairs and another view of the sea beyond, a small lounge can be seen off to the side through a two way fireplace, and corridors curve off at angles suggesting yet more areas to explore.

Under the subject of ‘Emotional Architecture’, Western (2013) comments how ‘External landscapes shape our internal landscapes, influencing how we think, feel and perceive the world’ (2013, p. 255). He suggests natural environments stimulate creative imagination, so it is interesting to consider the extent to which Golden Sands encourages the natural external environment to come into the hotel. Western (2013) adds how having created an environment, we are in turn created by it, noting how this can both shape and limit our potential. All of the corridors in Golden Sands curve around, all rooms have a sea view and the bedrooms are sited on five levels, so lots of stairs. However, I later learn how this particular aspect of the hotel design is considered a nightmare by housekeeping staff who have to carry their equipment up and down these stairwells, unlike in more conventional hotels, as the House Manger comments: ‘it is hard to service rooms on 5 different floors without the usual trolleys/lifts etc.’ (email 18th July 2013).

Architecturally, Golden Sands was built with consideration for guest comfort, separating out the services and associated noisy aspects (deliveries, fans, heating) of a functioning hotel from guest sleeping areas. This structural divide is marked significantly by a copper clad wall scaling the full height of the building. The Architect explained how the entrance to Golden Sands was thought out and designed to make a stunning statement, the floor to ceiling window, the infinity pool reflecting the sky and copper colours providing the illusion of merging into the sea at the end of the invisible roof line.

I spent an hour one day watching the monitor in the back office, observing guests arriving to see the range of reactions to a desk-free lobby, much as Goffman (1969) observed neighbours dropping into a fellow islander’s cottage (1969, p. 19). Most people enter with purpose, some pulling suitcases, others with a questioning expression. People wander in, drift around by the door setting off a buzzer in the back office to alert staff numerous times, others move from door to window to side table to sofa. One woman pokes at a statue of a curled human body made out of seed heads, until (I think) she realises it is bottom uppermost and quickly walks away! A man sits on a sofa and appears to find ‘security’ reading a small section of a newspaper left behind by a previous guest.
Sitting in the ‘back office’, behind the scenes, I become more aware of the intense level of service provided by staff as trays of dirty plates stack up and staff rush around to locate hairdryers and meet other guest requests, even popping out to local shops to purchase items. This is in stark contrast to the calm and tranquil atmosphere the staff create in the public areas, front of house.

On a later visit I notice a small sign has been erected on wooden easel just inside the front door that advises arrivals to ‘please wait and a staff member will attend’. It just seems to add that little bit of ‘security’ for the arriving guest, and I wonder if this is as a result of guest feedback? Is the challenge of this daringly different reception hallway minus desk a step too far?

A reporter comments on his first impressions of Golden Sands and in particular about his experience entering the hotel lobby:

> This was a most unassuming introduction, and for one that makes a statement on so many levels it seemed remarkably unpretentious. This was evident as we walked in and found no formal introduction, no concierge, just a sign saying, ‘Take a seat, we know you’re here. Someone will be with you shortly’. And then Will emerged, greeting us warmly and as laid back in manner as attire that I thought at first he was another guest just being friendly, until he started taking down our details. (Toby White, The Arbuturian, September 21st 2011)

A number of people worked together to design and oversee the building of the Golden Sands, potentially a nightmare scenario, as one Director notes with some wonderment. Collectively, they created a charter together setting out how they intended to ‘deal with everybody properly’, how they were ‘all in this together’ and intended to ‘resolve issues together’. He recalls:

> I am convinced a lot of things came together that could have gone horribly wrong. There was risk, throughout all of this: the German contractors had not built a hotel before, just supermarkets and apartments; the hotel owners did not see eye to eye, lots of tensions over seemingly meaningless issues on reflection, but which at the time seemed crucial. (21st September 2012)

He describes this whole process as a ‘great weave’, adding that once written the charter did not ever need to be taken from the drawer. The Architect also commented
how this ‘was a bold move by the hotel owners’, adding to the risk factors of building a new hotel in a recession, and using German contractors at a time of euro instability. The Architect also commented how ‘The process was a lot more involved … I mean we do like to involve our clients quite a lot, and we do some sketches and we work things through so in that principle it was the same, but it was so much more intense’ (8th October 2012).

A guest wrote in some detail about their first encounter with the hotel:

This hotel is quite like no other - both its situation, carved as it is into the hillside and it’s unique architecture promise a quite different experience. And so it proved from the moment we entered the hotel: there is no reception as such (which is a tad disconcerting at first) … It IS an experience. But if you like your comforts a little more traditional, this isn’t going to be the place for you. (Trip Advisor, 16th July 2012)

The very structure of the building and its design ‘challenge’ traditional expectations, and as this same eloquent guest continued to comment, upon entering the hotel bedroom…

… whilst we were immediately struck by yet another fabulous view from full-height sliding doors at one end, we were also struck by the lack of any real division between the bedroom and the ensuite. … there’s a sleeping area and an ‘abluting’ area within a single space. And yes, that does mean what you’re thinking – the toilet is effectively in your bedroom, albeit behind a kind of basic modesty screen. Now, whilst this is an interesting style statement, I think somebody forgot the practicalities of what actually happens in a hotel bedroom, often in the middle of the night (no, not THAT!). Going to the loo (at whatever time) is, for most of us, a fairly private affair but at [hotel name] one has no option but to share the experience with one’s public!! This may do it for you, but for us it was all just a little unnerving. (Trip Advisor, 16th July 2012)

And for comparison, another guest commented:

… the reception immediately makes to feel relaxed, welcomed … There is no reception desk just a welcoming person waiting for you. You were made to feel special from that very moment on. The staff are all very friendly and relaxed. (Trip Advisor, 3rd December 2011)
One of the Directors describes how ‘doing things differently’ influences the staff recruitment process:

*When we were recruiting for the Golden Sands for example we took a lot of very professional hoteliers onto the beach and set up a lot of team projects for them to do, to see how they reacted, picking up rubbish and things, and at the same time what we were really looking for is which people were caring, which people are actually going to put looking after somebody who was struggling before coming first and um … I think that is a theme that runs through … it’s really key for us because you can’t instill that caring nature into somebody, whereas you can train people to do a job.*

A lot of people don’t know about sustainability when they come to us, more and more do, which is great, but we can enthuse them about it, but we just need them to be open minded, and actually have enough of a caring attitude so that when they find out about it they actually want to care enough to change their behaviour. *(6th June 2011)*

The Finance Manager very proudly talks about ‘daring to be different’ in the finance department; she explains, ‘It’s not what brought me here, but it is certainly what keeps me here’ *(12th September 2011)*. She provides an illustration by outlining the budgeting process:

*We have what we call a ‘budgeting hot house’ we sit in the conference suite for a day and literally people come in and out, my manager goes ‘right I can see that you are saying here that you are going to sell 10% less rooms – really? Oh you think you are going to put the price of the rooms up, you’re going to achieve 30% extra – really? Do you want to go back and think about this?’ We have lots of discussion around it, it’s a very proactive way of doing finance, um … it brings its challenges, because it would actually be much easier to be a grey suited accountant who produces numbers and doesn’t get involved in the day to day but that’s not the way we do things.* *(12th September 2011)*

I am given the impression staff expect to challenge and be challenged on decisions as the Finance Manager explained and they delight in seeking out new ways to do things that might just be a little bit different to conventional norms, as noted in the
press reviews. The value ‘daring to be different’ is used regularly as part of everyday explanations for how and why things are done in a certain way. There does seem to be a genuine desire for The Hotels to differentiate themselves from other hotel and spa complexes and this is picked up in a press review:

There are weeds in the pool. That’s all right, though: there are supposed to be weeds in the pool. In the absence of any chlorine, they’ve been planted there to keep it clean. That’s how they do things at what might just be the greenest hotel in Britain. (Stephen Bleach, Sunday Times, September 13th 2009)

4.3 Summary

This chapter began by referring to a number of factors drawn from my reading of the literature that provide a sense of ‘disconnection’ between techno-centric and eco-centric discourses, and I note how these influenced my thinking and observation as I undertook this study to explore: ‘How leadership enables a business to minimise negative ecological impact’. As a result, I believe I was drawn to notice how staff at The Hotels understand and articulate ‘sustainability’, relate to their environment and each other, consider the impact of their local actions on others, and set up and manage their systems.

Storytelling recounts the significant influence of family history and associated values and the ways these values are lived out, embedded in everyday activities. Familial behaviours and the use of language – emotive, spiritual and ecological language and avoidance of ‘corporate’ terms – shape the reality of The Hotels. Staff are tactile with each other and anyone else who is prepared to share this approach, such as myself, hugged and pecked on the cheek on numerous occasions, crossing boundaries of personal space. The Hotels push through semi permeable boundaries with other communities, working together with suppliers and other hoteliers, and engaging with local people on several levels. Care is taken to show respect for and understand others’ perspectives (although interestingly the sisters are less tolerant of this with each other).

Albeit the three sisters are very different individuals, each with their own role in the business, they do share their parents’ philosophy and values, recycling, making and mending, being in contact with the earth, gardening, growing vegetables, foraging food, home baking, appreciating nature. Attempts to stay ‘close to nature’ are
followed through in the design of Golden Sands, allowing the outside environment to come inside and ‘be taken notice of’, shaping and influencing the lives of both staff and guests. The sisters appreciate art in many forms, and have a love of big bold colour and design.

Daring to be different is a well-voiced motto heard in all areas of the business. The sisters aim to challenge conventions, take risks and want to be just that ‘little bit different’, to stand out from the crowd, expressing this in their use of emotional and informal (and non-corporate) language. They value the people that work with them, providing training, education and a package of benefits. In return they expect hard work and commitment, and treat staff as family. Staff numbers include several couples and people who have long associations with The Hotels.

There is a preparedness of people here to challenge the status quo on numerous fronts: architecturally, behaviourally, linguistically, pushing boundaries of what might be possible – but not just as a one off, on a continual basis, almost knowing when a change is due.

The Hotels claim to ‘have minimum negative impact on the planet’. To uphold this value I became aware of the ritualistic nature of decision making, whereby a number of seemingly ‘simple’ decisions become ‘complex’. This complexity results from questioning and giving consideration to the impact of local actions on the lives of other people and places. This may include local people, such as neighbours and suppliers, or people and places who are out of sight and out of mind making products in other parts of the world. This approach complexifies even the most seemingly simple decision such as the purchase of toilet rolls. The decision-making process invites multiple perspectives and possible solutions. Questions are asked about the potential impact of an action, and in some instances how this might lead to further decisions to resolve the problems arising from taking a particular initial action. I recognised these behaviours as constituents of ‘Wicked Problems’, a concept named and described by Rittel and Webber (1973). In the chapter that follows, this and other concepts are drawn out from these ‘first order facts’ and used, as Van Maanen (1979) recommends, to make sense of the ethnographic account.
5. Discussion

Less is More

can less be more, can more be less?
well, yes and no, and no and yes
well, more or less …

(Harvey, 2010, p. 70)
5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an ethnographic account of what it is like to work in a hospitality business that pledges to take ‘responsibility for reducing the negative impacts our actions and activities have on the environment and our local community’ (Hotel website). Personal stories describe how members of staff at The Hotels attempt to meet the challenges posed by this commitment in their particular areas of expertise. This ethnographic inquiry was undertaken to gain an understanding of ‘what’s going on here?’ What might we learn about the ‘doing’ of leadership that helps to meet this pledge?

Taken in isolation, the observable events and ethnographic account ‘do not speak for themselves’ (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540). They do not explain conceptually how leadership enables a successful business to minimise its negative impact on the planet. Van Maanen (1979) refers to this data as ‘first order’ facts and explains how an ethnographer might obtain theory from such material by a process of reflexivity, taking into account the context, situating data ‘historically and biographically’, understanding how it was interpreted by members of the organisation (1979, p. 540). He then advocates the use of ‘second order’ concepts ‘to explain the patterning of the first-order data’ (1979, p. 541), noting how the identification, or ‘drawing out’, of these second order concepts is ‘perhaps the most difficult yet most interesting goal of the ethnographic enterprise’ (p. 541).

This Discussion chapter aims to make sense of what is going on at The Hotels, using a process of reflection, identifying second order concepts, and bringing these to bear on data.

In what follows, my findings identify how everyday challenges at The Hotels are dealt with in ways that complexify, rather than simplify, them. The first section of this chapter discusses how this complexification comes about as staff are encouraged by The Hotels’s philosophy to inquire, reflect upon and notice how issues are situated. Emphasis is placed on the relational and systemic nature of all things. In so doing, issues that may previously have been dealt with by adopting a simple either/or decision-making process now garner wider implications. The work of Rittel and Webber (1973) explores how the nature of problems changes when considered
systemically, from being 'definable, understandable and consensual' (1973, p. 156) or 'tame', to taking on the characteristics of 'wicked' problems, by which they refer to the consideration of multiple perspectives, with no one 'right' answer, problems with several possible solutions, some of which may be paradoxical and manifest further problems in their resolution. Wicked problems documented in existing literature tend to refer to strategic policy and planning issues (Durant and Legge, 2006; Frame, 2008; Stoppelenburg and Vermaak, 2009) or societal crises and military situations (Grint, 2005). In contrast, this study identifies wicked problems in operational, practical and domestic situations.

Immersed in the ethnographic undertaking, I recorded stories told by people who work for and with The Hotels, recounting what they have done and how they continue to resolve day-to-day problems to uphold the company pledge. The daily work routines are guided by the firm’s philosophy. I quickly became aware of how the philosophy is not merely a list of abstract notions; instead it directly influences practice. Expressed as ‘threads’ or ‘valued behaviours’ (Appendix 8), the philosophy is embedded and embodied by the staff in their daily activities. The ‘valued behaviours’ become daily routines. Interestingly, the routines avoid inertia, as the staff members are encouraged by the ‘Choosing Well’ and ‘Dare to be Different’ threads of the philosophy to constantly question things that would otherwise be taken for granted.

My data illustrates how storytelling at The Hotels situates issues and problems, exposing their complex and ‘wicked’ nature. An example below illustrates how hotel employees and suppliers work together, sharing stories, combining knowledge and experiences, appreciating differing views, to examine the complexity and ‘wickedness’ surrounding purchasing decisions.

The penultimate section of this chapter reflects on the main themes emanating from the discussion thus far and brings the concept of mindfulness to bear on the data, and from this an appreciation of leadership at The Hotels begins to emerge.

The chapter draws to a close by summarising the themes that have emerged from this discussion to describe leadership at The Hotels, addressing the question at the heart of this inquiry – What might we learn about the ‘doing’ of leadership that helps an organisation to minimise its negative ecological impact?
5.2 What is going on here?

5.2.1 Complexifying the mundane – realising the complex nature of everyday tasks

As an ethnographer, it was striking to realise the number of seemingly ‘simple’ everyday operational tasks that, as a result of staff at The Hotels working to minimise negative ecological impact, become ‘complex’. For instance, I listened to a chef who recounted to me his efforts to source local produce:

This week for example we got English asparagus which I spent half, three quarters of an hour on the phone, trying to go round and find the person who actually grew the stuff, to find out about it, to make sure how it is grown and where it comes from, the history of the plant, because especially as we are a hotel… under the spotlight … if I put asparagus on the menu, people are going to start saying, ‘That’s from Peru.’ I spoke to the veg suppliers … I think it’s fun, to find out who we are buying from. He went through how the farm grows it… he was saying that the Peruvian asparagus - it’s on every menu round the country, he said if you look at the problems that asparagus in Peru causes – alright, it gives them an income but the serious droughts they have in Peru – which then led me to look into research on the internet about Peruvian asparagus and the massive problems it causes them. There’s 60 million tons of asparagus, or something ridiculous, comes out of Peru every year and quite a large percentage, a measurable percentage, of the entire water of Peru goes to watering asparagus so they can export it to make money. You think, well, is that sustainable?

A further and particularly illustrative example is provided by the search for and decision-making process involved in the provision of a slipper for guest use. I first heard of and made note of this situation when in August 2011 the General Manager of Golden Sands explained to me her dilemma:

I can’t … I can’t … reconcile at the moment, just putting in the little disposable slippers that they put in all luxury hotels, because I have this thing that … they’re there as a kind of a badge that says you’re a luxury hotel … most people if you get the literally disposable ones, will open them … they might
not even put them on, they go ‘oh, these are nice’ and because they come in a little packet as well … then that will be it … they will be wasted.

From a leadership perspective, the General Manager’s inability to reconcile could be interpreted as indecisive or even weak leadership behaviour when considered in relation to traditional ‘heroic leadership’. As Wheatley and Frieze (2011) comment, heroic leaders pronounce “I have the answer” … “I know how to solve the problem! Follow me!” (2011, p. 169). Or as Jones (2008, in Marturano and Gosling, 2008, p. 74) describes: ‘The leader as hero … is one who exhibits extraordinary courage, firmness … in the course of some journey or enterprise’ (p. 74).

Depending upon one’s interpretation of this outpouring by the General Manager, one could question whether she displays any or all of the five vital qualities of effective contemporary leadership put forward by Jackson and Parry (2008): ‘confidence, integrity, connection, resilience and aspiration’ (2008, p. 17).

Weick (2009) however gives legitimacy to the reply ‘I don’t know’ (2009: 263) and suggests the admission of ‘doubt’ signifies adaptability, sensitivity to changing circumstances, willingness to find out and make sense of an equivocal situation; in short – strong leadership (2009, p. 263). In a world of change where issues are open to multiple interpretations, he considers sensemaking an all-important collective process, of which the actual decision making is a ‘minor by-product’ (p. 263). Weick (1995) states: '[s]ensemaking is what it says it is, namely making something sensible’ (1995, p. 16) and he lists seven ‘characteristics’ or ‘properties’ (1995, p. 17) of sensemaking that distinguish the concept from other ways of understanding. He describes sensemaking as a retrospective process, based on the argument ‘that people can only know what they are doing after they have done it’ (1995, p. 24). He suggests the sense we make is dependent upon the way we construct our own identities, how we know ourselves and our ability to be flexible and adaptable in our environments. To illustrate this, he uses the phrase ‘How can I know who I am until I see what they do?’ (1995, p. 23). From this, we can appreciate sensemaking as an ongoing social process. He proposes the cues we extract will depend upon our ontological perspective and suggests we extract just as much as we need to get on with our own projects; in this way, sufficiency and plausibility ‘take precedence over accuracy’ (1995, p. 62).
Pye (2005) offers the opportunity to reframe leadership as a process of sensemaking in order to understand the ‘daily doing of leading’ (italics in original, 2005, p. 33). From this, one might conclude sensemaking would seem eminently suitable as a concept to identify patterns of leadership behaviour at The Hotels as people work to make sense of the complexities embodied in their daily work activities as they strive to minimise their negative ecological impact.

However, the sensemaking process I observed at The Hotels is not just retrospective, it is current and forward looking; as the slipper example illustrates, it is part of the ongoing process of making decisions. Weick (2009) explains how people seek direction and he borrows Hurst’s (1995, cited in Weick, 2009, p. 264) analogy of using a map and compass to wayfind. The suggestion being that a map can only help in territories that are previously ‘known’, whereas a compass can provide a general direction, and if a leader is prepared to admit they do not know the territory and are guided by their compass or values, much as the General Manager describes, then this type of leadership is more likely to ‘mobilize resources for direction making’ (Weick, 2009, p. 264). Going forwards into ‘unknown territory’, the General Manager sought guidance from others.

I witnessed the General Manager asking questions, paying attention to those with knowledge of the matter in hand, continually updating her own knowledge, and admitting her own areas of ignorance. She also weighed up the information she had in relation to her own feelings of discomfort and doubt:

Because most of them have got a little cardboard bit, they can’t be washed, they can’t be reused … you can get some that can be washed and reused … we’ve been exploring those … but then we have also had the option of some sort of rubbery ones that you can literally chuck them all the washer, put them back in the rooms again – which is fantastic but the ones that I have found of those are made in China! … I cannot find one that I feel comfortable with … we just can’t find the one that we think is going to work for us. And then there is this whole debate about should we put something because there is a demand for it and it’s what people want at this level of luxury, do we put something in there because they want it?

