

How Sustainability Crept Out of the Black Box: The Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

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This paper describes how sustainability thinking crept out of the black box into the spotlight by the power and persistence of a growing cadre of internal outlier activists in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Discussion, even arguing, on linkage of sustainability with the core values of the church boosted energy and insight needed for defining an ambitious strategic intent of becoming a trailblazer in society in sustainability thinking and actions. Over a period of three decades internal activists reinforced by external volunteers developed numerous independent strategic initiatives that gradually brought sustainability into an integral part of mainframe strategic agenda.

Keywords: sustainability, strategic transformation, spirituality

INTRODUCTION

“We live in a unite ecosystem. We must recognize that every breath, every mouthful of food we take comes from the natural world. If we damage the natural world, we damage ourselves.” This powerful insight was voiced by Sir David Attenborough, 92, naturalist, broadcaster and activist at the World Economic Forum’s Davos Conference in January 2019. Since the 1980s sustainability movement has gradually conquered spotlight of politicians and business executives. Even though sustainability has become a key part of strategic agenda of governments and NGOs like, it is only during this millennium when good intentions have been converted into action (United Nations, 2018; Rockström & Klum, 2015).

Many business companies have taken sustainability goals as permanent ingredient of their strategies. For long, sustainability was regarded mainly as an image-building element. Impact on business performance seemed to be vague (e.g. Black, 2013). More recently, there is increasing amount of research evidence demonstrating that investments in sustainability generate also economic gain (Eccles & Serafeim, 2013; Flamel & Bansal, 2017; Kiron et al., 2013). One of the questions addressed is whether governments, NGOs and businesses are doing enough? Are the caliber and speed of actions sufficient (Hoffman, 2018; Sushanta & Keshab, 2017)? Are there additional players or new perspectives that could make impact on enhancing sustainability practices? Are there silent voices acting out of the spotlight?

Sustainability implies a spiritual dimension, too. In fact, there is a diversity of spiritual orientations within the sustainability movement, from active members of various traditional religions to free thinkers of all types (Dhiman & Margues, 2016). Even though most people accept the idea that spirituality is

somehow linked with deeper meaning of sustainability, sustainability movement has paid most attention to concrete challenges such as environmental, economic, energy, education, policy, biological diversity and similar issues (United Nations, 2018). It is however noteworthy that many green/eco products and services are promoted by using images that appeal to spiritual needs. Consequently, we address a question: what – if anything – can religious organizations contribute to contents of sustainability strategies, process of strategizing and the role of strategists?

The purpose of this article is to describe how sustainability thinking crept out of the black box towards spotlight by the power and persistence of activists in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Based on this, implications for renewing processes and contents of strategizing will be drawn.

HOVERING DANGER OF SHORT-TERMISM

Sustainability offers value-base for strategizing that goes beyond profit maximization. Instead of short-termism, sustainability awareness encourages strategic thinking in terms of long-term viability of organizations, networks and societies. Increasing amount of empirical and research evidence affirms that long-term orientation creates also more value than short-termism (Flamel & Bansal, 2017; Barton et al., 2017).

A common assertion is that formal strategic planning processes enhance performance efficiency. The downside is that overly structured planning systems hurt innovative activity due to the inflexibilities introduced (Arend et al., 2015). The overriding paradox of aggressively implemented planning systems is that they may turn good things such as strategy process bad (Sull, 1999). Martin (2014) discusses, in a somewhat exaggerated fashion, “the big lie of strategic planning”. He argues that many practicing managers create plans that are characterized by detailed financial analysis and statements in which costs and operative actions are emphasized. While these kinds of plans create a sense of comfort among administrators, they reinforce business-as-usual practices (Baliga & Santalainen, 2016). Formal template-based strategic planning systems are typically top-down exercises that seldom give space for silent thinkers or voices coming from the edges of organization, nor inputs from outside the organizational boundaries.

OUTLIERS AS ACTIVISTS – WHO INITIATES SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS?