Walkerden (2010) proposes the development of ‘a “feel” for how to act’ (2010, p. 197) when working with the complexities and uncertainties of socio-ecological dynamics
and advocates the immersion of oneself in a process of ‘listening … tasting and savouring’ (p. 197). He highlights the importance of being sensitive to the ‘intricacy of instances’ (2010, p. 200) in our efforts to map contexts around specific situations and he states: ‘Stories exemplify this’ (p. 200).

Weick (1995) highlights the importance of telling a ‘good story’ as stories show patterns and, like a map, record previous efforts at sensemaking (1995, p. 61). The General Manager created a situation whereby she could ‘make sense’ by accessing stories behind ambiguous facts associated with the purchase of hotel slippers for guest use. She demonstrated behaviours proposed by Weick (2009) that enable us to ‘stay in touch with context’ (2009: 265) and make decisions that are plausible given a particular set of circumstances. The General Manager along with the Spa Manager and House Manager continued to research slipper products over a period of six months. In February 2012 a linen supplier, bearing a range of towel, bath robe and slipper samples, was invited to Golden Sands to meet with the three managers, as they were all affected by the decision to purchase these commodities. My ethnographic data records their conversations; taking several hours to discuss a range of ethical and economic issues, they asked questions to explore the implications of their purchasing actions and considered a range of perspectives focussing on three slipper samples, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

Unpacking the slipper story

What are the slippers made of and where do the materials come from?

What chemicals are used in production? How are they used and managed?

What do we know about the pay and working conditions?

Are any of these products re-useable? If washable how much water and detergent will that use?

How can we educate people about our choice?

Why do people expect to have this product?

Which products are most fit for purpose and provide best value for money?

What about waste, can it be separated, are they toxic, bio degradable, compostable?

Figure 5.1 Slide used in presentation to illustrate the slipper story
Through a process of exploratory questioning and storytelling, factual information was contextualised. The ecological and social implications of purchasing decisions were brought to life through the telling of situated accounts. This information might otherwise have remained unknown, peripheral to the purchasing decision, being geographically distant, obscure and somewhat controversial. In this case, the linen supplier had first-hand knowledge of the production process of each slipper sample. She described the impact on local inhabitants living in areas where bamboo is grown and manufactured, the qualities of Tencel® as an alternative material, the refuse collection arrangements that had been put in place to recycle similar slippers purchased by spa hotels in Paris, the values and principles of the company producing the recycled rubber flip-flop in China. This elaborate storytelling helped the three managers to draw out the strands of these complex issues, and enabled them to decide upon an item to purchase and be able to justify their decision with information available at that time.

The managers chose to purchase a recycled rubber slipper from China, despite their concerns about the distance and energy used to ship this product. In addition to this slipper being made from recycled rubber, the managers felt this product was durable, and having considered water and energy use were satisfied it could be laundered and reused. The supplier had assurances of ethical manufacturing processes and employment conditions of the workforce, overseen by a shoe manufacturing company in the UK. The rationale for purchase was later printed on a small card that accompanies each pair of slippers to inform and educate guests of some of the issues considered in making this decision. This action was taken, in part, as the slippers bear a stamp mark ‘Made in China’. At face value, this label was considered to have the potential to raise ethical questions of The Hotels’s claim to take responsibility to minimise their negative impact on the planet. I suggest this action highlights how important it is to consider that others may perceive things differently, unaware of the relational and systemic nature of the range of issues considered.

This account is just one example of what might otherwise be considered a simple and mundane purchasing task. My data illustrates how working in ways to minimise ecological impact necessitates that decisions are considered systemically, and in so doing this complexifies rather than simplifies. Complex data can overwhelm and create uncertainty; by admitting we ‘don’t know’, we can invite in others who have
information to contribute. Storytelling provides context, rather than just recounting logical factual detail, and this in turn enables people to make sense of a number of perspectives and consider a combination of factors collectively. The important role and influence of storytelling is discussed again in more depth in section 5.2.3 of this chapter. First, in the next section, I explain how the concept of ‘wicked problems’ put forward by Rittel and Webber (1973) is reflected in day-to-day decision-making processes at The Hotels.

5.2.2 Mundanisation of the wicked – making wicked issues part of everyday life

In their classic paper Rittel and Webber (1973) articulate the existence of ‘wicked problems’ facing modern-day society. They recount how, historically, the scientific rationale and industrialisation influenced organisation and problem solving, creating ‘professional expert[s]’ to solve problems in specific fields of expertise ‘that appeared to be definable, understandable and consensual’ (1973, p. 156). However, as they explain, contemporary society has had to address more complex and systemic issues that cross previously segregated disciplines, for which the use of professional analysis and traditional dichotomous problem solving is no longer applicable. In short, if ambiguity and uncertainty plague an issue with wider implications, then an alternative to ‘either/or’ problem solving has to be applied. They suggest we have to first make sense of a situation in order to move forward. Whether or not action results in ‘progress’ will, according to Rittel and Webber (1973), be deemed assessable at some later point, depending upon one’s idea of progress and how this is to be measured (1973, p. 163).

Rittel and Weber’s (1973) study identified a number of characteristics of ‘wicked problems’ beginning with understanding social systems as ‘open’ systems, describing how taking action in a system of this nature may cause a chain of cascading consequences. As a result, one can never say a job is complete as there may be endless repercussions rippling out. By taking any action Rittel and Webber (1973) explain how we change a situation in such a way that it cannot be ‘undone’ (1973, p. 163) as something has ‘been done’ that will impact upon someone somewhere. The number of interpretations or perspectives on an issue equates to the number of
interested parties involved; this provides multiple solutions to every problem, all of which are therefore ‘unique’ (1973, p. 164).

Rittel and Webber (1973) suggest ‘The information needed to understand the problem depends upon one’s idea for solving it.’ (italics in original, 1973, p. 161). The Hotels pledge to work in ways that minimise their negative ecological impact on the planet and working practices are guided by The Hotels’s philosophy. Aiming to be a successful as well as ‘environmentally aware’ business the staff at The Hotels seek solutions that are financially, socially and environmentally sound, both in the short term and to secure the long-term sustainability of the business.

My ethnographic field notes record a range of mundane operational issues that were handled in a manner consistent with the nature of wicked problem solving, as described by Rittel and Webber (1973). A range of people from varying areas of expertise bringing differing perspectives were regularly invited to contribute to an inquiry; the environmental, social and financial implications of actions were questioned and consequences considered. Decisions were made using information available at the time, knowing that this may be updated and changed as new information become available. This approach was described to me in connection with the purchase of soap and shampoo products, a variety of foodstuffs, new towels and bathrobes, fuel for the boiler, the use of cleaning products, the replacement of the spa baths and even a dilemma surrounding the composting of food waste. Staff working at The Hotels did not refer to these problematic situations and their approach to problem solving as ‘wicked’, but there was an acknowledgement that working to uphold The Hotels’s pledge did require more than a simplistic ‘either this or that’ decision-making style. As the Executive Housekeeper commented: ‘You actually have to stop and think about what you do and why you are doing it.’

The point illustrated here is that staff members at The Hotels were aware of and appreciated the contribution made by everyday operational activities to the achievement of the company’s pledge to minimise its ecological impact. As Brown et al. (2010) note, ‘it is the sum of the local issues that has generated the global issues in the first place’ (2010, p. 3). However, they also acknowledge that global issues generate local issues and in so doing lock us into ‘an endless spiral from which there is no escape’ (p. 3). Data in my study illustrates that when people realise the connection between actions taken locally and the implications that ripple out contributing to global issues, we can indeed act local and think global, bringing an
otherwise trite phrase associated with sustainability to life. The most unlikely and mundane problems experienced at The Hotels offered opportunities to consider and address their ecological impact. It was the ability to situate problems in this way, not the problem itself that exposed the wicked nature and determined the approach to be taken. Rittel and Webber (1973) consider it to be ‘morally objectionable’ (1973, p. 161) to treat wicked problems as if they are tame. This data demonstrates how enacting ‘tame’ problems as ‘wicked’ can be driven by a moral standpoint, in this instance to minimise negative impact on the planet.

The examples of wicked problem solving in this study contrast strikingly with existing literature on the subject that tends to identify problems dealt with in this way in strategic, societal crisis and military situations. Grint (2005) refers to wicked problems arising in the development of ‘a national health system or an industrial relations strategy’ (2005a, p. 1473) and cites Presidents Kennedy’s handling of the ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’ (p. 1473), the dismantling of the ‘Brent Spa’ (2005, p. 1479) and The War on Terror in Iraq (2005a, p. 1481). Frame (2008) discusses long-term planning in New Zealand, Durant and Legge (2006) explore debates in public health concerning the development of genetically modified foods and Stoppelenburg and Vermaak (2009) classify cultural issues blocking organisational change within the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as wicked.

The identification of wicked problems at the level of the everyday is not well documented in existing literature, and Marshak (2009) notes a ‘paucity of professional literature … suggesting ways to address wicked problems’ (2009, p. 58). Brown et al. (2010) note the complexities and uncertainties associated with the management of wicked problems go ‘largely unexamined in the main-stream organizational literature’ (2010, p. 180) and provide three studies of Organizational Inquiry in their collection to counter this lack. Although one of these provides a method for mapping individual managers’ decisions (2010, p. 193), none address wicked problem solving in day-to-day decision making at an operational level in a service sector business.

The findings outlined here allow this study to make a conceptual contribution by expanding the notion of wicked problems beyond those referred to in existing literature, i.e. strategic policy, military and societal crisis situations. The data shows how working in ways to minimise ecological impact requires people to appreciate the
‘wicked’ nature of even the most mundane operational issues, weighing up the consequences rippling out from any action taken, however small.

My data problematises the line between tame and wicked problems, situating the ‘wickedness’ more overtly in the sense-making processes of participants, rather than in the a priori nature of any given challenge, operational or otherwise.

In what follows, I explore the influential role of storytelling in my data. I show how stories help make sense of everyday undertakings as they are complexified. Stories are dynamic; they represent and invoke the actions of people rather than static values, they are accounts of embodied practice drawing on verbs and actions. Stories help the employees to discuss possible routes through their dilemmas in a way that injects life into otherwise potentially abstract values, creating valued behaviours in practice.

5.2.3 The influence of storytelling

As an ethnographer, I listened to many stories told by staff at The Hotels from the moment I arrived. My data records their use of metaphor, the propensity to recount family histories and provide personal reflections, this all seemed to indicate a significant way of behaving, telling something about the culture of the business. Gabriel (2000) suggests researchers have choices – when faced with such narratives, ‘they may dismiss them as trifles of organizational life … Alternatively, they may treat stories as clues leading to the “truth” about the organization’ (2000, pp. 31-32). Bolden et al. (2011) also suggest the use of a storytelling approach may ‘offer a guide to organizational values’ (2011, p. 57). Schein (2010), however, provides a note of caution, suggesting it can be ‘dangerous’ (2010, p. 256) to rely on stories alone to provide us with an understanding of an organisation’s culture. Nevertheless, as an ethnographer, I noted a consistency in the messages across a variety of storytelling approaches. In addition to stories voiced by staff, symbolic storytelling was evident throughout the premises. The homemade jams at the breakfast table and liqueurs on the bar invite conversation, the architectural design of Golden Sands along with paintings and sculptures by local artists have stories to tell (Appendix 9). The common theme running through all of these forms of
communication was the influence of, and value placed upon, a respect for nature, inviting the outside environment inside at every opportunity.

Fleming (2001) reminds us that storytelling is one of ‘humanity’s oldest art forms’ (2001, p. 1) and, despite Isaac’s (1999) lament that the oral tradition of sitting and telling stories is missing from our busy lives (1999, p. xvi), there appears to remain an acceptance in the leadership literature that stories continue to be told to communicate meaning on a regular basis in many aspects of day-to-day life (Forster et al., 1999; Fleming, 2001; Gabriel, 2000). Parry and Hansen (2007) suggest ‘organizational stories demonstrate leadership’ (2007, p. 282) and Bolden et al. (2011) that storytelling can provide meaning, contribute to sensemaking, anchor people to a particular set of values and reduce ‘uncertainty and ambiguity’ (2011, p. 57). Similarly, Gabriel (2000) explains how organisational stories ‘support a universe of meanings and values that integrates individuals into their groups, helps them make sense of everyday experiences’ (2000, p. 56).

In this section I highlight the importance of stories, used by staff at The Hotels as a way of exploring, informing and reinforcing a range of embodied behaviours. That storytelling is a part of leadership practice at The Hotels is not necessarily unusual in itself. However, I suggest there is something different about the expansive and emotionally expressive style of communicating stories at The Hotels that contributes significantly to the way they do things. The staff at The Hotels are encouraged to explicate the story behind their decision-making prompted by the value ‘Choosing well’ illustrated in the accompanying flow diagram entitled ‘Ethical Decision Making’ (see Figure 5.2 overleaf below).

This process is intended to influence and guide all decisions, however people are encouraged to make their own decisions about what is ‘right’ in the circumstances as they interpret them.

The Ethical Decision-making process\(^3\) poses three questions for self-reflection:

\[
\text{Transparency – Am I happy to make my decision public – especially to the people affected by it?}
\]

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\(^3\) When I spoke to the Director who proposed the use of this process to elaborate the valued behaviour 'Choosing Well', he made clear this was not something originated by The Hotels and he was unsure of the origin and author of this work.
Effect – Have I fully considered the harmful effects of my decision and how to avoid them?

And Fairness – Would my decision be considered fair by everyone affected by it?

Figure 5.2 Ethical Decision-making process used at The Hotels

If the answer is ‘no’ at any stage in this process, a feedback loop links to an advisory note: ‘Rethink – Think about things more carefully. Look for a better solution.’

When the answer is ‘Yes’ to all stages the ‘ethical decision’ can proceed, and a further advisory note adds:

A strong feature of good leadership is knowing when, and having the strength, to find another way – the ethical way. (Documentation supplied by The Hotels)

The ‘Ethical Decision Making’ model prompts the decision maker to ask questions, to consider multiple perspectives, possible solutions, and the potential impact of any action taken. This process highlights the existence of ‘the other’, of whom we may otherwise be unaware, providing an opportunity to consider ‘their there’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37) and not just how a situation is perceived from ‘my here’ (p.
37). I suggest the answers to the questions posed in this process help the staff to ‘frame’ (Smircich and Morgan, 1982, p. 258) the context for action, providing information that enables them to know and articulate what might otherwise be unknown and unsaid. The answers to the questions shape reality and may challenge prevailing wisdom, all facets that, according to Smircich and Morgan (1982), realise leadership.

The staff at The Hotels are able to use the stories that unfold from this process to make sense of their decisions. Stories help to connect activities in the immediate vicinity of The Hotels to wider issues, as implications ripple out across the globe, exemplified in the slipper scenario above. The stories recounted by the linen supplier connected the decision-making process undertaken by managers at The Hotels to hoteliers and recycling arrangements in Paris, to people growing and harvesting bamboo, and others manufacturing recycled rubber products in China. Gabriel (2000) argues how the telling of organisational stories seeks to ‘educate, persuade, warn, reassure, justify, explain, and console’ (2000, p. 32).

The questioning involved in the Ethical Decision-making process frames ethical practice as an emergent, immersive process that requires people to bring the ‘valued behaviours’ to bear on specific issues in context and make sense of the information and answers they receive.

As I have described in the earlier sections of this chapter, working in ways to minimise ecological impact at The Hotels creates ongoing, complex issues from simple, mundane and otherwise ‘tame’ tasks. Here, I describe how stories are used to call the process of complexifying the mundane into being, enabling an appreciation of the perspective of ‘the other’ and contributing to the process of ethical decision making.

Weick (1995) notes how stories are necessary to aid the process of sensemaking. He lists the qualities of a ‘good story’ (1995, p. 61) as:

... something that preserves plausibility and coherence, ... is reasonable and memorable, ... embodies past experience and expectations, ... resonates with other people, ... can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, ... captures both feeling and thought ... allows for embellishment and is fun to construct. (1995, pp. 60-61)
Weick (1995) also explains the vital role played by stories in the process of sensemaking. Because ‘people are always in the middle of things’ (1995, p. 43), the process of sensemaking never starts or stops, the information available and the context are always changing, and as a result he notes how individual accounts may lack accuracy, and suggests:

A good story holds disparate elements together long enough to energise and guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens, and engageingly enough that others will contribute their own inputs in the interest of sensemaking. (1995, p. 61)

Without the contextual information that a story provides, the choices that arise from complex situations might seem irrational, such as the example of buying a slipper product made in China. Stories can be used to legitimise decision making and justify courses of action by providing accounts from a number of perspectives. The examples in my data show how stories develop understandings of sustainability as related to specific situated accomplishments, in so doing stories bring the values alive in practice. In the enactment of complexity, stories become important accounts of situated practice that can be re-imagined and shared.

Grint (2005) concludes the typology of a problem is determined by the ‘persuasive account of the context’ (2005a, p. 1490). Stories such as those recounted during the purchase of the slipper highlight hidden connections and the paradoxical nature of actions taken locally and their likely impact on people and places across the world. People who grow crops, manufacture products and manage the by-products of an increasing vicious cycle of consumption and waste creation (Rimanoczy, 2013, p. 69) are commonly treated as ‘out of sight, out of mind’ (Gore, 1992, p. 145). Recounting a holistic story portrays the systemic nature of these issues and prompts a wicked problem-solving approach.

It could be argued that making inquiries about production processes and resource implications and their impact on people who are otherwise out of sight and out of mind makes purchasing decisions more complex and ambiguous, in that it invites multiple views for consideration, thus opening up options and delaying decisions. Alternatively, only by exploring these issues can we begin to appreciate the perspectives of others whose realities and projects differ from our own (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37).
Brown et al. (2010) describe how for ‘just and sustainable decision-making it is necessary to explore possibilities’ (2010, p. 5) and particularly in situations working across disciplines they stress the importance of people being able to place ‘themselves in others’ shoes’ (p. 5), in other words be able to appreciate realities other than their own, and the data here shows how storytelling aids this appreciation.

My findings suggest stories can illustrate others’ experiences and realities and explain something of their rationale for behaving in certain ways. In addition, stories can inform us of the impact of our actions, create connections and enable us to appreciate the perspectives of others who would otherwise be ‘out of sight and out of mind’. In this section I have raised the importance of stories as a way of exploring and reinforcing a range of embodied, context-specific ways to practise leadership in an organisation that pledges to minimise its negative ecological impact.

In the next section, I discuss how The Hotels’s philosophy becomes grounded in practice, making it an influential tool in guiding behaviour to prevent the onset of inertia brought on by routine practices.

5.2.4 Putting the philosophy into practice

The stories referred to above are dynamic accounts of embodied practice. In this section, I explain how The Hotels’s philosophy, a set of recommended behaviours, become embedded in daily practice.

Figure 5.3 The Hotels’s Philosophy
The Hotels’s ‘philosophy’ is intended to be more than a set of static ‘value’ statements. In an attempt to illustrate this, the behaviours are depicted as a mobile, illustrated in Figure 5.3. on page 178. Each of the eighteen baubles carries a short phrase, such as ‘Discovering simple pleasures’ or ‘Nurturing our Relationship with Life’, and these are suspended from the overriding pledge, ‘Cherishing Our World’.

A document created in 2008 by The Hotels’s Directors (Appendix 8) provides brief descriptors for each, an example being:

**actively caring:** We all care about a lot of things. Active caring means we must actually follow up this sense by doing things that will make a difference.

The language used throughout the document reflects considered aspects of behaviour and uses verbs rather than nouns, such as: ‘sharing laughter’, ‘experiencing nature’, ‘ask yourself “how can my learning help others?”’, ‘let’s find our inner child and take it out to play’. In this way, the philosophy invites and encourages ‘doing’. Weick (1995) urges people to work with verbs rather than nouns as in his opinion verbs are dynamic. He suggests:

> People who think with verbs are more likely to accept life as ongoing events into which they are thrown, and less likely to think of it as turf to be defended. (1995, p. 188).