If formal strategic management systems and strategy practitioners are not necessarily the best possible drivers in introducing and rooting new ideas such as sustainability, where to search? Experience from expert organizations suggest that world-class innovations can happen even though there is no deliberate strategy as has been the case of CERN; where World Wide Web was developed, Higgs particle was found and some 400 doctoral theses have been finalized year after year (Bertolucci, 2013).

Burgelman guides search of innovative actions towards exploiting opportunities outside the core. In a more analytical mode, he talks of autonomous strategic action, which involves individuals or groups that are outside the scope of strategizing. Autonomous strategic initiatives may complement or even substitute formal strategizing processes (Burgelman, 2002). These initiatives are typically performed by activists, who function outside the core of organizations. With their desire to make changes in organizations or wider society, passionate activists can promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform. Hamel states, that in order to make genuine strategic renewal happen, it is an imperative to have courageous activists, especially in bureaucratic organizations. Rather than creating anarchy, constructive activists should reach out and partner with multipliers within organizations. Hamel further acclaims: “Activists are not anarchists. Most often they are ‘loyal opposition’ whose goal is to create movement within their organization. Courage is the most important attribute for making innovation stick (Hamel, 2000; Goodwin & Jasper, 2009).”

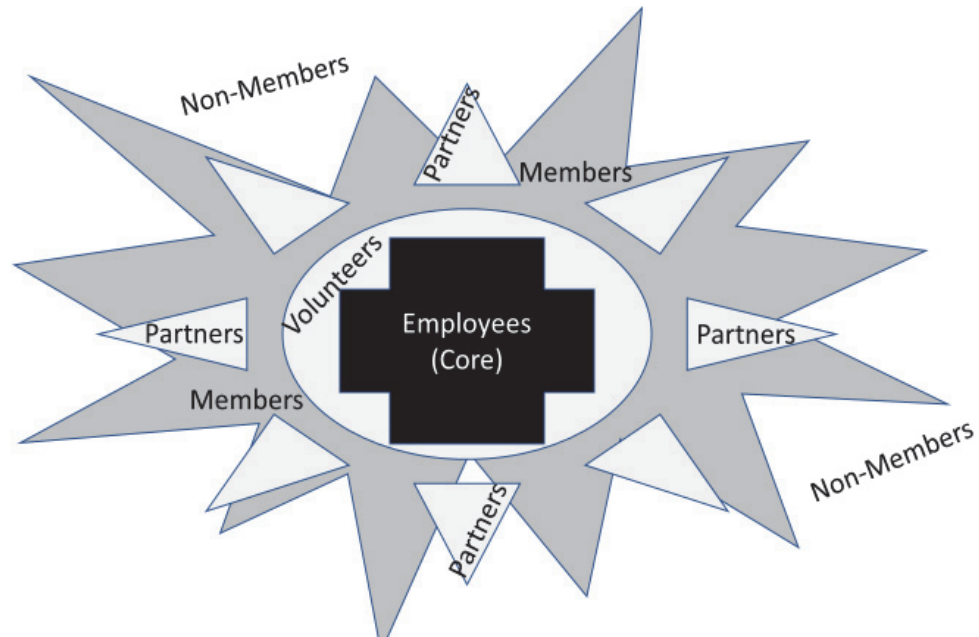
Activists are outliers, “men and women who do things that are out of ordinary, or something that is situated away from a main body” (Gladwell, 2010). “Something” can refer to teams, organizations, things, evolving industries or phenomena, but in the case of strategic renewal, it is the individuals that trigger change. Outlier activists working in incumbent organizations realize that great(est) opportunities for strategic novelty exist at the edge of conventional organizational systems and processes, close to organizational boundaries (Välakangas & Gibbert, 2016). Incumbents rarely notice the value of outliers as driving forces for novelty. Sustainability movement, however, creates pressure and offers opportunities for strategic novelty. Church is an example of an incumbent organization, which, by definition, is guided by conservative values. Is it possible, and if so, how to instill sustainability thinking into strategic agenda of an incumbent organization such as a church?

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AS A VALUE NETWORK

Most church organizations form a multilayered organizational value network with somewhat unclear and constantly changing boundaries. These networks are often composed of relatively isolated actors who manage their operations independently, but work together based on shared agreements (Lindgren, Taran & Boer, 2010). Sometimes actors within a value network create tighter mutual linkages that resemble business ecosystems (Iansiti & Levien, 2004). Ecosystem partners form a network around a central hub in order to jointly create common good such as novel business models. There is also nascent research evidence that organizations with their stakeholders can co-create valuable new sustainability-related endeavors and solutions (Breuer & Ludeke-Freund, 2019). Nongovernmental stakeholders can boost the development of sustainable communities in many ways; by lobbying for environmental legislation, raising public awareness, partnering with local companies in implementing sustainable practices and even acting as public watchdogs (Berrone & Gelabert, 2019). Some of these organizations act seemingly out of the spotlight.

In most Western countries church organizations act out of the spotlight, even more so when strategic renewal is concerned. Shrinking church membership has been one of the main worries of church leaders. Nevertheless, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has maintained relatively strong position throughout the country. Even though the membership is declining year by year, 69.7 per cent of Finnish people are still members of this church (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as a value network with somewhat indistinct boundaries.

FIGURE 1
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AS A VALUE NETWORK



Some 20 000 full-time employees (2018) form the core of the value network of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The core organization is centrally led with three levels of organizational units: national Church Council, nine regional dioceses that cover the entire country along with 384 local congregations.

Approximately 3.8 million members form a wide network around the core organization. Constantly changing number of members makes boundaries of this value network fluid as people join and leave the church. Membership has been steadily decreasing for several decades. In 2018 for instance, 58 300 members left the church whereas as 16 800 joined it. Oftentimes the decision to join or leave the church is connected to questions related to contemporary value-loaded discussion themes in wider society; sexual orientation and same-sex marriage being “hot topics” during recent years for example. Decline in the membership is not as dramatic as it may look since great part of members are passive ones. Active members make the church viable. Many active members are as a matter of fact more permanent actors in the local units than employees are.

Volunteers form another layer, mostly but not exclusively overlapping with members. It has been estimated that there are more than 100 000 volunteers working in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (2015). Contrary to the declining membership, the number of volunteers has shown steady growth during recent years.

Partners are organizations that collaborate with an intent to promote specific themes in society. Recent examples of collaborative partners have entailed missionary, humanitarian and social work organizations, mental health organizations, child and senior citizen organizations, scouts, WWF, Red Cross, AA, and other NGOs – as well as sustainability-related organizations.

Non-members are mostly not part of the value network of the church. However, special themes such as sustainability have attracted non-members to join specific development projects.

RESEARCH METHOD

We adopted a qualitative, process-oriented research approach, as we were interested in capturing insights from activists who had played key roles over the years in initiating sustainability measures at the

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (Jané et al., 2018; Langley, 1999). Primary stage of data collection combined semi-structured interviews of six key activists. Secondary stage was an analysis of church official documents and strategies, as well as archival materials such as sustainability reports and publications recommended by the activists. This was supplemented by analysis of press and media coverage. Thirdly, for promoting external validity the second author, who is a sustainability activist herself, performed complementary “sense-making sessions” with selected church employees and executives as well as active volunteer church members (Carton & Lucas, 2018). Our aim was to recruit a diverse set of opinions from people who were either for or against taking sustainability as a part of strategic agenda. It turned out that some of the interviewees had little interest in strategy jargon; hence they proved to have taken strategic actions for enhancing sustainability without even knowing it themselves.

Data collection covered a period of 2 years ending in October 2019, but the data itself extends over a period of approximately 30 years. We analyzed the data in mutual sparring processes, during which we connected empirical observations to extant conceptual frames. Our aim was to identify critical events in order to generate tentative ideas on how sustainability gradually crept out of the black box into the spotlight (Giudici et al., 2018).