The Hotels’s philosophy offers guidance about what matters for behaviour in this business, but these are not stated directives to be upheld – in Weick’s (1995) words ‘turf to be defended’ – as this would in itself contradict the values of ‘Guided by Conscience’ and ‘Daring to be Different’. The phrases used here are more in the form of suggestions, allowing for individual and situated interpretation. However, this presents a dilemma; having stated that staff are very much encouraged to find their own interpretations for these phrases, the directors use terms such as ‘we must’ and ‘we should’, and this is recognised. A paragraph in the philosophy document itself acknowledges ‘the dilemma of definition and ambiguity’. It reads:

> The simple words used in the statement of [hotel name’s] philosophy are intended to be given meaning by the user. We have, therefore, avoided defining the meaning at a corporate level. However, some of the words and

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4 Recreated with kind permission of The Hotels [name]
phrases can be open to conflicting interpretation and this will result in a loss of central unifying purpose. Some expressions of meaning are given here to enable the user to better understand how they might bring the philosophy to life – but these are not a substitute for the development of a deeper personal understanding for the meaning of each strand. (Hotel Literature)

The implications of having an overtly ambiguous philosophy are that staff make multiple interpretations, each within the context of their particular area of work, be that restaurant, kitchen or housekeeping. This in itself can highlight different opinions between these service areas and requires staff to look at issues from multiple viewpoints, rather than as their particular view or ‘piece of turf to be defended’. Examples of staff experiencing each other’s areas of hotel service are detailed in the ethnographic account. By ‘standing in the shoes of the other’, as Brown et al. (2010) recommend, I suggest this enables people to appreciate situations in ways best described by Rittel and Webber (1973) as ‘wicked’ rather than ‘tame’, realising complexity and the existence of multiple perspectives. Although staff did not refer to their actions using these literary terms, their behaviours reflected the philosophy in action and The Hotels’s valued behaviours meanwhile become embedded in practice. I have already referred to the Ethical Decision-making process in this regard, which brings to life the value ‘Choosing Well’ and engages staff in a reflexive process to consider decisions they are making from the perspectives of others by posing questions such as: ‘Who are the people who will be affected by my decision? Are there any harmful effects? Would my decision be considered fair by others? Am I happy to make my choice public?’ (Hotel literature).

I suggest the encouragement of staff to make their own interpretations of these valued behaviours exemplifies respect, in that it acknowledges an individual’s right to interpret differently and promotes a process of finding out. In so doing, this also facilitates mindful organising, upon which I elaborate later in this chapter.

The accounts of decision-making situations in the data show a pattern of gathering together people with diverse views and expertise who are invited to put forward their perspectives on an issue and to consider the views of others. One such gathering is the daily staff meeting held at both hotels, sometimes referred to more familiarly as ‘morning prayers’. This meeting is highly routinised, taking place at a set time and place each day. Members of staff from each department of the hotel congregate to
share information about service issues, solve problems, review mistakes and congratulate each other on jobs well done.

The ritualistic nature of this meeting, described in the previous chapter, embodies the definition of an organisational routine as described by Feldman and Pentland (2003), namely ‘a repetitive, recognisable pattern of interdependent actions, involving multiple actors’ (2003, p. 96). Feldman and Pentland (2003) note that organisational routines are ‘regarded as the primary means by which organizations accomplish much of what they do’ (2003, p. 94). However, routines can be problematic and reviewing some of the prevailing theories on routines, Feldman and Pentland (2003) note that as ‘the story goes, routines also result in inertia, inflexibility, and mindlessness’ (2003, p. 99).

This daily staff meeting witnessed at Golden Sands supports Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) argument that organisational routines can be both ‘a source of change as well as stability’ (2003, p. 94) and goes some way to dispel the notion that routinisation leads to inertia, inflexibility and even mindlessness, of which more later.

The way day-to-day issues are dealt with here seems to continually create change, as staff work together to ‘make sense’ of daily happenings. The consideration of a number of perspectives could be said to complexify issues, whilst at the same time new possibilities are created by reflecting on the different perspectives.

Feldman and Pentland (2010) promote ‘the central importance of subjectivity’ (2010, p. 109) in enabling routines to energise, and refer to Latour’s (1986) distinction between the ‘ostensive and performative’ (2010, p. 94) aspects of routines to build their argument that routines can be both a source of ‘change as well as stability’ (p. 94). The aspects of the daily staff meeting that could be objectively described as the ‘ostensive’ are, for example: the time, place, duration and A4 sheet of information, all of which frame the meeting. The ‘performative’ aspects are the actions taken by people to bring the meeting to life – the idea of the meeting and people’s perceptions may vary between those taking part. Different people attend each day depending on shift patterns, therefore changing the group dynamic each time. In comparison to the ostensive aspects, the performative aspects are highly subjective. The meeting allows people to bring their individual perspectives to bear on the issues raised, influenced by the particular views of each department represented as well as people bringing their own personal opinions to share.
Gatherings such as these are a regular occurrence at The Hotels, encouraging the sharing of information from a range of perspectives and diverse sources. People are encouraged to challenge the status quo and question how things can be improved. Staff exchange stories and know-how, and unpack how things have (if they have) gone wrong, and how these situations can be prevented in future. In this way these routine meetings of people with diverse perspectives do not function to simplify issues, but provide a regular opportunity to complexify. Making things complex becomes a part of everyday practice and this is normalised, but the very process of complexifying in itself prevents this process from becoming an inert or mindless activity.

The valued behaviour ‘Daring to be Different’ encourages people to take risks and find innovative ways of doing things. This was a phrase heard and recorded so regularly in my field notes it seems to set the norm for daily life at The Hotels. My data illustrates how an adherence to do things differently signals a preparedness to make mistakes, challenge things that would otherwise be taken for granted and in the process of doing so create further complexity. The Directors in particular seemed to thrive on challenging the status quo, most notably in the way they set out to design and build Golden Sands. The decision not to provide a traditional reception desk in the hotel lobby has had a significant influence on the behaviour of both guests and staff who, as a result of this design feature, provide a ‘hosting’ service to welcome and take care of guests’ needs. This challenge to more traditional hotel conventions and guest expectations enacts the practice of ‘Daring to be Different’. The Front of House Manager referred to the ‘disorder’ caused by this design feature, making the otherwise simple activity of guests queuing in an orderly fashion complex:

With no desk everyone doesn’t know what they are doing so the staff have had to learn how to deal with people.

Although these are just two of the eighteen valued behaviours contained in the philosophy, taken together, ‘Choosing well’ and ‘Daring to be Different’ initiate a process of inquiry to find new ways of doing and improving, creating a dynamic that has the ability to complexify rather than simplify. Despite being a part of The Hotels’s routine decision making, these behaviours prevent inertia, continually challenging and questioning the status quo.
In this section, I have explained how the philosophy becomes embedded, shaping the way things are done at The Hotels. The valued behaviours are not merely statements of intent, or a set of abstract values that individuals must somehow translate into practice. Rather, by the use of verbs, these phrases suggest action and in their undertakings people develop an understanding of the kind of situated behaviours being encouraged.

The next section discusses these behaviours in relation to the concept of mindfulness and considers the contribution they make to leadership practice.

5.2.5 Leading mindfully

This section begins by briefly summarising the main themes emanating from the discussion thus far. By pulling these together and using the concept of mindfulness one can begin to appreciate the role of leadership at The Hotels in helping work towards their pledge to minimise negative ecological impact on the planet.

So far this chapter has discussed the inclination by people working at The Hotels to complexify rather than simplify issues. This includes the consideration of multiple perspectives and thereby exposes the ‘wicked’ and often paradoxical nature of things when considered systemically. This process is normalised in routines and the process of complexifying in itself prevents daily routines bringing the onset of inertia. While this brings an increasing risk in terms of choosing action, the whole philosophy recognises the inevitability that there will also be mistakes or ‘failures’ from time to time. In their view, this is to be expected, is allowable and is a learning opportunity for improvement in future.

Ubiquitous storytelling both complexifies and enables a process of sensemaking, and through elaborating on basic facts and communicating something of the wider context and implications, this enables people to comprehend by hearing them through the voice of another.

The philosophy of The Hotels uses verbs wherever possible rather than nouns. In so doing, this encourages action and creates a questioning and sensemaking self-perpetuating dynamic, daring people to do things differently. Staff are encouraged to make their own situated interpretations, which I suggest exemplifies a way of doing leadership with respect for others, acknowledging an individual’s right to interpret the
valued behaviours differently. These behaviours are embodied in daily activities carried out by staff and embedded by the telling of their stories.

An example from my data described how the General Manager at Golden Sands was able to admit doubt in her decision making. In addition to signaling 'strong leadership' (Weick, 2009, p. 263), she demonstrated a willingness to find out and make sense of an equivocal situation. The General Manager's actions provided the stimulus for collective inquiry. The sensemaking process here illustrated the use of storytelling, exposing the systemic and complex nature of the task in question. The approach taken resembled 'wicked problem solving' (Rittel and Webber, 1973) as a number of options were identified and their implications considered systemically, making an otherwise seemingly simple decision complex.

A rich reservoir of illustrations in my data shows how the process of complexifying requires active engagement and mindfulness and deters mindless behaviour. Langer (2014) describes mindfulness as ‘the process of actively noticing new things’, of being ‘in the present’ and ‘sensitive to context and perspective.’ In her earlier work, Langer (1989) identifies the powerful effects of ‘mindfulness’ as the counterpart to the ‘equally powerful but destructive state of mindlessness’ (italics in original, 1989, p. 1) and suggests the ‘consequences of mindlessness range from the trivial to the catastrophic’ (1989, p. 44).

From Langer’s work, one could appreciate how acts of mindlessness undertaken in our everyday lives contribute to global devastation and catastrophe, an example being the islands of floating plastic found in the Pacific, Indian and North Atlantic Oceans (Livescience, 2014). Langer (1989) provides three factors to determine mindlessness: ‘entrapment by category’, ‘automatic behaviour’ and ‘acting from a single perspective’ (1989, p. 10). The factor ‘entrapment by category’, when considered in relation to this example, describes how we respond to material categorised as waste or rubbish. Our ‘automatic behaviour’ is to follow the well established routine of throwing rubbish away, albeit there is no ‘away’ on the planet, and we are ‘acting from a single perspective’ where the rubbish is no longer in one’s own domain, as it is out of sight and out of mind. These behaviours illustrate how we can ‘blindly follow routines’ as if on ‘automatic pilot’ (Langer, 1989, p. 4), without further thought. The impact of our actions is only made aware to us only when we
have the opportunity to stop and think, to consider the consequences of our otherwise seemingly logical behaviour systemically and mindfully.

That is not to say that all automatic or routine behaviours have negative consequences. Levinthral and Rerup (2006) note how ‘less mindful’ automatic and routine behaviours can have many benefits, not least in freeing us from tasks that do not require our attention, enabling us to focus on others that do, and provide a wealth of accumulated organisational experience upon which to draw when required (2006, p. 503). Their paper highlights how mindfulness and ‘less mindful’ behaviours are complementary, connecting what have previously been regarded as two disparate literatures (2006, p. 502). I suggest the constant questioning and challenging encouraged by The Hotels’s philosophy encourages the practice of routine mindfulness.

There is an ever-growing abundance of literature on mindfulness, much of which emanates from the corporate world of consultants and practitioners advocating the use of mindfulness to address a multitude of business and organisational issues (Confino, 2014; Langer, 2014; Purser and Loy, 2013). My case data and analysis provide a distinctive organisational illustration of mindfulness in leading and organising, and my discussion draws from and contributes to leadership literature in particular.

The notion of mindfulness has grown in acceptance and popularity, appearing ‘to offer a universal panacea for resolving almost every area of daily concern’ (Purser and Loy, 2013). However, Purser and Loy (2013) also raise a concern that in some instances the concept of mindfulness has been ‘uncoupled’ from its Buddhist origins to make it a more acceptable product for the corporate market. An article in The Economist Schumpeter Blog (2013) adds to this concern, suggesting this ‘commodification’ leads to mindfulness becoming ‘part of the disease it is supposed to cure’. However, on a more reassuring note, Confino (2014) cites Thich Nhat Hanh, reputed to be the father of mindfulness in western cultures. Apparently, he considers that, ultimately, undertaking the act of being mindful will in itself fundamentally change business leaders’ outlook on life, ‘opening up their hearts and minds to greater compassion’ (Confino, 2014, para 5) rather than merely focusing on profit maximisation, making the world a better place.
Langer (1989) acknowledges similarities and differences between cultural and religious understandings of mindfulness and hopes that ‘some of the moral consequences striven for by Eastern disciplines might also result from mindfulness as understood in this Western form’ (1989, p. 78).

My data illustrates how mindfulness as practised at The Hotels contributes significantly to the achievement of their pledge to minimise their negative ecological impact. The actions and behaviours of people working at The Hotels demonstrate how they think not only of themselves but also of the impact of their business undertakings on other life forms.

For the purpose of this discussion, I refer to Langer’s (1989) seminal work on the mind, which is underpinned by a powerful process orientation, and her argument that ‘every outcome is preceded by a process’ (1989, p. 75). Mindfulness is about paying attention to the ‘situation and the context’ (1989, p. 65) thinking about ‘how’ we do things. She states three ‘key qualities of a mindful state of being: (1) creation of new categories; (2) openness to new information; and (3) awareness of more than one perspective’ (1989, p. 62).

I suggest these qualities are evident in the practices observed at The Hotels. The valued behaviours create new categories such as ‘Actively Caring’, for example, people are asked at interview what ‘Cherish the world’ means to them. Interpretations of these behaviours differ, influenced by a person’s situation and perspective. People working for The Hotels engage in an ongoing process of inquiry, inviting in new information, in addition to highlighting and considering multiple perspectives.

The mindful tasks of ‘actively caring’, ‘choosing well’, ‘daring to be different’ and engaging with complexity are not just limited to senior management. Instead, it is everyone’s responsibility to see everyday issues as complex, showing leadership at The Hotels to be a shared process, putting their value ‘Inspiring and enabling’ into practice.

Langer’s (1989) work has been taken up by organisational scholars and developed in academic literature in terms of ‘mindful organising’ and ‘organisational mindfulness’ (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2012; Weick and Roberts, 1993; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 1999). Previous studies have explored the relationship between mindful organising and organisational mindfulness, seeking to differentiate
(Ray, Baker and Plowman, 2011) and reconcile (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2012) them. This debate builds on the basic distinction that organisational mindfulness is invoked by top-down leadership, whereas mindful organising is more bottom-up and process oriented, forever ongoing, enacted and accomplished in the process by the people organising (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2012).

The data here straddles both organisational mindfulness and mindful organising, illustrating both the creation of contexts for thinking and action by staff as well as staff themselves enacting the context for thinking and acting mindfully. As such, 'organisational mindfulness' and 'mindful organising' merge together, co-existing as an interdependent dynamic. The influence of the founders and their philosophy, brought alive by verbs and storytelling; wicked problem solving processes for day-to-day, what might otherwise be considered tame problems; and, not least, the way things are considered and challenged so that routines do not become inertial have all together created a way of doing and being where everyone is responsible for their own actions and has an active mindful part in shaping the collective. This quality of organisational mindfulness in turn enables individuals to mindfully organise, and the behaviour of individuals acting mindfully perpetuates collective organisational mindfulness.

In the slipper example, leading mindfully is triggered by an admission of doubt on the part of the General Manager. In so doing she creates a situation of organisational mindfulness, where other managers feel comfortable, confident and motivated to contribute mindfully to a collective process of inquiry and sharing of ideas.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Weick (2009) suggests the admission of ‘doubt’ signifies adaptability, sensitivity to changing circumstances, an illustration of strong leadership (2009, p. 263). Langer (1989) also comments that a manager’s ‘uncertainty’ about ‘how’ something can be achieved makes a strong contribution to innovation and creativity when coupled with a confident belief that a task can somehow be resolved. She states, ‘Admission of uncertainty leads to a search for more information’ (1989, p. 143) and explains how a manager’s ‘uncertain’ style communicates to staff the opportunity to ask questions, present options, not have to be right all of the time themselves or hide mistakes, and be able to take risks (p. 143) She suggests, ‘if managers seek out information from employees to answer [these] questions, both will probably become more mindful and innovative’ (1989, p. 144).
The practice of leading mindfully at The Hotels draws others in to a dynamic of engaged leadership as described by the architect attending the ‘ideas sharing’ meeting preceding the design and build of Golden Sands. On that occasion, the owners of The Hotels asked a number of people ‘what makes a hotel?’ and ‘what makes a hotel different?’ Although this was not an explicit admission of doubt on their part, their actions signaled a willingness to set their own ideas to one side and listen to new ideas and information from others. They created a space for others to ask questions, present options and be able to take risks, as Langer (1989) suggests.

Leadership is a meaning making process (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). At The Hotels, the acknowledgement of doubt by owners or managers invites and empowers others to contribute, and space is made for such conversations to occur. According to Ladkin (2010), ‘Protecting the possibility for such spaces becomes a key leadership activity’ (2010, p. 115). Examples of such ‘spaces’ in my data include the ‘ideas’ meeting for the new build, the managers’ meeting with the slipper supplier, and the daily staff meetings.

Meaning is created as people gradually ‘fuse’ (Ladkin, 2010, p. 114) together their differing views and opinions. A criticism voiced by managers themselves at The Hotels is that such collaborative processes slow things down, certainly in the slipper example the three managers considered the issue over a period of six months. Grint (2005) notes how time taken for reflection can slow a decision-making process down. However, in this instance the decision was not ‘critical’, and by gathering together information over time the General Manager was able to assuage her doubts. The meeting with the supplier opened up opportunities for questions and suggestions from departmental managers, inviting in new information from the supplier – a collective reflective process ensued using the Ethical Decision making model. Here the General Manager demonstrated her ability to defer to expertise, challenge herself and other managers to be ‘open’ to and accept new information for further consideration, even question previously held beliefs or ‘categories’ (Langer, 1989, p. 64), an example being that distance travelled would render the product less ‘sustainable’.

Working through the Ethical Decision-making model, staff at The Hotels actively complexify issues, rather than them merely showing ‘a reluctance to simplify’, one of the dimensions of mindful organising evidenced by Ray et al. (2011, p. 190). Stories elaborate on factual data and illuminate a number of perspectives; this enables an
appreciation of ‘my here is their there’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 37) as answers to questions ripple out, widening the sphere of influence, connecting local actions with global issues. This enables people at The Hotels to appreciate how working in ways to minimise their ecological impact becomes a shared endeavour.

Mindful organising can be seen here as an embedded contextualised approach to managing complex issues in such a way as to minimise this organisation’s negative ecological impact. Mindfulness at The Hotels is brought into being by the use of repeated storytelling practices – these invoke the ways in which individuals have had to engage on a personal level with the challenge of weighing up and navigating a route through a range of alternative practices and choices. These are aspects of leadership in which everyone actively takes part.

Mindfulness is also brought into being by the philosophy, which encourages mindful practices to negotiate the not very clear cut demands of ‘sustainability’ in a luxury hotel setting. Rather than this being a set of static directives, the use of verbs and an encouragement to interpret meaning in context furthers mindful behaviour. All of these manifestations are embedded in routine practices, such as the daily staff meeting, which in turn do not become routinised because of the mindful practices taking place.

What we have at The Hotels is an understanding that managing issues in ways that aim to minimise their negative ecological impact, making everyday situations and decisions complex, and promoting the valued behaviours that have become embedded can be identified as those elements that comprise a state of mindfulness.
5.3 Summary

Using a process of reflection, bringing second order concepts to bear on first order facts, this chapter has discussed the questions, ‘What is going on here?’ How does leadership enable The Hotels to work towards their pledge to minimise their negative ecological impact?