RESULTS

Identification of Change Accelerators

In the first stage of analysis we structured our data by using Kotter’s eight step model of change (Kotter, 2012; Kotter, 1995). We assumed that identification of change accelerators could reveal how sustainability issues gradually became part of formal strategic agendas. We soon learned however, that change accelerators in our data did not follow any logical order or even sequence of time. In fact, multiple change processes were happening simultaneously at different levels i.e. individual, team, local, regional as well as national. In any case, Kotter’s framing was helpful in finding triggers and drivers that boosted sustainability thinking. This will be discussed next.

Sense of urgency for developing sustainability within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland gained momentum along with the global voices that signaled emergent problems of climate change. As early as in 1983, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches tackled the environmental questions in relation to themes such as justice, peace and integrity of creation. Attendees from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland brought these themes and questions back home. Moreover, one of the activists had worked in Germany which has been a forerunner in sustainability thinking. About the same time, in the late 1980s, isolated activists in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland started to talk of the need to educate people in sustainability. They thought that sustainability thinking is a big opportunity not only for taking responsibility of developing a healthier planet for the next generations but also for renewing church doctrine in order to address emerging issues of modern times.

Early sustainability measures were mainly related to education, especially of young people. “If the education system of the country does not take care of sustainability education, the church must take responsibility”, was a point presented by one of the activists. The church has a firm tradition in youth work through confirmation teaching. As of today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church reaches more than 90 per cent of 14-15-year-old church members in their confirmation teaching, which extends over a period of approximately six months. In 2018, for instance, a total of 48 133 individuals attended confirmation teaching, 45 610 of whom were 15-year-old. This means that 77.3 per cent of the whole age group, i.e. members and non-members, attended. Based on recent experience young people are especially interested in environmental questions also in the church setting. Consequently, recent pressure for change comes more and more from unexpected source: youngsters have become activists who demand sustainability measures. Sometimes they are silent, sometimes vocal.

Much earlier, though, activists, who were typically trainers and development experts, started to voice their stance in the media. Activists began also to find each other. They started to *build and maintain a loose coalition* that gradually set strategic direction for sustainability efforts. Most important vehicle was

materials they produced for church's own occasions and educational programs. Educational programs paved the way to first local environmental actions. External volunteers joined the expanding coalition offering their help in creating and spreading the sustainability message.

At this stage early activists did not get support from the church leaders, who let activists act, but did not show much appreciation or encouragement, nor committed themselves to sustainability efforts. Activists were perseverant, though. Even after being retired some employees and volunteers continued working for the cause, still staying virtually out of the spotlight. It took more than two decades before the tidal wave of sustainability movement in society had grown so powerful that the expanding cadre of church activists started to creep out of their isolated "black boxes". By this time these activists had created a wider partner network that included not only individuals but also several non-religious organizations such as WWF.

Activists started to gather ingredients of a potential *sustainability vision*. They believed that sustainability issues such as greenhouse effect, pollution and questions of social justice can create a bridge with the core values and doctrine of the church. The basis of sustainability thinking for the church is found in the creation narrative in which we are called "to cultivate and take care the Earth" (cfr. Gen 2:15, NIV). Soon there was room for a wider range of emergent strategic initiatives (cfr. Mintzberg, 1985) starting from educational programs, reinforced by publications, media presentations and finally leading to creation of a system called the Church Environmental Diploma.

Movement toward the vision was accelerated when the Church Environmental Diploma was introduced in 2001. The Diploma proved to become the most important *short-term win* in boosting sustainability. The Environmental Diploma is a practical strategy tool for screening and implementing sustainability practices not only in various church organizations, but even in external partner organizations. The window of opportunity for the church's own environmental certification document resulted of time being favorable for sustainability thinking in the wider society. Another key factor was that by this time there were enough church leaders on highest organizational level who were capable and willing to take steps in developing visible sustainability practices.