Leadership at The Hotels actively creates ‘space’ for people to share ideas and make sense of situations. Examples from my data illustrate this practice being set in motion by senior managers admitting their doubts. Their admissions of ‘not knowing’ and then asking questions actively invites, encourages and empowers others to contribute and share ideas freely, creating a rich pool of information upon which to draw and eventually base their decisions.

Issues are actively made complex here by the application of an Ethical Decision-making process as this encourages people to ‘stand in the shoes of others’ and experience the impact of their own actions from differing perspectives.

The use of verbs articulates intentions and injects action. This is how The Hotels’s pledge is brought to life, embodied by people undertaking daily activities and is embedded into the fabric of the establishment by the telling of their stories.

Bringing to life the philosophy of The Hotels is not just limited to the senior management; it is everyone’s responsibility to interpret the valued behaviours as they apply situationally to specific areas of expertise around the business.

Leadership at The Hotels is a shared and engaged process. Identified as ‘mindful’ here, this way of ‘doing’ leadership offers people the opportunity to admit that they ‘do not know’, to raise doubts, take risks, ask questions, get things wrong, have a view and opinion and seek that of others, to challenge and be challenged, to stand in the shoes of others and above all to dare to do and say things differently.

Having summarised and drawn conclusions here about the ‘doing of’ leadership at The Hotels, the next chapter retraces the steps I have taken on this learning journey, identifying the contribution this study makes more generally to the theory and practise of leadership.
6. Conclusion

Success

In order to get more out of life, we do not have to go and change the world.

The world is already beautiful.

We have to change ourselves.

(Malkani, 2004.)
6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to gain a better understanding of the role of leadership in achieving sustainable business. I have inquired how leadership might enable sustainable practice to be more embedded in the day-to-day ‘doing’ of running a business, beyond the rhetoric of strategic plans, vacuous mission statements and technological fixes, actually influencing behaviour.

In this concluding chapter I revisit my rationale for this research undertaking, present my findings and consider the contribution they make to bridging the ‘how’ gap identified in the literature between rhetorical ideals and the ‘doing’ of leadership that may promote more sustainable business. I also consider the positioning of my study in relation to existing literature in the fields of leadership, sustainability and the emerging body of literature that connects the two. Finally, I reflect upon my methodology and make suggestions for further research.

6.2 Rationale

To achieve the purpose of this study, I have focused on two questions: ‘What is going on here?’ and ‘What might we learn about the ‘doing’ of leadership that helps this organisation to minimise its ecological impact?’

I have been particularly interested in the day-to-day aspects of running a business, delving beneath the potential veneer of strategic plans and mission statements to uncover daily and operational leadership issues. For that reason, I engaged in an ethnographic study enabling me to appreciate the working lives of people actively engaged in situ. I selected to study a small to medium sized luxury hotel business comprising two hotels, as they had acquired, and continue to acquire, a number of awards for sustainable business practice, as listed in Appendix 1.

This inquiry was timely, beginning when sustainability was topical on the international news agenda. The media at that time pronounced and promoted the build up to Rio+20 a high profile review of progress made to promote sustainable development
since the concept was introduced at the first Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

This study and my questions were prompted by my reading the leadership and sustainability literature, wherein authors report how progress to promote ‘sustainability’ has been described as modest, slow and even limited (Doppelt, 2003; Hardman, 2012; Jacobs, 1997; Robinson, 2004; Senge et al., 2005). Furthermore, what constitutes progress towards sustainability also seems unclear in the literature, as authors note the contested (Ladkin, 2010; Marshal et al., 2011) nature of the concept, describing it as ‘difficult to pin down’ (Bolden et al., 2011, p. 116), complex, ambiguous and vague (Connelly, 2007; Dresner, 2002; Jacobs, 1999; O’Riordan, 1988; Robinson, 2004).

Lozano (2012) notes that the progress that has been made towards sustainable business has focussed on “hard” technocentric solutions … such as reducing impacts or improving efficiencies and effectiveness’ (2012, p. 44). He comments further how the associated strategies, assessments and reports that accompany these solutions do not address the “soft” issues, such as philosophies and management practices’ (p. 44). Walkerden (2010) also comments on the orientation so far towards technical solutions and emphasises the need for reflectivity and sensitivity on behalf of the practitioner to successfully address environmental problems.

There are numerous calls in the literature for further empirical research (Hardman, 2012; Redekop, 2010; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008; Walker et al., 2010), whilst a Business in the Community report (2010) simply states, ‘We need examples of business success with sustainability at the core’ (2010, p. 11). The intention of this inquiry therefore, has been to contribute to this still seemingly under-researched relationship between leadership and ecological sustainability.

Literature presents a ‘how’ gap between rhetorical ideals and actual ‘doings’ to minimise our negative ecological impact. As Western (2013) notes, much discussion has taken place, but ‘organizational leadership has failed to keep pace’ (2013, p 245). Glimmers of new approaches are emerging, and Western (2013) himself explores the ‘Eco-leadership Discourse’ (2013, p. 243). Hardman (2012) promotes ‘Regenerative Leadership’ on the back of his research ‘with successful sustainability leaders’ (2012, p. 157) and Doppelt (2012) examines the urgent need to move from
an individual to a collective perspective.

All of these theoretical ideals build on systemic ways of ‘knowing’ and ‘being’, moving away from the linear, dichotomous paradigm, a shift referred to in my review of the sustainability and leadership literature in Chapter Two. However, the question of ‘how’ this shift might be accomplished still remains. How might people working in organisations bring their well-meaning proclamations of working sustainably to life in their everyday actions and behaviours? As Berger and Luckmann (1967) comment: ‘when I want to challenge the proclamation’ (1967, p. 37) of my everyday reality I have to make a ‘deliberate’ and ‘by no means easy effort’ (p. 37) to do so.

Hardman (2012) suggests at the outset of his work that leadership for sustainability requires ‘skills and behaviours’ (2012, p. 1) that have previously gone unrecognised. My study of leadership at The Hotels highlights skills and behaviours that enable this particular business to weigh up economic, social and environmental considerations to operate in ways that minimise their negative ecological impact.

The findings from my ethnographic undertaking present an account of the manner in which employees of these two luxury hotels integrate their concern for ecologically sustainable business into every aspect of their day-to-day working practices.

### 6.3 Addressing the ‘how’ gap

Authors tell us there is very little written about how people embed sustainability in their everyday practices, revealing a ‘how’ gap in the leadership literature. This research and subsequent findings contribute to bridging this gap by providing a rich, detailed, empirical case study of a successful luxury hotel business that seeks to make minimal impact on the planet, and an analysis of how they do it.

The glib phrase ‘act local whilst thinking globally’ is often associated with the notion of sustainability. This is easy to say, but my research suggests that it is challenging and time-consuming to achieve. Data in this study provides practical illustrations of how leadership actions influence sustainable organising and bring this short and potentially powerful phrase to life in one organisation. People working at The Hotels are actively encouraged and enabled to make sense of how they undertake business activities on a day-to-day basis to minimise their negative ecological impact, linking
local actions with global implications.

Reflecting on my data I have recognised a pattern, a process of leadership taking place on several occasions within daily working life at The Hotels. This is most clearly illustrated by the ‘slipper story’ detailed in my Discussion Chapter, as well as being described to me by the architect in relation to the new build at Golden Sands, and later upon further re-reading of data I found this to be a routine approach applied to both strategic and operational situations more generally. This leadership process cannot be summed up neatly by one word or phrase, instead I have identified four themes that emerge and these are detailed below in section 6.4 and illustrated diagrammatically as a framework in Figure 6.1 on page 204. I stress this framework does not imply more general application as the data and my subsequent theory building emphasise the embodied and situated nature of leading towards ecological sustainability within the context of this particular hotel business. However, I do hope it may stimulate further thought and consideration for leadership behaviour in other organisations.

6.3.1 Leadership to minimise ecological impact

Having expressed a desire to look beneath mission statements and strategic plans, I have to acknowledge the overarching influence of The Hotels’s philosophy and values (Appendix 8). These derive from and are shaped by the owners’ family history and lifestyle values, and describe how The Hotels do business. The philosophy sets the scene, provides a context and influences behaviour. This is achieved by the use of verbs to outline actions suggested in each of the eighteen value statements, or threads, such as ‘Cherish our world’, ‘Dare to be different’, ‘Actively caring’ and ‘Choose well’. Each of these value statements or threads is open to individual interpretation in situ, and thus they directly influence situated practice. People use this language as they go about their business to describe both ‘what’ they are doing and ‘how’ they are doing their work.

In the slipper scenario, the General Manager considered how she could uphold The Hotels’s philosophy and values to minimise the ecological impact of this particular purchase. ‘Daring to be different’, she questioned whether to provide slippers for guest use at all, challenging guest expectations of service standards in a luxury hotel. ‘Choosing well’ required her to feel confident about making her decision public to those affected by it. Had she considered the harmful effects? Would her decision be
considered fair by everyone affected?

Thinking through her options, she realised that purchasing slippers for guest use was fraught with ecological dilemmas and paradoxes. Although she did not use this terminology, her questioning the issue systemically changed the nature of what might have been a simple and ‘tame’, ‘either this or that’ decision into a ‘wicked problem’ the like of which is described by Rittel and Webber (1973). She had doubts and admitted to not having an answer sufficient to satisfy her concerns and uphold The Hotels’s philosophy. She invited others to contribute their ideas and suggestions, and made time and space for this collaborative process. A number of perspectives were brought to the table, and each person had a story to tell to elaborate on basic facts. Stories brought alive the impact of decisions made locally as their implications rippled out into ever-widening spheres of influence across the globe. In this way the stories complexified the issues, whilst simultaneously aiding sensemaking, providing a window through which to know more about other people’s lives. With the information available at the time, the managers made a decision to purchase a product, knowing this would be open to review as and when other information became available.\(^5\)

Illustrated here is an approach to leadership that is not about specific leaders per se, but more about a shared process, where everyone takes part.

The data I have gathered offers specific insight into how we might conceptualize leadership for sustainability as an inquiring, engaged and collective practice at a local and operational level, dealing with micro issues, not just an approach reserved for strategic policy and planning.

6.3.2 Positioning my study in relation to existing literature

Early on in this study, I identified that both ‘leadership’ and ‘sustainability’ were recognised in the literature as ‘difficult and contested terms’ (Marshall et al., 2011). So far in this concluding chapter I have referred to my findings in relation to the shared ‘doing’ of leadership rather than this being a name given to person in a role. In the same way, The Hotels avoid using the term ‘sustainability’ to name their

\(^5\) During my recent visit to the Hotels (3\(^{rd}\) Nov. 2014), I was informed of a new slipper product under consideration, an organic felt slipper made by a small company in Slovenia.
philosophy, although they do publicise a ‘Sustainability’ policy on their website (Appendix 10). Their literature and internal documentation use instead phrases that describe their intentions and ways of doing: ‘responsibility for reducing the negative impacts our actions and activities have on the environment and our local community’ (accessed on the hotel website on 1st October 2014). I can appreciate the more general use of the term ‘sustainability’ for ease of communication as it provides convenient shorthand for the rather lengthy alternative phrase used by The Hotels – ‘to minimise our negative ecological impact’. However, as I noted in the Literature Review, the meaning of the term becomes disputed as we attempt to capture and objectify such a broad principle in just one word. Moreover, the use of verbs in The Hotels’s literature provide a dynamic and, as we see here, people at The Hotels just get on with ‘doing’ what they say they will. In this way the philosophy really does become embodied by people and embedded in the way things are done differently.

In section 2.2.1 of the Literature Review, I argued that the notion of sustainability as it is generally understood and addressed in contemporary society has ‘lost touch’ with its ecological roots, pertaining to the ‘man-land’ relationship. My study of The Hotels revealed how they make efforts to enable ecological business. The architectural design of the new building aims to ‘bring the outside inside’ at every opportunity, metaphors from nature are used liberally in The Hotels’s literature and are commonly heard in spoken exchanges, these all influence and shape the discourse of the business. An ecological stance is also illustrated by the consideration given to the site of the new hotel facing south-west to maximize sunlight, incorporating features such as a curved corridor that enable the building to ‘blend in’ with it's surroundings. These strategic considerations also mirror those given to daily operational considerations in the various service areas of the hotels: the purchase replacement towels, soaps and shampoos, cleaning products, food and beverages and new spa baths as I have discussed. Many deliberations echo this ecological way of thinking about the impact of small local actions on wider issues. The approach taken at The Hotels would therefore seem an attempt to do much as Bateson (2000) suggested, that by adopting a language of metaphor and storytelling we would be better equipped to ‘speak nature’s language’ (2000, p. 80) appreciating the interconnectivity of all things.

In my review of the leadership and sustainability literature I was critical of the way society has approached the sustainability agenda over the last twenty-five years,
questioning the efficacy of the predominantly positivist paradigm and associated techno-centric (Doppelt, 2003, 2012; Marshall, Coleman and Reason, 2011; Lozano, 2012) stance taken. I noted how authors such as Bateson (2000), Capra (1989), Parkin (2010) and Waring (1995) critique modern society’s ad hoc approach to problem solving. The proliferation of social needs and wants and increased consumption to meet these demands pursue the assumption that nature is a resource which is to be mastered, controlled, regulated or exploited for human gain. These assumptions are grounded in the anthropocentric worldview. I have argued how sustainability is an ecological issue, a cyclical process, and yet approaches to promote sustainability in organisations have tended to focus on linear ‘end of pipe’ (Parkin, 2010, p. 34) solutions driven by technology and economics (Hawken, 2010; Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; Jackson, 2009; Vale and Vale, 2009). I further argued how we attempt to measure and analyse the impact of our actions for sustainability without recognising the relational issues, the consequences of actions taken in one place for those who may be ‘out of sight and out of mind’ (Gore, 1992, p. 145) in other parts of our shared world.

Having now completed my ethnographic study at The Hotels I find some of their approaches could also be described as anthropocentric. The Hotels have a business to run as one of the owners commented, and they have a large overdraft, and make it known that they are not a charity. In addition they wish to provide all year round employment for people living in the locality. These motives make me reconsider my earlier critique of anthropocentricity and wonder about the possibility of un-anthropocentric ways of organizing in a world dominated by a political economy that prioritises the financial and materialistic wealth of human beings. As such my study aligns more with the findings of Stubbs and Cocklin (2006) who conclude that whilst it is possible to make ‘significant progress’ (2006, p. 521) to operationalise sustainability ‘fundamental changes are also required to the socio-economic system’ (p. 521) of which all business is a part.

It is however worthy of note that The Hotels address the ‘how’ issues and not just the ‘what’ (Marshall et al., 2011, p. 7) and in addition provide an illustration of a situated and relational approach not merely the application of a blanket sustainability policy or non-contextualised analytical measurements. That said staff at The Hotels do measure energy consumption and water use (I spent a morning with two staff who monitor water and energy use on a weekly basis providing graphical evidence that is displayed in the kitchen where cooking methods drastically impact energy and water
What is more evident in this study is the way leadership behaviours at The Hotels demonstrate respect for self, other, and ecology and encourage consideration of context, take into account a number of perspectives and give thought to the complex global social, economic and environmental issues that spiral out from local decisions and actions.

Leadership at The Hotels could be said therefore to reflect Western’s (2008) emerging discourse of Eco-leadership, which he explains is not just about ‘going green or taking an environmentalist stance’ (2008, p. 183). It is ‘a leadership perspective that understands how solutions in one area of business may create problems in another’ (p. 183). Western (2008) describes how he uses ‘the term “Eco-leadership” to refer to an emerging leadership discourse which is immersed in values, metaphors and language which resonate with the term ecology’ (2008, p. 183). I consider leadership behaviours at The Hotels to some extent reflect this emerging discourse. In Western’s (2013) later work he identifies four qualities he suggests form the essence of the Eco-leadership discourse, these are: ‘Connectivity and interdependence, Systemic ethics, Leadership spirit and Organizational belonging’ (2013, p. 254). My findings contribute a case study of ‘how’ eco-leadership can manifest in practice, aligning with the four qualities at the heart of this approach: interdependence between people and their environment, acting ethically to protect the natural environment, paying attention to relationships and being part of a whole community.

The collective and community approach evidenced at The Hotels also resonates with the work of Wheatley and Frieze (2011), who refer to the shift in leadership approaches ‘from hero to host’. Leaders as hosts have conversations that matter, are curious and invite people to come together to explore, ‘creating the means for problems to get solved … and for people to become energetic activists’ (2011, p. 212). The Hotels represent an interesting empirical case study, which illustrates the collective ‘hosting’ practices embedded (and embodied) in leadership that aims to support a more connected relationship between people and planet.

I also referred to Ladkin’s (2010) work in my review of leadership literature and her concept of ‘The Leadership Moment’ (2010, p. 28). Ladkin writes of the ‘indefinability’ (2010, p. 2) of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon and encourages her readers to think of leadership as an emergent property ‘created through the confluence of a particular situation or context’ (2010, p. 177). My findings from
research at The Hotels show how embedded values, the use of language, admission of doubt, storytelling, complexification and mindfulness all contribute and influence the context, purpose, and people and, as such, could be said to add a layer of richness to Ladkin's (2010) initial model in relation to the sustainability agenda.

Accepting that no one person or business can change the planet this case analysis shows how it is possible to create a business microcosm, which illustrates a successful way of making a more environmentally sustainable economic contribution.

6.4 Doing things Differently – a framework for ecological leadership

My study of The Hotels has enabled me to identify four main themes emerging from the data and these are explained here:

6.4.1 Theme 1: Active doubting and questioning as situated practices for sustainability

Managers at The Hotels admit to ‘not knowing’ or having ‘doubts’ in their decision-making, and this empowers others to contribute ideas. Questions are asked to actively invite suggestions and further information, and, moreover, space is made for this very purpose. Their Ethical Decision-making process poses questions about how others might be affected by one’s decisions. In effect, this asks how might an action in ‘my here’ affect someone in ‘their here’ which is ‘my there’. Appreciating others’ perspectives makes things complex, highlights the wicked nature of even the most mundane decisions and engages a systemic mindset in relation to micro issues such as the purchase of soap and toilet rolls.

6.4.2 Theme 2: Storytelling as a mechanism for disseminating embodied accounts, the practice of making the everyday complex

Storytelling is used to express accounts of situated practice at The Hotels, stories elaborate on facts and detail, make connections between local actions and wider contexts. People tell stories that personify and embody the valued behaviours into
the way things are done day-to-day. Storytelling complexifies by expanding on basic facts situating accounts in a context. At the same time, storytelling contributes to making sense of other people’s realities; hearing accounts told by others enables an appreciation of differing perspectives on life. This again is not just a process confined to a person called ‘the leader’, I found storytelling to be rife at The Hotels, enabling a process of sensemaking embodied by staff. Storytelling promotes listening, noticing and ‘bracketing’ (Weick, 1995, p. 35), bringing things to life that may otherwise be taken for granted or go unnoticed. In combination, these ways of ‘doing’ address the ‘how’ gap mentioned earlier.

6.4.3 Theme 3: Routine behaviours promote possibilities for change
The combination of actively admitting doubt, questioning, inviting contributions from others and telling stories has, as a collective process, become a routine way of doing things at The Hotels. Time and space are made available for this routine to become the way things are done. The daily meetings, the managers’ meeting with the linen supplier and the gathering referred to by the architect prior to planning the build for Golden Sands illustrate three quite different situations where the same approach was applied. Albeit this way of working has become ‘routine’, it has not become ‘routinised’, nor does it ‘result in inertia, inflexibility, and mindlessness’ (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, p. 99), supporting Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) argument that organisational routines can be both ‘a source of change as well as stability’ (2003, p. 94).

The way issues are dealt with at The Hotels seems to continually create change, the leadership behaviours I observed encourage and invite people to challenge the status quo, work together to share ideas, understand different perspectives and ‘make sense’ of otherwise complex issues.