Diploma handbook is a concrete tool that gives guidelines in areas such as energy and water efficiency, waste management, sustainable transportation, green cleaning, eco-friendly food, eco-efficient building, environmental education, and of course church-related areas such as care of graveyards and green spaces. The handbook also addresses topics on ethical investing, global responsibility and sustainable forest management. It is notable that the church owns 0.7 per cent of all forests in Finland. This may not sound much, but the importance of forest ownership can be rescaled by the fact that Finland has more forests than any other country in Europe with 73 per cent of area covered by forests. In addition to a source of revenues from forest management, the forests have a natural link to sustainability programs, since forests form an important carbon sink.

The church further *communicated its sustainability vision* by entering in public discussion around climate change when it introduced its first nationwide climate program called "Gratitude, Respect, Moderation" in 2008. This climate program presented theological viewpoints of climate change as well as environmental experts' advice on what can be done in order to counteract it. This first climate program created wider buy-in attracting more people both inside and outside church organizations to consider potential actions needed for preserving the environment.

Early experiences in application of the Diploma offered valuable lessons for wider action. Lessons learned were now communicated in more favorable fashion. Sustainability work spread faster to local congregations and parts of central administration as they started to adopt the Environmental Diploma as well. Sustainability was also more and more often an agenda point in internal meetings. This allowed best practices to be multiplied. Success attracted an increasing amount outside volunteers to join in church's sustainability efforts. They both enriched internal sustainability efforts by bringing their own expertise and helped in spreading church's external image as a modern institution.

A powerful booster came from the very top of the organization by Archbishop Mäkinen in his opening address of General Synod 2013. The Archbishop called the researchers of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a modern version of the prophets of the Old Testament: "When I read

the coolly analytical words of the IPCC scientists, its rumblings seem to urge something deeper than the necessity to urge the development of an action plan, and those rumblings apply no less to the church...I recognize in the report the boldness characteristic of the prophets of the Old Testament. That is what the climate scientists are doing now. Theirs is a prophetic message for our time.”

Another public booster came soon after when the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church was elected as a nominee for Nordic Council’s Nature and Environment Prize in 2015. The same year the church also received environmental award from The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (FANC). Recognitions granted from outside further *accelerated sustainability movement*. More and more signs indicated that sustainability thinking had started to institutionalize in the organizational culture.

However, many sorts of barriers remained. There were still stubborn, hard-voiced purists who thought that sustainability does not belong to church’s message. Another typical barrier was a group of people who still did not believe in sustainability and/or denied the very existence of climate change. Some even seemed to be too lazy to take action or to execute strategic initiatives crafted by the activists. As an example, Eco-Bank initiative never came alive. Another example was a high-level task force which aimed at accelerating sustainability thinking nationwide. This task force never met because the appointed chairperson never called the group together. Good intent thus faded away. There were also penny-stretchers who thought that any sustainability action will be too costly.

Despite resistance, positive *experiences learned* by increasing number of congregations that had adopted the Environmental Diploma accelerated momentum of implementation a greater variety of sustainability-related actions. As a result, the divide between church’s core message and values guiding sustainability endeavors shrank. The power of execution process of sustainability measures through the Diploma turned out to be forceful. Growing number of sustainability enthusiasts included more and more church leaders in key positions. Church also enhanced general awareness in society for the need of sustainability actions and moderate lifestyle. Church offered a contribution to wider society by developing guidelines for ethical investment - and by executing them itself.

By 2019 almost all large congregations had adopted the Environmental Diploma throughout the country. It is kind of an ecolabel that is granted after external audition process for a period of five years at a time. Implementing the Diploma has been an action learning process. Based on experience (best and worst practices) of current Diploma holders backed by fast growing general awareness of sustainability issues, new editions of the Diploma have been launched. The 4th Edition will be published in 2020. Furthermore, one large congregation that has had the Diploma, is searching collaboration with adjacent cities and universities with a purpose to attain the ISO 14001 standard. This opens new opportunities to stretch out toward wider and closer external partnering.