6.4.4 Theme 4: The value of the ‘mindfulness’ lens in addressing these situated practices
Mindfulness (Langer, 1989) is a helpful way of articulating practices at The Hotels, where people think not only of themselves but also of the impact their daily actions
and business undertakings have on other life forms. People demonstrate how they are aware of their surroundings, and efforts are made at every opportunity to bring the ‘outside inside’, both architecturally and in the ways of working. Examples in my data refer to The Hotels as an active member of the local community: organising the beach clean, providing allotments and recycling curtains. Also, as part of a global marketplace, making decisions about whether to purchase food from UK growers and producers or from further afield, and understanding the impact of these decisions on indigenous peoples. These examples illustrate how people working at The Hotels consider small and local actions in relation to their wider implications rippling out into the community and across the wider world. Staff members defer to others with expert knowledge, people who can provide different perspectives and new information from a variety of sources – this creates ideas and new ways of doing things.

People at The Hotels do make mistakes and these are often openly admitted to guests as well as being discussed amongst the staff team in order to explore how things could be done differently. Consequently, there exists a constant balancing and negotiating of different perspectives and priorities.

What we find at The Hotels is the coming together of a practical illustration of organisational mindfulness and mindful organising. Previous studies have explored the relationship between organisational mindfulness, reputed in the literature to be invoked by top-down leadership, and mindful organising as a bottom-up process. Organisational mindfulness is exemplified at The Hotels by the overarching values and philosophy shaping the context, and mindful organising is noticeable in individuals’ behaviour. Together, these two approaches create a perpetual dynamic of mindfulness. It is difficult to determine which came first, as individual lifestyle practices influenced the business values and the business values now influence individual behaviour. This study illustrates how mindfulness at The Hotels is not a one-dimensional concept applied at either an individual or organisational level, but a self-perpetuating, interdependent dynamic. This illustration of collective mindfulness further addresses the ‘how’ gap in our understanding of how leadership enables an organisation to minimise its ecological impact.
6.4.5 A framework for ecological leadership

Over my time spent at The Hotels I noticed a pattern of leadership embedded in the themes outlined above. This pattern of leadership, represented diagrammatically in Figure 6.1 over the page, is particularly prevalent in relation to decision-making at The Hotels. People working at The Hotels embody a number of practices commencing with the identification of a ‘problem’ as having no ‘technical solution’, being complex in nature or in the words of Rittel and Webber (1973) presenting as a ‘wicked problem’. As such there may be no tried and tested obvious resolution and I witnessed the admission of doubt, people saying ‘I don’t know’ in such circumstances, much as Weick (2009) legitimises. To find a solution multiple views and perspectives are invited and space made for the sharing of ideas, elaborating on basic details using a storytelling or narrative dialogue (Weick and Browning, 1986). This complexification process was routinely used, replicated in a number of different settings, the new build and the search for guest slippers being just two examples that I was able to record in detail. This way of ‘doing’ seemed to me as the ethnographer to enable The Hotels to undertake business in ways that minimise their ecological impact, linking leadership and sustainability. I suggest these behaviours go some way to addressing the ‘how gap’ between the rhetoric and the doing of leadership to promote sustainable business practice as highlighted in the literature (Bolden et al., 2011; Parkin, 2010). However, I wish to emphasise the framework below does not constitute a generalisable ‘how to guide’ as it takes place within the context of The Hotels, influenced by their history and values and ways of being and doing. I also stated earlier in this thesis that it was not my intention to produce a directive given my understanding of the situated and socially constructed nature of reality. However, this contribution indicates how story-telling, routinis complexity and mindfulness are wrought together in a way which contributes to conceptual understanding about the daily practice of leadership for sustainability. These concepts are integrated with practice here in this study, in such a way as to build theory.
Doing things Differently – a framework for ecological leadership

I have listened to accounts of, and personally observed these practices taking place on a number of occasions during my time at The Hotels. On a day-to-day operational level I witnessed this process of ecological leadership happening as a housekeeper made her deliberations about sourcing replacement towels, and a chef considered his purchase of asparagus for the menu. On a more strategic level this is the process described to me by the architect in relation to the design stage of the new build. It also reflects the story recounted to me by the person responsible for sustainability maintenance at The Hotels as he went about the task of replacing the iconic spa baths that sit on the cliff top enabling the occupants to wine and dine and enjoy the view whilst languishing in hot bubbles.

I was fortunate enough to experience and record the whole process from the identification of a ‘non technical problem’ through to the ‘letting go and going forward’ phase in relation to the purchase of guest slippers, and was later able to follow up on progress when the initial solution was reviewed in light of ‘new information’ being made available.
It is also important to note that these behaviours were predominant but not characteristic of every situation. For instance one example of a more autocratic style of decision-making was acknowledged by a director in relation to pebbles adorning a wall in the Beach Cliff, that are in her words ‘not at all sustainable.’ (13th June 2011). Another example comes from a member of the housekeeping staff who described to me the bedroom layout at Golden Sands and how this impeded the ease with which they carry out their duties. I recalled the architect had explained to me how they had wanted to design the hotel in such a way as to maximise opportunities to ‘let the outside in’ and provide every bedroom with a magnificent sea view. The architects had also taken account of the impact of this new building on neighbours and local residents, and as such had designed the building on five levels descending the cliff face. As a direct result of these design features the housekeeping staff have the task of lugging heavy cleaning equipment and linen up and down numerous stairwells, to access just a few rooms on each floor. In many more conventional hotel bedroom layouts, such as the Beach Cliff, bedrooms are often arranged along a corridor providing ease of access for servicing and this enables the use of a service trolley upon which linen and cleaning equipment can be carried.

A similar example relating to the architectural design of the building came from one of the bar staff (Vv) as my notes record:

…she explains how she feels the design of this bar was not thought through by somebody who had worked in hotels, ‘it all looks so beautiful but it is not practical as it entails lots of walking backwards and forwards to the kitchen and the restaurant both of which are downstairs and there is no access from the back room behind the bar to take things through to the kitchen without going through a public area.’

Vv describes the route that has to be taken, coming out of the bar area down the stairs through public areas to enable access back into the staff corridor behind the restaurant. This route entails opening and maneuvering through several heavy wooden doors, making it quite awkward to carry a tray piled high with crockery back to the kitchen. An alternative route is to go through the restaurant, which is permissible only when one is coming out of the kitchen with food to serve in the bar, and is discouraged when carrying piles of dirty dishes from the bar back to the
kitchen as it looks rather unsightly. (In my notes I recorded how I must remember this ‘as I have already taken a tray back via that route already – oops!’ (23rd February 2012)).

I suggest these examples are not evidence of ‘mindless’ behaviour as such, given the architect did describe how he and his partners considered numerous perspectives and challenged conventions on several levels in their design of the new hotel. I suggest it is more that they did not consider the perspective of the bar and housekeeping staff as much as they might, compared with their considerations of the guests and neighbours. The implication here is that ‘mindful practice’ does not automatically lead to the ‘right outcome’ for everyone.

The housekeeper later explained to me how he had made some concessions given the challenge posed by the layout of guest rooms, allowing more time to service guest rooms and reducing the number of rooms allocated to each staff member in comparison to general hotel industry norms. In contrast, the issue of the heavy doors and access to the kitchen from the bar area was not resolved during my time at The Hotels, and I felt it would be inappropriate for me as an ethnographer to intervene by mentioning this to the architect in my conversations with him.
6.5 Methodological implications

I began my research by identifying three very different establishments that publicly proclaim themselves to be working to promote sustainable business in one form or another – a large educational establishment, the UK’s largest mutual business and a small hotel group. I carried out trial research, meeting and interviewing managers from each with a view to undertaking a comparative study.

Reflecting on the progress I had made during the first few months of research, I realised carrying out one-to-one interviews with selected managers provided rather a one sided view of what was going on in the businesses. I felt I needed to obtain a range of views from all levels and perspectives to substantiate or counter the opinions I was hearing. To do this in the time available, I decided to undertake research solely with one organisation and opted for the hotel group. My decision was justified in the literature on small and medium sized business. Walker et al. (2010) note a paucity of research in these firms, despite the fact they constitute over 99% of all enterprises in the UK (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2010). Small and medium sized firms proliferate in the South West region of the UK, and in particular within the hotel and catering industry – the mainstay of the tourist trade upon which the regional economy relies heavily. Although it is difficult to be precise, Hillary (2000) reports the cumulative environmental impact of small to medium sized firms is said to be substantial, contributing as much as 70 per cent of all industrial pollution (2000, p. 37). This sector, despite being under-researched, is therefore not inconsequential economically, socially or environmentally.

Initially, I hoped it would be possible to work alongside and reside amongst The Hotels’s employees for a length of time, to ‘live with and like them’ as Van Maanen (2011b, p. 219) proposes. However, for a number of practical reasons this total immersion was not possible. Although I was not able to ‘take a toothbrush’ as Bate (1997, p. 1150) advocates, I was able to undertake a longitudinal study. Over a period spanning almost three years commencing from my first unofficial visit in November 2009 to October 2012, as detailed in Appendix 6, I spent approximately one hundred and sixty hours in the company of people associated with The Hotels, in a variety of observational roles, not least of all just ‘being there’ (Van Maanen, 2011b, p. 220) shadowing, observing and interviewing. Rather than working undercover, I
made a formal request to carry out a study to The Hotels’s owners, I was welcomed and given free access to roam.

Following some considerable process of reflection (Neyland, 2008) and the use of ‘second order concepts’ (Van Maanen, 1979) to ‘organize and explain’ (1979, p. 540) the factual data recorded in my field notes, my aim here has been to provide a situated account of one organisation. I have addressed the questions ‘What is going on here?’ and ‘What might we learn about the ‘doing’ of leadership that helps this organisation to minimise its ecological impact?’ The findings here are not intended to be a ‘how to’ guide, but a situated case study. Other authors (Connelly, 2007; Hardman, 2012; Ladkin, 2008; Marshall et al., 2011; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008) also provide case study illustrations that bring the concept of sustainability to life in organisational settings across the world. This research differs from these in that it is an ethnographic study of a small hotel group in the UK, exploring issues across a number of perspectives including front line operational staff and senior managers. In this undertaking I have illustrated the value of ethnographic research in helping researchers and practitioners understand and experience the contribution made by the exploration of situated behaviours when considering how a business can minimise its ecological impact.

The extent to which the activities and behaviours I have described here are transferable to other business could be the subject of future inquiries, some suggestions for which are listed below. Personally, I have been able to enrich my own learning about this subject having experienced people doing leadership in ways that minimise the ecological impact of their business. I hope to use my learning and experience when working with a variety of leaders and managers, influencing their own thinking and behaviour in situated circumstances.

6.6 Implications for further research and practice

This research project has several limitations, and I will deal with these first before going on to explain how these may also give rise to opportunities for further research. This is a single case study, and the findings and conclusions are acknowledged as not necessarily replicable. Furthermore, as a piece of qualitative research, the findings do not provide statistically valid data. That said, the epistemological
perspective of my argument is that of a social constructionist and this study builds theory contributing to the ‘how’ gap that exists between the rhetoric written about and the ‘doing’ of eco-centric business practice.

There are a number of ways further research could build on this study to plug the ‘how’ gap in our understanding and some of these are listed below.

1. As the findings from this study are not generalisable to other forms of organisation or industry sectors, there are opportunities to undertake ethnographic studies to build case studies of similar and comparative organisations.

2. One might inquire the extent to which the concepts of Mindfulness, Wicked problems and Sensemaking are evident in ways of ‘doing’ in other organisations. How do other businesses bring their values, vision and mission statements to life?

3. I was unable to access a range of suppliers to The Hotels, but it would be an interesting project to look into the implications of supply to an organisation that aims to minimise its ecological impact.

4. This research focused on an organisation where working to minimise their ecological impact derived from historical family lifestyle values. It would be interesting to research an organisation where similar ecological principles have been the result of some change intervention or programme of leadership learning.

5. A criticism voiced by managers themselves at The Hotels of their way of complexifying matters is that this process ‘slows things down', and Grint (2005) also notes how time taken for reflection can slow a decision-making process down; further research might also look into the wider implications of this.

As identified in the literature, authors are unanimous in their calls for further empirical research in this field to further our understanding and questioning of how leadership might address the challenges posed by efforts to promote ‘sustainable’ business practice.
6.7 Summary

In this final chapter I have summarised my findings and outlined how they contribute to bridging a ‘how’ gap in the literature. The Hotels accomplish what they do to minimise their negative ecological impact through people engaging in shared leadership and systemic processes. These include: using verbs, admitting doubts and not knowing, inviting questions from a range of perspectives, making space for collective problem solving, telling stories and making things complex rather than simplifying. These behaviours can be understood by the application of the combined concepts of ‘wicked problems’, ‘sensemaking’ and ‘mindfulness’. Leadership at The Hotels is about challenging the status quo and daring to do things differently, taking risks and making mistakes. The participants in this study are mindful in their approach as individuals and this influences and is influenced by organisational mindfulness in a mutual dynamic. In so doing, they enable me to present, in this thesis, an understanding of ‘leadership for sustainability’ as a shared, embodied, situated accomplishment, involving a mindful process of ‘making the everyday complex’ to minimise ecological damage, and continuously connect local actions with consideration for their global impact.
Epilogue

A piece of research of this size and duration requires stamina and commitment. Why? Is a question I have been asked many times over the past five years, not least because I am almost at the end of my professional career, unlike so many of my fellow PhD students who are just about to embark upon theirs. So why bother to sweat (not quite blood) and shed tears for this? My motivation and my drive to undertake this study and continue this work has definitely been tested over these five years. I have had false starts and potentially ‘given up’ on more than one occasion. At best I can only describe my drive to achieve a PhD as an ‘itch’ that I have had to scratch. This is something I have had to prove to myself, having failed my eleven plus and not having had a university education as a young person. With lots of help and support I have found the determination within me somehow to continue – never having been one to give up easily.

Without doubt sustainability and leadership are two important influences reflected in my life. My beliefs and values are about having a close affinity with the natural world around me. This is evidenced by the significant role played by my compost heap enabling me to feel connected to the natural cycle of life. I know there is no waste in nature and no ‘away’ to throw things to. Composting is how I make sense of sustainability, it is an awesome process turning waste into riches. According to McIntosh (2004) this warm midden is ‘a precious commodity’ (2004, p. 9) and, as Heeks (2000) notes, ‘you get out more usable energy than you put in’ (2000, p. 76). Symbolically it is an iterative process that enables new life and energy from death and decay. Composting is also how I ‘offset’ some of my guilt for having a horse and two dogs which in rational terms are not sustainable at all because, unlike the suggestions for sustainable pets put forward by Vale and Vale (2009, p. 252), I do not intend to eat them, despite this being a most sustainable and realistic suggestion proposed to maintain grazing native ponies on Dartmoor.

My professional work for thirty years has been located in the field of Leadership and Management Learning, helping others to learn, personally develop and grow in their business endeavours. For a long time I have been puzzled by the apparent disconnection between the cyclical and relational patterns of earth systems upon which we depend for life, and the linear analytical systems we create to organise people going about business. As an active gardener, living in a rural community, giving due deference to the cyclical, systemic and sustainable nature of life I have
often wondered how I could think about peopled systems in similar ways to natural systems, as part of, rather than being apart from, nature.

I have learnt a tremendous amount during these past five years and my only regret is not having been able to undertake this research earlier in my career. However, there is still time to use my own learning to support others to explore and learn, influencing their leadership contributions to promote ecologically astute business practice. I hope my findings inspire others to undertake further research, to try out some of these ways of working in their own localities and contribute somehow to a greater reverence of nature.

Presenting my findings to the management team at the Golden Sands on 1st August 2012, they immediately recognised and knew of other examples of ‘wicked problems’ facing them on a daily basis. When making a similar presentation to the Beach Cliff Heads of Departments meeting on 13th September 2012, the Director asked if it might be possible to have a version of my slides incorporated into the new staff induction. The managers felt I had captured what they hoped they were about precisely. They also delighted in realising their efforts and activities have theoretical underpinning such as the concept of ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel and Weber, 1973) and the social constructed nature of reality giving us the phrase ‘My “here” is their “there”’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Having listened to my presentation, the Human Resources Manager expressed how ‘proud’ she felt working for The Hotels, appreciating how I had noticed their efforts to promote sustainable business practice. For now I continue to embed and embody sustainability in my own lifestyle …

Today I had five years growth cut from my head
‘Taking the PhD out of my hair’ the hairdresser said.

Feeling liberated and smiley.
Taking them home I chopped my fallen locks into tiny pieces
And scattered them on the compost heap.
When I grow vegetables in my soil, cook and eat them
I will be consuming traces of me –
Interesting thought … embodied sustainability.
References


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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of Awards

2010

Cxxx Sustainability Awards 2010 –

The Most Sustainable New Building / Development UK Commercial Property Awards 2010 –

Best Small Hotel and Construction UK AA Awards 2010

Eco Hotel of the Year. South West Tourism Awards 2010

Gold awarded Small Hotel of the Year. South West Tourism Awards 2010

Gold awarded Sustainable Business of the Year. South West Tourism Awards 2010.

Winner of Winners. Cxxx Tourism Awards 2010.

Gold awarded Small Hotel of the Year. Cxxx Tourism Awards 2010.


Green Hotel of the Year. International Green Apple Awards 2010.

Environmental Best Practice. Cxxx Business Awards 2010


Winner of Winners. Trip Advisor 2010 – Certificate of Excellence

2011

NHS Cxxx Health Workplace Gold Award December 2011.

Enjoy England Sustainable Tourism Award 2011 Awarded to xxx
Sustainable Tourism partnership (CoaST) – Ambassadors Big Tick – Awarded to xxx Ltd by Business in the Community International Hotel Awards 2011

Best Sustainable Hotel UK International Hotel Awards 2011

Best Spa Hotel UK. International Hotel Awards 2011. Best International Hotel

2012

Cxxx Tourism Awards 2012. Silver Award for Small Hotel

Investors in People 2012 BKSA Best Eco Credentials 2012 Cxxx Tourism Awards 2012 – Silver Award for Small Hotel of the Year Investors in People 2012 Hospitality & Tourism Award – 2012 Sustain Magazine Awards for Sustainability, Business and the Built Environment Highly Commended – 2012 Goldstar Awards

2013

Visit England 2013 Small Hotel of the Year – Highly Commended

Tripadvisor Travellers choice awards 2013 No.9 in the UK for Romance

Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence for The xxx Restaurant

Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence for The xxx

xxx Ltd is place number 76 in the Western Morning News Annual Business Guide 2013 Top 150 Employers in xxx

The xxx Restaurant Taste of the West 2013 Gold

Wine list of the year 2013 Imbibe & Louis Roederer Champagne – Finalist

The Best Kept Secret Awards 2013 Best Eco Credentials – Highly Commended
Appendix 2. Pictures of waste recycling
Appendix 3. Sample Data

NB 10th August 2011

I guess I suppose what I was saying to start with about the differences between the two businesses would be … where I would start wanting to tell you about what’s different here … we didn’t have a hearts and minds we just had a blank sheet of paper, I mean we still had them but because we had a blank sheet of paper we started from … the top that way um and so yes … it’s in all our job descriptions, include a line about sustainability so given that it is part of their job to embrace that … um …

So it’s not kind of like an add on its part of the business?

Exactly, as a result we have … I think our recruitment process here is very good and we don’t start recruitment process until we’ve described the job and the ideal candidate for the role … we then would generate our ad. from that so that was where … when we were looking at the job and we thought part of the job was sustainability then that has to be part of the ad. content um and then it also has to be one of the things we will question at interview you know generally the general question we will throw into most of our interviews is that ‘the overarching value of our philosophy is Cherish our World – what does this mean to you? How do you think it will affect you on a daily basis?’ That’s an interview question you know that we ask everybody when they come to join the organisation.

I love the fact that you use language such as ‘Cherish our world’ which you would not find in your average corporate business.

No.

But you’ve actually said that is part of our language …

Yes very much so, and I am very lucky as the GM of this business that I did spend time at Beach Cliff and when I spent the time there it was as the philosophy was being launched and I helped do some work up there and launch the philosophy and start to develop that change in culture up there I mean it was already underway when I joined them um it’s been part of my language and to then be confident with it and
bring it down here and lead this business with that philosophy um and I do think it is a very powerful philosophy um …

So when you say the change in the business up there … when I spoke with E, I knew about the Witts anyway … E was saying her parents brought her up in that way, so the three sisters who are now involved had that kind of philosophy … you’re talking about the fact that the Beach Cliff changed?

Well it was there, it really … it was there, it was definitely there, but the um the commitment to it the properly you know nail your colours to that mast and say this is what we are about and now we want to try and get some recognition for it etc. etc. etc. I feel it wasn’t … whilst it was embedded at the Directors level and it was definitely … I don’t know whether there was the the broad understanding of the whys and the wherefores etc. there … um in the early days, that felt it was this full commitment to … that everybody understood through all the different layers down through the business and so it was that mission to kind of make sure that it went right down … um because it was what was driving it but they hadn’t actually … as I say nailed their colours to the mast been able to put it all down and say this is what we are about this is what we stand for, so they went through the process of developing something that meant that that leadership could continue and stay and the communication was there so they got their whole team to a point where they understood and that's a big team and a big organisation as well, so whilst it was part of it I don’t think it was the whole … it wasn’t what they are doing now which is exemplary you know they realised actually this is what we believe in but what does the whole team understand that? You know … Do they know why that green roof is there? Do they know why we use solar panels? Do they … you know do they think it’s just because we want to save some money? You know … And so getting that message, this is what we stand for these are our values you know and then making sure they were shared through the whole business I think was the big mission that they went through. It was kind of and I wasn’t there through all of it … and I certainly … I probably came in at the tail end … they were already an award winning sustainable business when I joined them but I could definitely, from the … my point of view, I get a feeling that when um people started to talk about doing business more sustainably etc. that felt like exactly the right thing for them to do, and rather than just going through the motions of picking up those guidelines that started to be out there etc. they literally grabbed them embraced them and actually then stared to challenge
them and push them forwards even further so where as you describe a business kind of where as on a corporate way they decide it's good to put the sustainability badge on the business etc. This just felt like this is naturally what we should be doing – because it is at the heart of our business it's just you know we want to really grab hold of it and make sure we are doing it an exemplar rather than just … because it was their values it is at the heart of those three sisters and when I joined they had got it to a point where it was already … I saw some of the struggles I guess that's why I knew they had had a big job to do because on some levels there was still some resistance you know and they were having to battle resistance and actually get to a point where you know you can't resist us this is what we are so there was a few of those little issues still going on then and for me I took away from that actually I'm starting a new business this has to be embedded from the start I don't want those little battles later on … you know … once we've got somebody in and they start saying … they know … that every single thing is going to have go through the sustainable questioning and things so you know … people will come to me with a proposal for something and you know I don't just say yes or no we consider all the various different sides of it and I'll go through … I don't have a set … form etc. that means that we log it, but whenever somebody comes … I'll say let's think about this, why do we want to do it? Is it the right thing to do for the planet? Is it the right thing to do for the business? And we go through these various different questions and before I'll authorise any change to what we do.

The decision-making is certainly what E pointed out takes the time.

Yes…

Um because you can't just say 'is it this or is it that' and we only know so much today, and tomorrow we might know more to influence a decision …

Yes, an example would be the towels that we bought, we decided ... so OK we are sustainable ... what sort of towels are we going to buy in this business? And we went for organic cotton, and a luxury towel, because it's a luxury business um so it's quite high weight and at the time when we were looking the supplier we found that we felt most comfortable with was an organic cotton that was made in India, so it had to travel quite a long way, um so when we came to do a reorder, by that point we'd found another supplier of towels, who could do them in Turkey, and so we are still buying organic towels and its being matched to the same um as we had before but
it’s not coming as far this time, and then we are now considering … we bought swim towels at the time … certainly we are considering when we replace swim towels … because they are literally just something that when you go and have a swim you just put round you … downgrading the weight, in fact should we consider replacing them with hallam towels instead which are the flat cotton ones which won’t take as much washing and so we are now going to the point that if we replace them with those we won’t have as many washes going on because we can fit more in each wash, so we … there are so many different levels that we have to challenge … we are not just going ‘right well lets buy the same again’ we are actually thinking every time ‘can we do better this time, than we did last time?’

*When I saw E she mentioned the towels were an ongoing issue – these examples really illustrate the issues …*

One of the things, and this is where we get a little bit stuck, um I suppose we are still sitting on the fence, the other thing is slippers for the rooms, and I can’t … I can’t … reconcile at the moment, just putting the little disposable slippers that they put in all luxury hotels, because I have this that thing you know they’re there as a kind of a badge that says you’re a luxury hotel, um … most people if you get the literally disposable ones, will open them … they might not even put them on, they go ‘oh, these are nice’ and because they come in a little packet as well … then that will be it they will be wasted. Because most of them have got a little cardboard bit, they can’t be washed they can’t be reused … you can get some that can be washed and reused … we’ve been exploring those … but then we have also had the option of some sort of rubbery ones that you can actually … you can literally chuck them all the washer, put them back in the rooms again – which is fantastic but the ones that I have found of those are made in China! And so we are like … (unsure) I’ve gone down the route of are they um ethically made etc. but I’m still um we’re still not sure if that sits comfortably with us. So we’ve … I’ve found some others now that are made in Europe which I am feeling a little bit better about but still we still at the moment we still do not have anything in the rooms whatsoever, because I cannot find one that I feel comfortable with – that doesn’t mean we don’t want to put one in there … um we just can’t find the one that we think is going to work for us. And then there is this whole debate about should we put something … because there is a demand for it and it’s what people want at this level of luxury, do we put something in there because they want it … that is not quite right for now, just so that actually we have
delivered that to them and we just keep looking, just keep challenging … So there’s one that kind of an unresolved …

*And there must be loads of those kind of things?*

There’s masses of them, masses … there’s um decisions that we took on toiletries in rooms was a big one big thought process that we went through … were we gonna put refillable bottles of toiletries in the rooms and put brackets on the walls and then have the housekeeping staff going round and refilling them … well it’s kind of OK from a sustainability point of view and you’re going to have less of those little bottles … but … um there was a bit of me … I’ve been told you know that some of the product sits in the bottom and you end up with hygiene issues in these bottles so for me I wasn’t comfortable about doing that route and we debated … and then we couldn’t find one either that was the right one for the hotel also we wanted … the product itself had to be good, from its sustainability side of things, um but then we also had the challenge that we wanted to represent a product that was also going to be spa product and to find a spa product that also could also go in the bedrooms was really challenging as well and eventually um because we started with a new product downstairs called Tri?? we were able to work with them to get them to do our in room toiletries, and I said OK I’m reasonably comfortable that we go for a small bottle then … in the rooms … providing I’m happy that that bottle is recycled and recyclable because at least I know we are not going to be creating masses and masses of bottles that are gonna sit somewhere, I have this vision of WALL-E – have you seen the film WALL-E?

*No*

– it’s a really nice film to help you with the um it’s something I use actually to describe to people some of these decisions … it’s about a robot in the future, when all of the um humans are gone, and robots are left on the planet and all they do is go around clearing up all the rubbish ‘cause the planet is now literally just one great big rubbish tip and so I have this thing … whatever we are going to put in place for these things, I need to make sure that WALL-E isn’t going to be cleaning it up in the future [shared laughter].

*Yes, I just think about nappy mountains, and all those sorts of horrible things – it’s the plastic isn’t it?*
Well we also thought about tins for the soaps, we have these … we’ve got the same soap that they use at Beach Cliff which I think is great, it’s a locally produced organic natural ??? soap, which is fantastic and its lovely as well and it smells nice in the rooms and there’s all sorts of very good reasons to use it, but the frustrating thing at Beach Cliff, and they really annoyed, is that people don’t take it home, so they’ll come and they’ll use it but there will be quite a substantial amount of this good quality stuff … quite a substantial amount left and um … and so we were trying to work out how we could encourage people to take home and use it at home so we thought about having these little Golden Sands soap tins done with the branding on top so that would be a little gift that they took home with them, but then I thought … ah the tins though, WALL-E’s going to be cleaning up the tins! So then we worked out … we got this little organic cotton bag that they put it in and that will degrade and so the soap will go the bag will go and there won’t be any Golden Sands tins hanging around, but that sort of level of detail for every single thing.

So do you make the decisions, or how do you get the staff involved?

The staff, at that point, yes I tended to make … yes most of them the detailed decisions would come via me, now, one of the things that’s evolved that I’m really proud of, even though we went for these little bottles, eventually we said yes let’s put these little bottles in, the team in housekeeping decided we’re going to refill them.

Oh right

Now that isn’t an easy task … because … yes one big one … but these are tiny little things where you have to get a coin under the top and prize the top out and they now as a team said ‘we want to’ because we still saw big bags full of consumables going down to housekeeping area, big bags full of these bottles coming back and whilst we put ‘these are for you, take them home as a reminder, we really don’t want you to leave all these bottles here’ because then we end up with the product sitting in the bottle, and they were like ‘but we can’t waste the product sitting in the bottom of the bottles’ so they refill the little bottles …

That’s really dedicated isn’t it?

They’ve got a system in place – now we buy the product in bulk, we still buy, because the little bottles don’t last for ever … to look right, we still buy the product in small bottles, but we can refill them two or three times, if the guest doesn’t take them
home before the label gets too grazed, and then it starts to … but the labels have been designed so that they don’t graze to easily so that we can reuse …

You mentioned that the supplier had actually worked with you to produce that, so were they not producing what you wanted initially?

Um … they weren’t producing a um … I don’t think they were producing the shampoo … was it shampoo or conditioner? It started … they were a start up as well, so they had only just started up so they were open to … developing new products ‘cause they were still in that … so I think they had to develop one of the products, I can’t remember which one it was, oh it was the body wash, the skin softening wash that we use, but also we don’t have hand soap plus um hand lotion, plus body wash, plus body lotion, plus … the skin softening wash is a hand wash and body wash you know the lotion you can use on your hands and your body so we haven’t got you know … we evolved with that as well because to start with we only put in the rooms um … we started with literally shampoo and conditioner only, going into the rooms, because you know I said does anybody really use a body lotion and do we really … you know we’ve got a nice soap, do we really need the body wash as well as the soap? But we did find we got feedback quite quickly from this clientele at the luxury end they were expected the other two things in the room as well, so we monitored all the feedback from our guests.

Yes VM was telling me about this amazing feedback system yesterday, for me that’s a sustainable system, because obviously sustainability is about feedback loops, I have to say that my vision of sustainability is my compost heap so it’s about this cyclical, iterative process …

Yes.

So if I see that um … illustrated in human systems that’s what I think sustainability is all about. So I was saying wow you do all this feedback? She was going on about how they’d changed things … it sounds amazing…

Yes and what’s great about it … it’s interesting because we have had quite a debate about this between where the … the Beach Cliff do it as well, but there’s a slightly different format to it and I have a I have a um … it may be personal aversion, although I have shared this with my team since I was challenged on it and the rest of my team agree that they have the same aversion as me to have something that is
like a form with tick boxes because that does feel very corporate … my way of gaining feedback is … I write them a welcome letter and ask them um … four open questions … now we don’t get the sort of feedback you can score and monitor and do … we get really good qualitative feedback that I can use, you know, they write lots you know, I mean that’s not the best (showing me one) because those two questions he chose not to answer ‘what have you enjoyed most about your stay and what would you change’ um but he wrote all over the back of it …

*What are the other two questions that you ask them?*

What’s – they’re really good because E helped to develop these questions and I really like them, because they are all positive even though sometimes they can generate the negative response, but we are not just asking them to just start getting negative about us …

*No, no, but then that puts that idea in people’s minds doesn’t it? If you ask a negative question, you get a negative response …*

Yes so … ‘what have you enjoyed most about your stay at Golden Sands? What would you change at Golden Sands to make your stay even better? What surprised you about the Golden Sands and let us know whether this was positive or not and who do you think would enjoy a stay at the Golden Sands and why? And one of the things that it’s been suggested that I … this is what prompted this whole … I don’t want a form … um is that we add something that Beach Cliff have got which says ‘how likely are you to recommend this to somebody else’ um and they’ve put sort of a bar with scores underneath it and that was my (sharp intake of breath) ‘cause I don’t … the moment you put something that visually looks like that on it it starts to look like a feedback form and I was trying to explain to the person who was challenging me … this was SB I was saying … you know, I don’t even have to even read what it says, the moment you hold it up I can see boxes with numbers underneath, you are asking me to score something and that’s immediately made me think I don’t want it um … and he was then challenging me on ‘but that’s you personally, it not the whole world … so I opened it up and I questioned some of the rest of my team ‘what do you think about this’ and their reaction was the same ‘oh no we like our formula, we don’t want to change it’ because I do get a lot of these (feedback) and that’s the other thing we’re gonna maybe just have a look at, as a comparison, because Beach Cliff’s is a bit more form like still, is just look at as a percentage of people who come to the
hotel, how many of them take time to do this? Which would give us a bit of a gauge as to whether the form is a bit more off putting than this nice chatty letter, because I feel we get a lot, you know, we’ve got every single one still, we’ve got piles of them, we could count them all up and express it in the same length of time and be able to see what percentage actually filled one in for us ‘cause my gut instinct is that we get a lot and we get a lot of really good feedback and we do make changes so yes the change is we now put body wash and some lotion in all the bedrooms because people were saying they felt needed that, um we will when we find slippers end up with slippers in the rooms because there’s enough people who feel it’s important, but we listen to the guests at that point we don’t necessarily go actually … and we put it in perspective as well, so for example one thing that I don’t put in the rooms here, and I just have them there on request is cotton buds and cotton wool, which when you’re at this level most hotels would give you a little thing of cotton buds and a little thing of … and the thing is once they’ve been opened, and even if they don’t use them, people tend to go ‘ooh look at all the goodies’ and open them up and start fiddling with them, but they don’t actually use them or need them, and then they go in the bin, because they’ve been used once, so we have them available on request, so we’ve got them if you need that you can have them um … Sometimes it’s about the communication of that, because there is only so much … there is so much to talk about in this hotel when we check them in, there is only so much information you can give people when you check them in otherwise you are talking at the for hours …

Yes you have that lovely system of sitting down with people, I was watching that yesterday, thinking this is so familiar…it fits with the whole thing about not having a reception desk, it’s like coming into your own lounge, and then sat down on sofas …

It’s interesting actually this is a good example of this (holding up a form) because this form that I’ve got here he didn’t like that but he’s like one in … masses of people love it, you know so we take this kind of…so we won’t be all things to all people we don’t try to be all things to all people we stand by our values we know why we do it, we know that the majority love it, really love it and they have that extreme positive reaction to it so the odd negative we put it into perspective, we go ‘well ok we’ll just let that guy have his view’ you know that is interesting because I’ve emailed him to try and have a chat with him because I can’t quite gauge from your feedback form on balance whether you enjoyed your stay or not?

Oh so you would follow it up like that?
Yes, if there are some, particularly if I see there is one where they really, if I see it doesn’t look like they didn’t enjoy their stay at all then I’ll make contact with them and we’ll see what we can do to …

*It’s very personalised service, isn’t it? The whole customer expectation thing stands out a mile, everything I’ve seen and heard of the hotel is that isn’t it? I was amazed yesterday at the level of detail they go to pre in coming here, checking out what name to use where somebody had just got married …*

[knock on the door]

Hello, have you come for Jasper?

>>> *Jasper, yes please.*

Are you going for a walk then?

Pooh bag – good idea.

I don’t know what you are going to take with you I don’t know where his red ball is.

>>> *I think it might be downstairs still, I did see it yesterday, I think it might have been yesterday*

Yes, his lead and his ball, he came back without them yesterday, I think it might be interesting to see whether he stays with them, given the beach is quiet this morning, I think it’s the busy beach that’s confusing him.

*It sounds like this hotel’s your dream …*

Yes it is actually…I wouldn’t of…I went through a difficult development into being a GM, um because I got there to quick and my first GM post I wasn’t really ready for and I … I worked with my husband and we opened a hotel and about three months after it opened I thought I can’t do this anymore I didn’t have … I wasn’t equipped to know how to deal with it and put it into an order that was manageable it was … and I cared so much about it, that it just … it got the better of me and I walked away from it and we um went round opening hotels, so I still retained quite a lot of experience and through that was able to observe in some of the other GMs that we were employing and bring in um … what skill set they had to enable them to cope with the enormity of
the task and how they put it into place and then SB who is one of the Directors here who was responsible for developing this …

"Yes, I’d like to meet SB, I’ve heard a lot about him …"

Yes he was very instrumental in the Golden Sands, he’s worked with me before, in fact I met him just as I hit that wall in that hotel, and he’d always sort of said ‘you really need to give being GM another go because you’d be very good, you just need someone to support you and help you through it and get you to a point where you understand what skills you need to be able to do this’ and I had at the time said ‘I’m never going to do this again, you know, I don’t think I am ever going to go back there’ um and he knew I wanted to move to Cxxx, I’d got to a point where I’d decided Cxxx was where I wanted to be, he’d got involved with these guys, he also knew I had had a dream about running a hotel right on the beach, um and he rang me up and he just said, ‘you know that hotel you’ve been dreaming about on the beach – I might just have it for you’, and he knew … he knows me he knew that my values, my philosophy the way I like to do things was a natural fit with the sisters um and sort of gradually tempted me in an sort of introduced me to these people, which is why I ended up working at the Beach Cliff to start with which was really not not … whilst everybody kind of underneath knew that there was a desire possible to put me in as GM it was kind of almost an unspoken thing because they knew that I wasn’t sure that I wanted to do it … to come back to it … so we worked together um … as we did I was reassured they were going to be the right organisation to support me through the process of re-engaging with the role and starting to understand what I needed to be able to do well and the hotel, the location and everything, I did go to them before they came back to me and say – ok shall we just get this out in the open – am I or am I not going to do it, I think I’d like to if you’ll have me … um they said ‘we’d love you to do it’ and as a result we went on from there, but I was involved at the very outset when they were still sketchy plans and dreaming up what it was going to be … so yes that’s an advantage I have, that’s where I was going … to have been involved from the start and to have that level of commitment and ownership of it is something that helps me … it’s me, … that’s why … it’s always good to look for people with a natural fit to you values and philosophy, you know the recruitment element of what we do is I think a big part of what helps us to deliver because you just don’t want to be having try and convert – you can educate I mean we get people…we don’t, as I say we don’t ask for eco warriors we ask for open mindedness and the willingness … to
engage with it and its only when we find people don’t or aren’t or are being wasteful you know that we then have to go this is your job, part of your job … I mean if there is one irritation, I mean there’s one irritation that we’ve all had and they will as their job … but are we really education enough when actually in the staffroom they can’t blooming recycle …

*I have heard about that actually* [we laugh]

You know that was a real frustration, we’re not actually getting through to them if all we are doing is teaching them how to do a job in a sustainable way, because actually we want them to take it away with them as well and if they don’t do it in the … we got there …

*How did you get there?*

Um … basically elements of it are just not standing for it – guys we are not going to have a staff room that doesn’t, that isn’t capable of recycling, you know, you do it in the job its important here, I mean … and hopefully they then carry it home with them as well but um so yes a lot of nagging … a lot of and sometimes some of these things that is it you know the amount of times I get people come to me and say, ‘oh my god I told them and told them and told them – why can’t I get there’ and I say ‘you got to keep telling them but you’ve also got to change your chat/tack and see if there’s another way to get through to them’ etc., explain a bit more about why, rather than just don’t do it and hopefully you’ll get there but you have to stick with a ‘I’m not going to tolerate the alternative’ you know? Which is like it is like breaking … and you’ll see it’s not perfect, cause when I take you on a walk round I’ll be like ‘this is what annoys me, this is what annoys me’ …

*Well that’s great, because I don’t think anywhere is perfect, none of us are perfect, we do want we can but I mean it’s almost about changing the whole way our society thinks …*