Institutionalization of Sustainability Thinking: Three Nationwide Strategies

Sustainability measures framed around the seven sets of accelerators (see above) gained step by step growing power. Consequently, sustainability efforts started to creep out from their isolated “black boxes”. Institutionalization of sustainability in the culture of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church happened through strategizing processes within different units in local, regional and national level. General nationwide “corporate” strategies prepared by the Church Council have been the most notable ones. As of today, two waves of formal nationwide strategies have been crafted. Sustainability conquered bigger and bigger role as an integral part of these strategies as they were executed in various parts of church network. A separate nationwide climate strategy was crafted and launched as a result of accumulating awareness of the need to take immediate sustainability measures.

The first nationwide church strategy called “Our Church, a Participatory Community” was formulated in 2007 (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 2007). It highlighted “responsibility” as one of the three core values of the church. Responsibility was further explained by caring for neighbors, protecting whole creation, using all resources responsibly and striving for moderation in our ways of living. Another core value, “justice”, called people to seek sustainable and long-lasting solutions for emerging issues.

The next nationwide strategy, entitled “The Church of Encounter” was launched in 2016 (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 2016). In this strategy, reaching until 2020, commitment to sustainability

work was renewed. Church's mission was seen to encourage people to care for their neighbors and all creation. A special meaning for "encounters" formed a central hook of this strategy. It is also notable that the strategy encouraged church employees to reach out and engage more volunteers to get involved in church activities including sustainability-related efforts. True strategy execution was believed to happen on individual level.

Sustainability theme came into complete spotlight in February 2019 when strategy steering group – composed by both internal and external "sustainability strategists" published nationwide energy and climate strategy for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The strategy entitled "Carbon Neutral Church 2030" was published with ample positive media coverage. The largest newspaper of the country even recognized the church as a trailblazer in sustainability thinking in the Finnish society. This recognition might stem from clearly more ambitious objectives of the strategy compared with existing sustainability strategies of other non-profit organizations such as cities. The new climate strategy contains five strategic objectives ranging from more typical ones like reducing carbon emissions, compensating reductions to church taking a strong role as a public opinion leader in society in sustainability issues. Fifth objective is also worth mentioning: "Church leaders at all organizational levels must commit in executing the strategy".

CONCLUSIONS

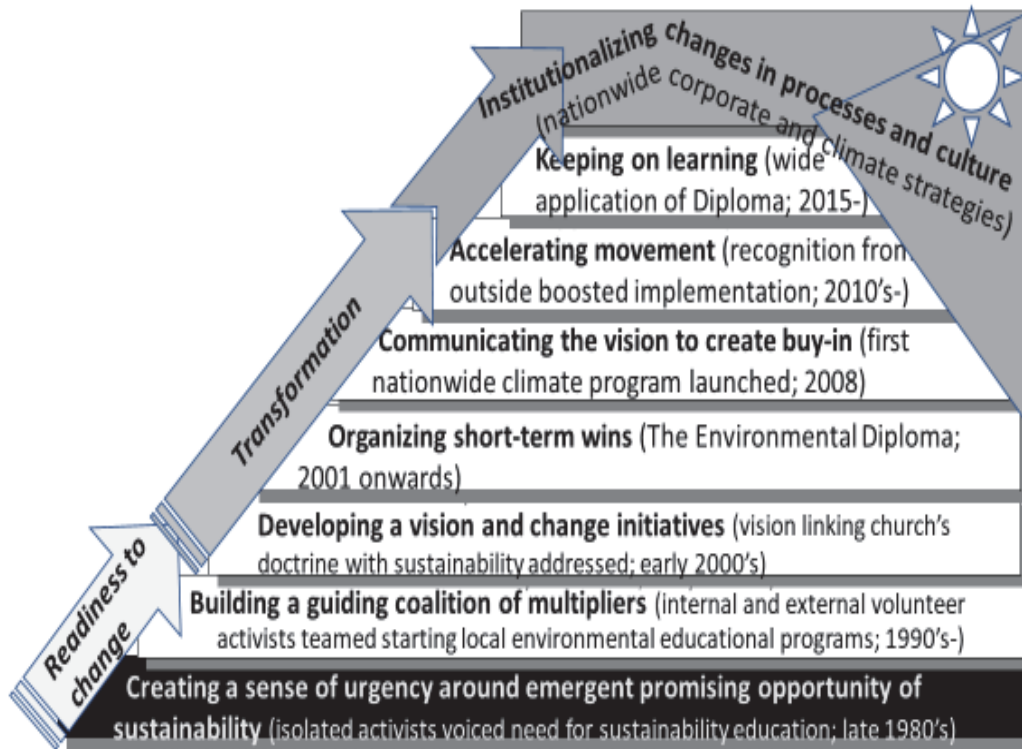
Framing the Institutionalization Process of Sustainability