And it’s interesting for me because I’ve been on a personal journey, because I’m not an eco warrior and my parents aren’t I didn’t grow up with that already in me at all, and it was a worry when I came to this role and I said you’re an award winning business – it’s not something I know an awful lot about it’s not something I’ve been brought up with um … but I’ve been on my own journey … ’cause the more I’ve learnt, the more I’ve learnt as I’ve gone on, the more I’ve passed over into home the
more I’m doing living my life differently … I was primed to change though … (laughs) I was at a point where I was definitely at a crossroads and I was ready to take a different direction and I’ve now … an example for me, it’s interesting J was asking a question like this just recently um I … there was a question that we asked ‘has anybody made a significant difference to their life as a result of working here?’ By cars and the vehicles I drive, a) the moment I knew I was going to work at Beach Cliff, at the time in our family we had … I drove … our run around car was a land cruiser Colorado that guzzled fuel and we had a sports car as well that guzzled fuel and John, my husband, had a motor bike which he still has and I said there is no way I am going to work in either of these cars at that hotel – I can’t, I can’t drive into that car park so straight away we got rid of the um Land Cruiser … and the sports car actually, John got a very economical diesel Golf that just goes and goes and goes um and I wanted something that was quirky, but that was green as well so my wish list for my car, I just changed it again, but I got a little Daihatsu Copland that I had and I was looking at all the ratings etc. and there was a time when I wouldn’t even bothered looking at how eco friendly is it? So I looked at all of that and I said if there’s only me, I don’t need a big car there’s me and the dog I just need a small car and I don’t need anything bigger so I drove that one to work for quite a long time 2 years, two seats, um it’s very light it’s great, but I just changed it earlier this year and my wish list was it had to be cute convertible and green and I’ve got Fiat 500 c with a new twin air engine which is the greenest engine you can buy and I don’t pay any road tax …

Oh wow … at all um but it was like, and I went through the whole process of looking at all the various cars on the market and finding the one that suited my three wishes – my husband still loves cars, and he’ll go ‘look at that isn’t it amazing’, and I’ll go ‘no’ and he’ll say ‘Nina I don’t want you to think about it in terms of all the other stuff’, he said ‘isn’t it an amazing piece of engineering’ and I said ‘no’ because it’s still ostentatious too much it’s a status symbol, using more fuel that it needs to why do you have to drive around at 120 mph anyway it’s all unnecessary, and as such it’s unnecessary spend on something that actually you don’t need. You don’t need that. Why do you need the big flash car? I can get from A to B in mine and it’s just completely changed my outlook on … and you were saying about composting as well and we’ve got a compost heap and you’re right that’s a really good way of looking at sustainability.
And I think that’s why sustainability certainly when we built this business ... even though ... we felt we had to put the word eco over the top of this because for marketing purposes it’s just the word that people know and recognise, it’s probably what they would put into Google if they were searching for somewhere with a conscious etc. um ... however it’s not our preferred ... it’s not what we really are we are a sustainable business, but sustainability ... certainly at the point where we opened um ... I think it’s a little but more but still a bit of a black art to most people who don’t really understand what that means um and sustainability is what we base it on not just green so that’s where for example all those decisions on towels and stuff it has to be sustainable for the business as well it has to be hard wearing it has to ... you find the balance and make the decision on the information you’ve got available at the time.

But that to me is a very different way of making a decision in that balanced way than just saying you know what’s the cheapest towel we can get ...

It’s the cheapest or it’s the best or it’s a the all sorts of yes it’s a very different way of doing um so yes I think the other thing we are wrestling with here and it comes a little bit from the spa as well but for me personally is what is enough? You know that whole, like you say, consumer ‘I need to have that gadget and this gadget and the other gadget and all the rest of it, what is enough, we need to live a simpler lifestyle appreciating you know the great natural stuff that we’ve got and you don’t have to sit on a great big engine or you know – it’s all of that and its definitely where I’m at and it’s where SC in the Spa is at as well and sometimes we get – the challenge here is which is something that J came out with, which I think is fantastic we’re looking to try and reconcile conscious and luxury because the two things don’t sit that naturally together and so what we do I think manage to do is deliver a luxury experience with a conscience you know and that helps people actually I can come and have this luxury holiday because I know they are thinking about little things all these detail things behind they have made a decision, on balance, this is OK I can allow myself this luxury.

Cause it doesn’t have to be ‘hair shirt’ ...

No.
You can have some really lovely things, like quality hand made shoes, you've got this beautiful environment here, what's luxury …

Exactly, it's define luxury … exactly the luxury here that people feel is … there are in this fantastic building with this amazing view I mean it was about connecting the whole place was designed to keep them connected to the environment all the time in every single turn in this building you've got that there … reminding you there is the planet there is what we've got that is what we are wanting to try and make sure we are operating in a way and it's just for those people who come and really enjoy what we do which is the majority it's not everybody but it is the majority um they just absolutely love it … it has an amazing effect on them, an amazing effect …

It probably makes people go home and do things differently do you think?

As I say we don't um preach it, over the top, it's just there and if you're interested you'll read about it, you know, I don't know if you've had a look at what people write on Trip Adviser about the hotels at all?

No, that's Trip Adviser? – I'll just make a note of that …

A few reviews ago there was an interesting little debate went on, on Trip Advisor, which I thought was lovely …

Is that just a website?

Yes – it's a website where people can post independent reviews of hotels and restaurants and all sorts of other services for travelers … there was certainly a guest who came who didn't engage with the eco side of it and actually felt that it was … he didn't believe … he wasn't convinced he just kind of … he was rubbing it and he went online to rubbish it and another guest promptly wrote … jumped online and went to our defence and he … they went into the soaps… we don't think you put enough soap in the room, we don't think you have given us enough toiletries 'cause we only give as much as we think is what they need, and when they have run out we will replace it, if they run out or want more we will replace it, we'll give you some more, but not until you've used it all [laugh], you know, because otherwise you are going to open it all, you're going to start a brand new one – have you finished the other one yet [laughs] before you do?
It was interesting because this other guest went on line and just wrote a massive response and we have no idea who that person is, well … we could if we really worked hard, but he’s a guest of both hotels and everything he’s written there he gathered from reading the literature that’s in the room that’s in other areas, the stuff we sort of gently talk about as we check people in but we are not really banging it home, and so the difference is you are either open minded to it and you take it all in and you go away going wow you know that’s great because I can see all these things, or you just go actually I don’t believe they are really doing it and you close your mind to it and you don’t look at any of it and you don’t read the reasons behind why we do stuff, you don’t believe it, and you go away feeling … but that’s rare … but you can and I’ve also noticed because we are a good luxury hotel as well people will, if they are looking for a good luxury hotel but they are not looking for a good luxury hotel with a sustainable conscious they don’t interact with that element of what we do, they don’t click on the environment tab on the website and read about everything we do, they zone out when we start talking about sustainable business … because that’s not why they are here, they’re are here for a lovely, luxury hotel experience – and that’s great too, because if we weren’t delivering on that level … then we wouldn’t have a business.

*You’ve had something like 92% occupancy or something?*

Last year was, um … no we ended I think on 84% last year, we go up to 100, but 84 for a year … per annum in a leisure based seasonal destination is amazing, 84% occupancy is the sort of level that a city centre hotel will achieve.

*Cause you weren’t expecting that initially were you?*

No, it’s not what we projected, and it’s interesting every now and again we have to remind the Directors that actually you know – those were year 3 figures that we got to in year one, because this year won’t be as strong, but it’s only just below where we were last year, but there was so much interest in what we were doing last year, people engaged with it in such a way … that you know it’s interesting because sometimes you get … I get guests who say this … sometimes I get other hoteliers who say things like ‘gosh you’ve had so much publicity – your marketing budget must be massive’ – we’re not, it’s not, the product is what’s selling itself the story, the effort, everything that’s gone into this is visible you know – I had to say this to a guest recently who said exactly the same thing on the ‘phone – this was another one who
didn’t quite … I mean some of her complaint was ‘why is there not a shower cap in the room?’ you know it’s things like that … there were other elements of things we got wrong which is why I needed to have the conversation, but we ended up focusing on that for a while which is uncomfortable, and she said ‘you know that way you market yourself’ and I said – but we don’t, we spend no money on advertising whatsoever all of the stuff is word of mouth or PR we have a good PR agency who’ve got a lot of good journalist down here to look at this project, but but what they have written has been as direct result of their experience, you can’t control what a journalists writes when they come to stay, they come, they experience, they write their article you know.

And the awards as well …

The awards … you do go through a process of entering the awards etc., you put yourself up for them but if you don’t put yourself up for them how can you get the recognition for what you are doing um and then the stuff on Trip Advisor is genuine guests who have, come stayed and written about what they experienced …

So will I be able to look back on Trip Advisor?

Yes, there’s about 180 reviews up there, and you can see, you can see where we have got it wrong as well, we’ve just got into … one of the things I was advised to do and it feels good anyway, so there’s no reason not to do it … we respond to them as well now and we try and respond to them all, which is a bit difficult when you’ve got lots of good ones, ‘cause actually you just end up saying ‘I’m really glad you enjoyed your stay’ or ‘we hope to see you soon’ and I end up feeling I do that one over and over again so I try and find a little something that’s slightly … I can pick up on … so I don’t end up writing the same thing, but we are not perfect all the time, and I think that’s the other thing … for me that is part of how I do my job and how I lead this team … is recognising we are not perfect … at this level actually its very interesting in the luxury hotel market there is an expectation of perfection … from the guests, there is also an expectation amongst … um staff and teams to a certain extent that at this level you have to be excellent there’s no excuses for mistakes and I don’t have that philosophy, I don’t believe people can learn unless they are allowed to make mistakes and so … so making a mistake is not something they need to be terrified of … and so we do permit some … and occasionally a guest gets the impact of that, but then that’s about how we deal with that and make it right for that guest, they happen
they will happen in any business anywhere and I think businesses that think they
don’t are kidding themselves, they’re actually, they’re not empowering people to grow
and learn, they’re actually going ‘if you can’t be this good, you’re not for us’.

If you’re fearful of making a mistake, then you’re not learning as you say, and you’re
just following something procedurally and not exploring.

And you’re not challenging and you’re not creating and given that what we want to do
is ‘dare to be different’ challenge things evolve, you know, as an evolving business
that wants to continue doing that you have to make some mistakes and then go ‘right
how do we do that differently?’ Rather than ‘this is how you do it, this is how it’s
always been done, do it that way perfectly every time and you won’t have any
problems’ …

And that I think for me really typifies the difference in the way of thinking what we’ve
been use to as traditional thinking, this is the absolute way of doing it and what you’re
describing is this really rounded iterative feedback, going round the loop, saying how
can we be different, and it’s that cyclical way that mirrors what’s out there, you know
nature gets it wrong, if the atmosphere’s right you get a certain product don’t you?
You create that sort of environment for people to learn and grow, it’s about that
connect and I think we have lost that connect …

Yes I definitely think we lost the connect with that, um and the results that I see here,
that I’m starting to see here, for me is phenomenal …

Having faith in that way of doing it …

Giving people the confidence, I mean the biggest issue for me is managing to coach
… sometimes with my managers anyway, is coaching people through what I went
through that time with that first hotel … that you know ‘I can’t do this, everything’s not
perfect, everything’s going to fall down because it’s not perfect’ as opposed to going
‘ok … it won’t be’ you know and when you open a brand new hotel you go through a
huge learning curve, you’ve not just got to put one process in place you’ve got to get
the whole thing working and it takes time it takes significant time.

Terrifying I would think?

Yes it’s very scary it’s very stressful and it doesn’t matter how much we tried to
prepare them for the fact that it wouldn’t be perfect straight away it would be hard, it
would be stressful but we had to make sure we kind of looked after each other etc. stil\[ nearly all of us \[ myself included \[ and SB who was the biggest supporter of ‘it will take time, it won’t happen overnight, you don’t just open the doors to a hotel and expect everything to unless you want to spend 6 months dry running it’ \[ and it doesn’t work like that, you’ve got to start making some money \[ and so you know we all went through this kind of bit where we were all like ‘it’s not perfect, things going wrong’ \[ we were literally a bag of nerves and all of us got very stressed but I’ve managed to coach at least, I’ve got \[ how many of my original management team are still in place? I’ve got one and one’s come back, so one’s gone and one’s come back again which is great and then I’ve got some new people too, but I didn’t lose anybody in the first year which is amazing at management level because every other hotel I have opened before \[ you know, by the end of the first year you have probably changed your whole management team, because going through something like that is so hard and they tend to do like I did, you hit 3 months or 6 months and you just can’t cope with it anymore …

Is it burnout I guess …

Yes you just burn out, and that’s about managing to develop in them this ability ‘right I’ve got to go home, I’ve got to look after myself as well, I’m no good to anybody if I just keep …’ and so I’ve managed to get a few \[ and its not been easy \[ um but I do feel I’ve done a lot better than I’ve seen in other experiences ‘cause this was my 6th opening so I had some to compare it to, um and so for me be sitting here approaching our 2nd birthday, when I’ve been involved since the very beginning is good as well and that’s a testament to the Directors for actually managing to learn that whole … ‘yes there does need to be a learning cycle, there does need to be mistakes made’ they are supportive of that \[ because you know you’ve got to keep the faith that the person is going to keep learning and developing, if the moment that things aren’t going quite as well as you expected you kind of go ‘well they are not capable, let’s bring somebody else in’ and I’ve seen that happen a lot …

It’s a big testament to you, considering it’s the three sisters and the two other directors as well, but it’s a family business and they’ve put you in charge of this £12 million hotel [lots of laughter].

Yes it’s fantastic, it’s really good, really good … I’m just trying to think …
I now have a format for all my one to one meetings that rotates around four titles, four headings, so um when I have a one to one with my team members … we talk about people, we talk about product, we talk about planet and we talk about profit so those four things are the things we have to keep in balance the whole time to continue to operate sustainably and then when I have a management meeting I have the same four headings that we talk about as a group and then when I go to the Directors’ meeting to report back on how the business is doing it’s the same four headings that we use and I report back under.

So it’s bringing the sustainable language into the day-to-day running of the place isn’t it, changing the way that you talk about things?

And, so when I do the management meetings actually these two are at the top they are … to a certain extent the most important whilst the planet is too we can’t do what we need to do there if we don’t have the right people, so it all starts from the people and being focused on that side of things.

Is that a spare form – thank you and again I’ll spoil it so its doesn’t go anywhere else …

And then I’m now encouraging that to go down – I started this format at the beginning of the year, um and I’m now trying to encourage it down to another level and another level so it kind of starts at the top and trickles down and I wouldn’t say we are right … probably right through the whole business yet, but we are getting there … we are going for Investors in People later this year and um they are going to come and do er … which I’m quite pleased about, rather than us going for it we are going to let them come around, tell us where they think we are and then we will do the work needed to get to where we need to because I think, and lots of people have said we are doing really well, and we’ll be surprised how you score etc. But I think to go through the process of learning how they score and what they’re looking for will help embed it, um rather than us just sitting down and looking at their forms and deciding we need to have this, this and this in place …

Yes because that can be a bit of a tick box exercise …

If we’re not careful and I don’t want to do that, I believe actually the principle, now I’ve seen them, I believe … it’s inspired me rather than made me think this is a lot of work, it’s made me go ‘oh yes that makes sense, that makes sense’, but then we’ll
still be going ‘how can we make it xxx’ you know we won’t just say can you give us a form and we’ll use your format and that’s where that format is xxx’ format for a one to one. They do look for regular one to ones … and various different meetings …

*How often do you have those, just out of interest?*

I have a one to one with my managers once a fortnight … ideally I would like to get that, if they are new managers I do that weekly until they have settled in, I’d like to get to a point where we could do once a month, um but we are not there yet, we are only nearly two, they still need quite a bit of support and coaching from me um and I’m happy to … so they get two hours of my time once a fortnight where we sit and go through and that’s how I manage to communicate with them where we are going I guess my … I know that when we get to Investors in People where it’s the next layer down that needs to be … the managers need to get through to the supervisors and the supervisors need to be doing this with their teams and we’re kind of not bad, but I know we’re not there yet. We’ve got some work to do still.

*And where does your support come from?*

Currently it comes from SB and J mostly, um I …, which I value a lot actually – they are both very good um …

*So are they around full timish …*

J no, J comes to … he’s the Chairman of the Board, but he’s non exec. And he’s a very inspirational individual um and my Spa manager said to me the other day ‘how come J is so good, how did he get so amazing – I’ve never heard anybody say a bad word against him, how did he get this skill set that makes him so incredible?’ and I was like… ‘he has done a lot of learning and he is very good’. SB, obviously he brought me here, for one anyway, he’s kind of my unofficial mentor, we were asked to choose a mentor, we were asked to choose a mentor outside of the business, I chose one and haven’t ever used him, because the internal mentoring and support we have is sufficient and having come from an organisation … where I used to work before I didn’t feel I had that same support and that same investment in developing me as a manger, a leader, you know, I’ve had some really good leadership advice over the course of the last two years that I’ve never been given before, I’ve never been aware of … what you should and shouldn’t be doing, more self aware of how the way you are impacts everyone else, you’re the one who’s leading you need to be
aware of that and that’s never really been shared with me before and that’s helped me grow as a person, massively.

*I do see that a lot in people who take on a leadership role, ‘I’ll read a book and I’ll know how to do it’ and I say to them ‘it all starts from here’… you’ve related to that when you were in that first position as a GM …*

I had to share … with some of them, to get them … and I was happy to do it with some of them to realise that actually I really do know how you feel I had to share some pretty painful stuff from the past this is how it manifested itself on me when I was there and when … I certainly saw a break through with one manager at that point where I shared something quite personal and then it was like OK …

*I think it is about that personal element, just because you have an office … they’ve got to see you are a human being inside all that …*

I think one of the things I’ve always done actually with organisations I’ve worked with which probably what’s helped me with this is um … I believe if you are gonna be the leader you have to totally embrace the values and you have to live them, you have to live by them so you have to be able to buy into them if you are gonna live by them and then give that … consistent leadership um … and so that wasn’t a huge challenge for me but there were some of them that … were not as comfortable, … but I mean there are so many things those values have inspired me to do personally in my life as well that mean that I’m much more rounded happier individual as a result of embracing them …

*Well it’s learning isn’t it we are all learning all the time …*

Learning that though, is another of the lessons, learning that we’re always learning is …

Shall we go and have a walk round?
Appendix 4. Non Disclosure Agreement

TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH:

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATEMENT (Doc 17)

This Agreement is made between

The University of Exeter Group (hereinafter referred to as the University) and

(insert name of Firm)

(hereinafter referred to as the Supplier).

The purpose of this Agreement is to establish the rights and interests of the Parties that have executed it below.

Whereas, either party may be disclosing to (‘Disclosing Party’), and/or receiving from (‘Receiving Party’) the other party certain confidential and proprietary information including, but not limited to, business operations, processes, plans, intentions, production information, know-how, designs, trade secrets, market opportunities, customers, costs, prices, business plans, details of corporate organisation and corporate financial information and any other information or data of whatever kind whether in physical, electronic, written or oral form, all of which is referred to herein as ‘information’, and

Whereas, for the purpose of evaluating a potential business relationship, the parties are each willing to disclose and receive information under the term and conditions specified below:-

Each party agrees to maintain all information received from the other party, both orally and in writing, in confidence subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and agrees not to disclose or otherwise make available such information to any third party without the prior written consent from the Disclosing Party. Each party further agrees to use the information only for the purpose set forth above. Information shall be deemed confidential regardless of the fact it is not marked as such if given in writing or, if given orally, identified as confidential orally prior to disclosure.
The Receiving Party’s obligation of non-disclosure under this Agreement shall not apply to information which

is or becomes a matter of public knowledge through no fault or action by the Receiving Party;

was rightfully in the Receiving Party’s possession prior to receipt from the Disclosing Party;

subsequent to disclosure, is rightfully obtained by the Receiving Party from a third party who is lawfully in possession of such information without restrictions;

is independently developed by the Receiving Party without resort to information which is confidential under this Agreement, and can so be proven by written records; or

is required by law or judicial order, provided that prior written notice of such required disclosure is furnished to the Disclosing Party as soon as practicable in order to afford to Disclosing Party an opportunity to seek a protective order and that if such order cannot be obtained disclosure may be made without liability.