The storyline above describes how sustainability thinking gradually crept out of fringes of the organization, labelled here as "the black box", into the spotlight becoming a central part of mainstream strategic agendas. Emergence of sustainability thinking did not follow any pre-assembled model or logical sequence. Kotter's eight change accelerators could, however, be identified in our analysis. In the early (first two) stages of the transformation process accelerators triggered readiness to change. Later, after the Environmental Diploma was launched and executed, change accelerators became more forceful drivers of actual change. There were numerous change processes that started at different times and on different levels of the organization, i.e. in congregations, dioceses, even in partner organizations. By taking a helicopter view, we framed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as a corporation.

Timewise the overall transformation process of adopting sustainability thinking can also be structured in three major waves that overlap change accelerators, forming thus an umbrella frame of strategic transformation. The first one, creating readiness to change by the power of isolated activists, happened in the 1980s. The second wave, making transformation happen by using the Diploma as a strategy tool, started in the early 2000s. The third wave, institutionalizing sustainability as an integral part of overall church strategy, brought sustainability into spotlight as of the early 2010s (cfr. Lewin, 1947). The first two stages of transformation were initiated in the core of the organization (even though close to organizational boundaries) while the third wave, institutionalization, happened as increasing number of external activists and partners joined forces with internal multipliers. This happened along with growing global awareness of sustainability issues in wider society.

In sum, transformation frame of the two overlapping change processes discussed above is configured in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
HOW SUSTAINABILITY CREPT OUT OF THE BLACK BOX:
TRANSFORMATION FRAME



(Kotter, 2012; Lewin, 1947, adapted)

Figure 2 represents a configuration with concrete examples of evolution of sustainability thinking with actions gaining momentum during more than 30 years within the value network of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Awareness was born in “black boxes” (as shown in the bottom of Figure 2) by isolated activists who soon created partnerships with employees and external volunteer members. Readiness to change was triggered through educational programs and public presentations.

Real transformation gained momentum when a vision bridging church’s doctrine with values of sustainability was addressed, after relatively intense debate. The vision of cultivating and taking care of the Earth, and recognition from the outside strengthened transformation drivers so that the number of sustainability-related programs increased rapidly. The increased sustainability thinking was boosted by volunteers and external partners that joined the internal activists.

The Environmental Diploma launched in 2001 proved to be an early success and a powerful strategy tool. Sustainability criteria of the Diploma lead to a wide range of sustainability-related initiatives. The Diploma can be regarded as an early success, but it took more than a decade before sustainability thinking started to root in organizational culture and management processes. Two nationwide corporate strategies along with the newly launched environmental strategy have played key roles in institutionalization.

Practical Implications

From strategy practice point of view our analysis leads to three major implications. These concern the role of strategists, the nature of strategizing process and contents of strategy (cfr. Whittington, 2019; Hutz et al., 2017).

First, activists can become powerful strategists – often without anybody (not even themselves) noticing it. We found that activists who try to introduce innovative ideas to incumbent organizations are most often outliers. Perseverant activists can create, extend and energize both internal and external networks of multipliers who then became change agents. Our study revealed also that internal activists can create buy-in and unfreeze resistance to change of top management with their well-addressed strategic messages. They can also attract volunteers and partners from external value network. More recently, even less organized youngsters taking part in confirmation education have created pressure to management for taking sustainability measures. At best, innovative ecosystems that start working on sustainability issues are created. Growing network activists can become valuable promoters not only in sustainability issues, but they also polish brand image of the organization (cfr. Reichheld, 2006). Based on the above, our practical recommendation is:

1. *Find, encourage and involve activists, including outliers and people with different voices, in strategizing and innovative transformation processes for finding promising strategic initiatives.*

Second, our findings clearly reinforce the notion that innovative ideas can be born outside formal strategic planning process. At least this seemed to be the case in somewhat bureaucratic incumbent organization such as a traditional church (by definition) is. Our study also revealed that innovative strategic change can be bottom-up or middle-top-down process. This finding upgrades the value of strategic initiatives that come from organizational boundaries or even from the outside. These initiatives are independent from formal strategy processes. Independent strategic initiatives can therefore complement “business-as-usual” mode of strategic management. They can be an invaluable source of creating awareness, opening minds to innovative ideas, but execution in all organizational levels calls for buy-in of management.

Open strategizing is a promising avenue for further developing dual strategizing processes by exploiting organization’s internal and external network power. Internally, horizontal collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas for creating strategic initiatives can develop “silo solvents” that increase both innovation and execution power. Externally, network partners can form strong “strategizing ecosystems” in identifying and breeding strategic initiatives (Baliga & Santalainen, 2016). Our recommendation to strategy practitioners is:

2. *Create space for emergent strategic initiatives by creating ambidextrous contents and culture (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2011), then develop and execute most promising initiatives by the “innopower” of external and internal networks, i.e. through open strategizing.*

Third, in order to make new innovative ideas stick (Szulanski, 1996), contents of strategy should be rooted in the core values of the organization as has been the case of sustainability work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Linkage between most innovative new ideas and traditional core organizational values can be remote at the outset, but the connection is worth building. Sometimes good stories or verbal images can be great mind-stretching tools that create stickiness. An example of such a mind-opener was a comment by one of the interviewees, who put connection between doctrine of the church and sustainability this way: “We are here on Earth on a leasing contract. Our duty is to take good care of what has been entrusted to us.”

In order to create lasting stickiness, innovative ideas should be loaded by values. Value-driven strategies are more viable than superficial (“profit maximizing”-type) ones. We found that the process of adopting sustainability thinking refreshed general discussion on values as strategy drivers in church organizations. A key insight in this value discussion was the notion that instead of asking what sustainability can do to strategies or organizations, which still is the prevailing approach in business companies, the main point should be to craft strategies that can boost sustainability, i.e. what we and our organizations can do to our planet (Wunder, 2019). Consequently, our practical recommendation is:

3. *Explore core values of the organization, reframe them as needed, and then anchor strategic initiatives in renewed value base for making them stick. This is how long-term viability can be achieved and strengthened.*

The core value of “cultivating and taking care of the Earth” was strong enough to trigger a powerful system-wide strategic action in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Creation of a shared value platform took time, but when this platform existed, sustainability efforts gained momentum. Ambitions of sustainability initiatives grew. True institutionalization of sustainability happened when out of the spotlight sustainability-related actions merged with strategizing processes of different organizational units, power of external value network was enhanced and when sustainability won a permanent place in mainframe nationwide strategic agenda. Commitment grew to an extent that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland boldly communicated its new strategic intent of becoming a trailblazer and benchmark for wider society in sustainability practices.

In sum, our advice for practitioners is: *Find* divergent voices for creating a robust idea platform, *process* most promising initiatives by applying open strategizing and *create* a visible link with organizational values in order to make new ideas stick.

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