Whenever requested by the Disclosing Party, the Receiving Party shall immediately return to the Disclosing Party all manifestations of its information or, at the Disclosing Party’s option, shall destroy all such information as the Disclosing Party may designate. The Receiving Party’s obligation of confidentiality shall survive this Agreement for a period of [five (5) years] from the date this Agreement is executed by the last party to sign, and thereafter shall terminate and be of no further force or effect.

The Receiving Party agrees that this Agreement shall not be assigned without prior written consent from the Disclosing Party. The Disclosing Party grants no right or licence to the Receiving Party except as expressly set forth in this Agreement. This Agreement is made under and shall be construed according to the laws of England and Wales and supercedes all prior agreements between the parties, oral or written, concerning the disclosure of Information.
On behalf of the Supplier

Name: 

...........................................................................................................................................

JobTitle: 

...........................................................................................................................................

Signed: 

...........................................................................................................................................

Dated: 

...........................................................................................................................................

On behalf of the University of Exeter Group

Name: 

...........................................................................................................................................

JobTitle: 

...........................................................................................................................................

Signed: 

...........................................................................................................................................

Dated: 

...........................................................................................................................................
Appendix 5. Consent form

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Embedding Sustainable Practice

Name of Researcher: Sue Chapman

The researcher named above would like to interview you for a research project. The main theme of this project is to appreciate how sustainable practices are embedded into everyday working activities in this organization, in particular the decision making process.

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the theme of the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider my involvement and ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that this interview will be recorded, and that this will not lead to my identification by others. I understand that I have the opportunity to ask for the recording device to be switched off and back on again at any moment.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to skip any questions or to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher. I understand that this will not lead to my identification by others.

5. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations and that every effort will be made to protect my identity.
6. I understand that the researcher may contact me again with the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. My contact details are:

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

_________________________  __________________  __________________
Name of Participant Date Signature

_________________________  __________________  __________________
Researcher Date Signature
Appendix 6. Dates spent in the field

'The Hotels' is the company name used here, comprising the two hotels, known for the purpose of this study as Beach Cliff and Golden Sands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Role / title</th>
<th>Dated Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>Director (family member)</td>
<td>23rd May 2011, 13th June 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW</td>
<td>Director (family member) and Operations Director, Beach Cliff</td>
<td>27th Sept 2011, Coaching 13th March 2012, 1st May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Director (family member)</td>
<td>Met in Directors meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JW</td>
<td>Director (non family)</td>
<td>9th Feb 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO/B</td>
<td>Sustainability Manager, The Hotels, (replaced SZ)</td>
<td>25th June 2011, 1st May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Marketing Manager, The Hotels</td>
<td>1st May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Front of House Manager, Golden Sands</td>
<td>9th Feb 2012, 24th May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VM</td>
<td>Reservations Manager (moved role to) Restaurant supervisor</td>
<td>9th Aug. 2011, 21st Sept. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Spa Manager, Golden Sands (latterly The Hotels)</td>
<td>21st Sept. 2011, 10th Feb 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Exec Chef, Golden Sands (replaced by TH)</td>
<td>10th Nov. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>Food and Bev Manager, Golden Sands</td>
<td>10th Nov. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Head Chef, Golden Sands and Beach Cliff</td>
<td>12th Sept. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Sustainability Property Manager, Golden Sands</td>
<td>20th Oct. 2011, 10th Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
<td>Housekeeper Golden Sands (replaced by AP)</td>
<td>26th Oct. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Host Supervisor Golden Sands (latterly Housekeeper)</td>
<td>13th Dec 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Bar Manager Golden Sands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Events Team Beach Cliff</td>
<td>9th Feb 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Produce Chef Beach Cliff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Restaurant Manager Beach Cliff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Child Care Manager Beach Cliff</td>
<td>21st Sept 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JW</td>
<td>Front of House Manager Beach Cliff</td>
<td>24th Nov. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Executive Housekeeper Beach Cliff</td>
<td>13th Sept 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Head Housekeeper Beach Cliff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Assistant Head Housekeeper Beach Cliff</td>
<td>13th Sept. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AK</td>
<td>Spa Manager Beach Cliff (on maternity leave from Jan 2012)</td>
<td>24th Nov. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Barman Beach Cliff</td>
<td>9th Feb. 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Ex Food and Bev Manager Beach Cliff</td>
<td>12th Sept. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vv</td>
<td>Bar/Restaurant host</td>
<td>23rd Feb 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research at The Hotels

**4th Nov 2009**
Visited Beach Cliff as a conference customer (College management team meeting) met with SZ before I left that evening.

**April 2010**
Visited SZ had a tour around Golden Sands had recently opened.

**23rd Feb 2011**
Met with SZ to discuss possibility of my research.

**23rd May 2011**
Meeting with Director responsible for Sustainability (ES) and HR Manager (GB) to discuss my research.

**13th June 2011**
Meeting with ES.
25th June 2011
Meeting with SZ and (over lunch in Beach Cliff Restaurant) with CO/B (SZs replacement) Sustainability Manager.

6th July 2011
Meeting with HR Manager (GB).

4th August 2011
Met with SZ in Bristol at her new job, reflections on her time at The Hotels having now moved on.

9th August 2011
Meeting with Head of Reservations (VM).

10th August 2011
Meeting and walk around hotel with NB General Manager at Golden Sands.

12th Sept. 2011
JH meeting
AE meeting (interrupted and not completed before he left)
CO/B meeting
Meeting with DM (temporarily) Head Chef Golden Sands
Briefly met ES and DW (two of the sisters) to go over how things are going with my research and to catch up on their issues.

13th Sept 2011.
Watching front reception at Golden Sands from behind the scenes
Sat in on Housekeeping training session for new room staff led by JR
Meeting with CD Exec HK Beach Cliff.

21st Sept 2011
Meeting with SC in Golden Sands Spa
Lunch with Spa sales person in Golden Sands restaurant, discussed his experiences supplying IT and Spa soft ware to The Hotels
Follow up meeting with VM
Meeting with CS Head of Child Care.

27th Sept 2011
Meeting with DW
2.30pm - 6.30pm Shadow JH on Duty Management shift.

11th Oct 2011
2.30pm – 6.30pm Shadow JH on Duty Management shift.

20th Oct 2011
9am Shadow CO/B and RG on energy monitoring all morning including attending
10.30 morning prayers at Golden Sands
Depart 1.30pm.

26th Oct 2011
9am Shadow NB on Duty Management and attend morning prayers 10.30
Shadow AW in House Keeping Golden Sands
Follow up meeting with GB at Beach Cliff
Attend Golden Sands Heads of Departments meeting in afternoon with NB
Depart at 5pm.
10th Nov 2011
8am Meeting with JM Exec Chef Golden Sands
10am Meeting with MH Restaurant Manager Golden Sands
12.30 NB catch up
2pm Go over energy use figures with Sustainability Property Manager (RG)
Depart 4pm.

24th Nov 2011
9am Meeting with JW Front of House Manager Beach Cliff
10.30 Meeting with AK Spa at Beach Cliff
Attend Beach Cliff Heads of Departments meeting
Depart 5.30pm.

13th December 2011
9.30 Meet with AP Host Supervisor
11am Meet NB re Team days have lunch in restaurant
Meet with MB Exec Chef Beach Cliff
Depart 4pm.

24th Jan 2012
Meeting CB catch up
Set up in restaurant for Team day tomorrow.

25th Jan 2012
8am Facilitate Team day – 5.30pm at Golden Sands.

26th Jan 2012
10am Writing up notes in staff room, generally being around all day, visit village hall
to set up for management day tomorrow.
Depart 5pm.

27th Jan 2012
8am Facilitate management strategy day in village hall – 5.30pm.

9th Feb 2012
10am Meeting JW
Sit in with AB and F re towels, robes and slippers
Meeting with PS at Beach Cliff
Chat informally with Paul in Beach Cliff bar
Depart 6.30.

10th Feb. 2012
8.30am Catch up with SC, sit in on her meeting with GB to discuss HR issues
Attend morning prayers at Golden Sands
Sit in on meeting with SC and NB and F re towels, robes and slippers
Depart 1.30pm.

23rd Feb. 2012
2pm – 9pm Joined Vv on bar duty.

13th March 2012
Began Coaching NB and DW (not part of data).

1st May 2012
Second coaching session with NB and DW (not part of data)
Catch up meeting with CO/B meeting with CI.

24th May 2012
Join in with the Beach Clean
JH catch up
AB follow up to discuss progress with purchase of towels, robes and slippers.

15th June 2012
Meeting with AP.

1st Aug. 2012
Attend Golden Sands Heads of Departments meeting.

13th Sept. 2012
Attend Beach Cliff Heads of Departments meeting
Meeting with MB to follow up on Food and Bev issues, discuss visit to local farm supplier.

21st September 2012
Spoke with ex Director SB on the phone.

3rd October 2012
Meeting with ex Director SB in local café.

8th October 2012
Meeting with JC in Architects (HS) practice.

Follow on

March 2014
Presented research findings to management team, had lunch with ‘Future Leaders’ and management team.

4th Nov 2014
Catch up meeting with GB over lunch in Beach Cliff Restaurant
Also met with SC (who is now moving on to travel, as yet to be replaced) ES and DW.
Appendix 7. Pictures of Beach Cliff interior
Appendix 8. The Hotels’s philosophy

The Birth of the XXXXX Philosophy

There has always been a special culture at XXXXXX – a way of working and looking after each other – but we all felt that it would be helpful to try and define what it is and how we wanted it to develop. We began to think about this in late 2006 and wrote the headings down in early 2007. During last year we’ve all been able to put flesh on the bones by discussing it and learning from others – inside and outside the business. What we now have is slightly changed from the first words that appeared a year ago but now feels right for this business and the very special people in it. There are many more ways of describing these ‘values’ and we hope you will find your own meanings and share these with us. All the values fall under the over-riding principle to Cherish Our World.

Cherishing our World

This is the central theme of the XXXXXXX Philosophy. The ‘World’ describes the planet and all the people on it. ‘Our world’ gives a more personal emphasis to the local part of our world. We must cherish our guests, our staff, ourselves and the environment we all seek to enjoy.

Guided by Conscience: We all have something inside us constantly trying to move us towards doing the right thing. Let’s find it, nurture it, and help it to grow strength.

Inspiring and enabling: We should all be leaders. We must stir the feelings, mind and imagination of those who look to us – whether staff, guests, or other businesses. Then we must ensure they have the means, capability and permission to do what we have inspired them to do.

Daring to be different: We must be willing to undertake things that involve risk; to find new ways of making progress and of achieving extraordinary results. We must inspire and enable others to do the same. All this should be done with our eyes open to the risks and the ways of controlling them.

Learning together: Shared learning, like shared laughter, is infectious and memorable. If some knowledge, insight or craft is useful to you, it will certainly be
useful to others inside and outside the business. Ask yourself “how can my learning help others?” and act accordingly.

**Actively caring:** We all care about lots of things. Active caring means we must actually follow up this sense by doing things that will make a difference.

**Generosity of spirit:** Consideration, compassion, thoughtfulness – properly intentioned. It requires a good dose of empathy. Guests may think “They didn’t need to do that – but it made the difference”.

**Emotional health:** You have to care for yourself in order to care for others. If you are emotionally healthy you will be also be flexible and resilient – able to bounce back and adapt. You will recognise the need for balance between pain and pleasure.

**Nurturing our relationship with life:** Cultivating our relationship with ourselves, with our partners, with our passions. Enabling our lives to thrive, grow, flourish. Teach human touching and variety.

**Choosing well:** This is about Ethical decision-making and quality. Are you happy to make your decision public – especially to the people affected by it? Have you fully considered the harmful effects of your decision and how to avoid them? Would your decision be considered fair by everyone affected by it? It applies equally to small and large choices.

**Beautiful Relationships:** Thankfully, we are not alone on this planet. We coexist with other people, places, animals and things. We gain from our relationships with these.

**Experiencing nature:** Having our spirits lifted as a result of being exposed to the beauty and rawness of nature. Bird song, ocean waves, storm winds, autumn leaves.

**Encouraging art & design:** We work in a built environment where the appearance and feel of things can take on a particular meaning. The business encourages good design and local artists in a particular way. We believe that a well-designed environment of artistic merit can improve all our lives.

**Exploring balance:** We often feel better when the parts of our lives are in balance. But to achieve this balance we may need to feel both imbalance and the pleasure of
the new balanced state that follows. Correcting the seasoning of a sauce. Drawing the eye back from a focal point. Not being afraid to go further than normal – just to see what happens.

Discovering Simple Pleasures: So much in life can seem to be complicated. Let’s find our inner child and take it out to play.

Sharing laughter: We never laugh as loudly as we do in company with others. The laughter seems more meaningful when shared. And the best thing…it’s free, and it beats most things.

Creating not simply consuming: We need to actively unwind... because it’s impossible to passively unwind. To do this, we need to invest and participate, rather than be a consuming voyeur. How can we invest in ‘creating’ (creating opportunities, partnerships, beauty in all its forms, and constructive feelings and actions), rather than paralyzing ourselves by ‘over-consuming’ (consuming excesses of food, alcohol, television and other off-the-shelf ‘pick me ups’)?

Feeding the soul: Doing and discovering things that show you how much you cherish yourself. This is again about balance, nurturing, looking after your inner needs.

Please remember this is the birth of the XXXXX Philosophy. This means that it needs lots of care and nurturing – we must look after it and keep it secure and fed! It also means that we must learn to live by the Philosophy and we know this is not going to be easy. No one will be the beacon or perfect example of our Philosophy so we will all need the support of our colleagues in recognising our strengths and weaknesses and helping us by feeding back to us constructively.

Thanks for helping to make this important and best wishes in your discovery of the Philosophy...

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXs (the directors)

21st January 2008
Appendix 9. Illustrations of storytelling
Appendix 10. The Hotels's Sustainability Policy

Our Sustainability Policy

At xxxxxx we have taken responsibility for reducing the negative impacts our actions and activities have on the environment and our local community; Our ‘Cherish the World’ ethos, which is embraced by our whole team, is not simply something that we feel is right, it has become our way of life.

Our aim is to create memorable holidays, experiences and escapes which don’t cost the Earth; we have dared to be different in our approach:

We source responsibly, scratching beneath the surface and considering the life cycle of the products and services we purchase.

We aim to reduce the amount of waste we send to landfill year-on-year.

We have a target to reduce our carbon footprint year-on-year.

We publish our energy and waste data, transparently sharing successes and failures.

We create rather than consume.

We aim to inspire all who come into contact with us to make positive changes in their own lives or businesses.

We are ground-breaking and innovative in our decision making, continuously playing with the ‘norms’ associated with 4* hospitality.

We pause to reflect on our decisions to ensure that we can stand by them

We are not perfect, nor do we believe that there is such a thing as ‘perfect’

We acknowledge our guilty pleasures and mistakes, and celebrate the learning they bring.
We are true to our values, resilient to challenge and committed to what we do.

Although we know that at times it can be difficult or frustrating, we will always strive to improve, ensuring that we deliver a high quality, sustainably conscious businesses.

Below are a few examples of some of the things we do live up to our Sustainability Policy:

**Waste** We ask our suppliers to deliver their products to us in as little packaging as possible; we’ve also helped some suppliers develop re-usable packaging that has eliminated some waste completely. The waste we do produce is recycled wherever possible – and this isn’t just limited to tins, cans and plastic bottles – we’ve recycled old sun loungers in the past, as well as the wax from our candles. We have several compost heaps on site where we put everything from used tea leaves and coffee grounds from our restaurants to seaweed from our Spa. Guests are encouraged to help us keep our waste to a minimum by using the recycling bins around the hotel (and in the car park for the packaging from any snacks that might have enjoyed in the car on the way here ). We also have a box where unwanted beach toys can be left behind at the end of the holiday for other families to enjoy.

**Saving Energy** Our building consumes a lot of energy, so we have made a commitment to purchase our electricity from a 100% guaranteed renewable tariff. Our team monitor energy meters three times a week and we produce an annual report of our carbon footprint. Electricity in our guest rooms is controlled by key cards, so when guests leave their rooms they can be confident that they are keeping their footprint small. In our main kitchen we have set up a system where we use the waste energy from our fridges to heat the hot water for our chef – the energy saved by doing this is equivalent to the energy used to boil 3,250 full kettles of water each day.

**Water conservation** In our Spa we are able to collect rainwater and use it to flush the toilets. We also operate a linen and towel change policy, where our guests decide when they would like their bedding and towels swapped for fresh. We no longer use tablecloths in our Wild Café, which means that we use less water and
energy for our laundry. Our toilets have dual flush options and small cisterns, and our taps and showers are fitted with aerators.

**Natural environment** We have recently started to leave sections of our grounds to grow wild, including the green roof over the Villa Suites, and will be encouraging the growth of a variety of wildflowers. By doing this, we hope to see the return of more indigenous butterflies, bumblebees, moths, lizards and small mammals to our area of coastline. New landscaping is being done at xxxx to reflect our location on the North xxxx coast, mimicking the sand dunes and allowing us to provide a variety of habitats around the hotel. We do a number of things to benefit both our immediate local parish, and the wider xxxxxxx community.

**Community Fund** xxxxx (xxxxxx and its sister hotel, xxxx) have set up a Community Fund that funds new or existing projects in our parish that contribute to improving the local natural environment, or provide a social benefit to people living in the area. The fund is made up of donations given by our guests through our Guest Gifting Scheme.

Our **Guest Gifting Scheme** enables our guests to give back to charities that support different environmental projects on the North Coast. These charities include: the National Trust’s work at Carnewas (around the corner from us), Surfers Against Sewage, and co2balance, which enables guests to offset their carbon emissions by planting a tree in a local woodland. As a hotel, we are committed to engaging with and promoting responsible tourism practices, which is why we encourage our guests to donate to responsible causes.

We organize a minimum of four **beach cleans** a year and encourage our staff and guests to participate. We also invite members of our community and other local businesses to come along and join in. At our most recent clean we cleared 25kg of rubbish, plus more fishing lines, nets and rope that we could get on the scales! Local litter picks around the hotel are due to be organized during the summer months to keep our surroundings clean both for guests and local residents. We are also looking into other ways we can lend a hand in our community, and hope to organize some volunteer opportunities for our staff to participate in.

We operate a **Buy Local Policy** and we have a business goal to source 70% of our consumables from local suppliers. This applies to food and drink, building materials,
printing, stationary and other general supplies. We not only purchase products from local suppliers but we also seek to foster relationships with them, allowing us to give and receive constructive feedback and advice, which in turn helps them and us to become better business partners.

Our hotel facilities are **open to non-residents**, and we try to hold regular events that involve our community. During the low season we offer discounts in our Spa for locals, and we offer memberships to our gym and swimming pool. Our two restaurants are open to non-residents as well. Last year we held a Vintage Pleasures event on xxxxx Beach for our local community, which included games for children such as kite-making, a belly boarding competition, cooking demonstrations by our chefs and vintage-themed stalls.

We operate a [Charitable Request Policy](#) to respond to the numerous requests we receive from individuals asking for support for a particular charitable cause close to their hearts. As an organization, we set out a policy to support local charities wherever possible, particularly those that will benefit a large number of people in xxxxx and the South West, or those that will benefit the natural environment in the South West. We also aim to support any charitable initiative that our staff are involved in.

We are keen to [share best practice](#) with others, and our Sustainability Manager regularly hosts visits of local college students and other businesses to share our sustainable practices. We are Ambassadors for the xxxxx Sustainable Tourism Partnership (CoaST) and are often invited to participate in and speak at events that both educate other businesses and work towards a sustainable future for xxxxx and the South West. We also often host students from local colleges and make schools visits to talk about some of the things we do and why being a sustainable business is so important to us and the planet.