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Faith in the future: On a mission to integrate sustainability into management theory and practice

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Abstract

We challenge existing corporate sustainability theory by exploring how the concept of syncretism contributes new insights that may help us to reconsider the role of business agents in driving society towards a more sustainable future. The theoretical model distinguishes between ‘syncretic missionaries’ who preach a faith and ‘syncretic believers’ who are preached to. We draw upon the (hitherto disconnected) literatures on syncretism and corporate sustainability to define the critical role of missionaries and believers in business. Using analogical reasoning, we argue that business missionaries and believers are characterised by varying levels of (1) sensibility to sustainability issues and (2) capacity to open themselves to ‘external’ idea systems and viewpoints. The type of relationships that are developed amongst and between themselves is alleged to critically shape a firm’s sustainability performance. The article ends with an outline of implications for the future of corporate sustainability theory, referring to theories and concepts recently developed in the field (i.e., organisational and institutional logics multiplicity, paradox perspective).

Keywords

Corporate sustainability, missionaries, believers, syncretism, management paradigms, analogical reasoning

Introduction – Sustainability - The 21st century business challenge

In the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR), one of the most significant developments has been the recognition of the need to challenge the ideological assumptions of capitalism (Kazmi, Leca, & Naccache, 2016) and make business practice more harmoniously aligned with ‘sustainability’ goals, reflecting society’s concern for fostering progress towards combined social equity, ecological integrity and economic prosperity (Bansal, 2005). Corporate sustainability (henceforth CS) is recognised both as an explicit and distinct (although closely related) topic for management scholarship (Montiel, 2008) and as the ultimate stage of CSR development within a firm (Kolk, 2016; Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2010).

Changes to products, technologies, regulations and business school syllabi, and the emergence of organizations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, or of sustainability management positions, targets and strategies amongst leading companies, can all be offered as evidence that business is changing to address the sustainability challenge. These however largely represent the adoption of the trappings of sustainability thinking rather than its substance. As noted by Valente (2010, p. 40), ‘despite the growing consensus among scholars and managers on the need for paradigmatic change [towards ‘sustaincentrism’], there is little sign within the academic, practitioner, and public policy domains that such a shift is taking hold [...] A continual stream of evidence reveals devastating business practices that catastrophically undermine social and ecological integrity’.

An early and influential framing of how sustainability challenges management thinking comes from Gladwin, Kennelly, and Krause (1995). They attribute the lack of progress towards sustainability to the clash between two management paradigms: the existing, dominant ‘technocentric’ paradigm and its comparatively new and radically opposing challenger: ‘ecocentrism’. These two represent alienated and opposing poles with neither

capable of truly integrating human society and culture with nature. Gladwin et al. (1995) see hope in the emergence of a new alternative 'sustaincentric' management paradigm that emphasises the inextricable links between socio-economic activities and our natural systems. Despite its potential however, sustaincentrism remains a category – an 'ism' – that falls short of explaining the processes that will help management research and practice bridge the gap between business and sustainability. It has been largely side-lined by CSR research and criticised as an ambiguously defined concept that risks the co-option of ethics by business concerns (Valente, 2012). Furthermore, the pursuit of a sustaincentric approach to business is not facilitated by 'conventional' management theories that tend to promote the status quo in management thinking. Sustaincentrism may represent a path by which business and sustainability can become reconciled, but it seems to remain tantalisingly out of reach for management practitioners and theorists.

Gladwin et al. (1995, p. 889) argue that 'significant contributions toward understanding ecologically and socially sustainable economies, societies, and organizations, however, will arise only from new fundamentals, new languages and new lenses'. This paper aims to extend our understanding of how sustainability might be better integrated into management thinking (theory and practice) by applying the lens of syncretism. As an element of cultural studies, syncretism is most closely associated with religious studies, and with efforts to reconcile or integrate opposing principles and practices when more than one belief system (or faith) come together (Lambropoulos, 2001; Lindenfeld, 2005). In an influential examination into how companies adopt and integrate CSR into their strategies, culture and operations, Berger, Cunningham, and Dumright (2007) identify a syncretic approach as one of three types of CSR 'mainstreaming' (the others being a business case based or a social values led approach). Beyond this however, the potential relevance of syncretism for CSR and CS contexts, has not been seriously considered as a theory of reconciling paradigms (Martinez,

Vazquez-Brust, Peattie, & Zokaei, 2012). Also, although Berger et al. (2007, p. 38) highlight the potential importance of ‘syncretic stewardship’ to achieve greater CSR (and by implication CS) they do not say much about the processes (and their participants) through which it can be achieved.

One emerging approach to the pursuit of CS is a paradox perspective (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2014, 2018) that seeks to accommodate potentially conflicting economic, environmental, and social concerns. The paradox perspective, and its critique of the notion of a ‘win-win’ resolution of the business case, seeks to move beyond an emphasis on business logic towards an emphasis on values and identities. Hahn et al. (2018, p. 237) argue that ‘accommodating conflicting personal and organizational identities and values around sustainability can foster change for sustainability.’ They echo Fiss and Zajac (2006) in explaining that ‘the coexistence of conflicting identities and values within the organization can drive cognitive organizational reorientation.’ What remains unclear are the processes that govern how such conflicting identities and values interact to maintain or transcend the sustainability paradox, rather than seeking to resolve or reject it. To understand them, there may be benefits in following Frederick's (1998) advice, and looking beyond the conventional CSR literature to studies from religious and cultural disciplines.

Some scholars observe that the economic paradigm that dominates management fields has proved impervious to sustainability pressures (Starik & Kanashiro, 2013; Swanson, 2014) and therefore resembles a religious faith in being intractable, enduring and resistant to change (Baird, 1991). This creates the potential for cultural and religious studies to inform our understanding of how actors of the corporate world meet the sustainability challenge, since it represents not just a battle of competing business logics, but a battle between technocentric and ecocentric ‘faiths’. A further clue to the potential relevance of religious perspectives comes in the semantics of the CS debate. Language denoting an idea system as faith-based,

such as ‘doctrine’, ‘dogma’ or ‘creed’ tends to be used by proponents of one faith when talking about the other (Martinez, 2017). Leading thinkers on each side are referred to as ‘gurus’, and each side appears to believe they are the ones led by logic and evidence, whilst the other is driven by dogma. Maon *et al.* (2010: 31) describe top management's support in their final seventh ‘transformative’ level of CS orientated CSR as ‘devotion’ whilst Gladwin *et al.* (1995: 896) refer to sustainability ‘believers’. These references have not been extensively echoed in CS research thereafter, despite their relevance to aspects of CS (cultural change, faithing processes) that remain largely understudied. In a similar vein, some ‘Human Relations’ authors (e.g., Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Kim, Shin, Vough, Hewlin, & Vandenberghe, 2018) have explored how people at work have recourse to vocational callings (secular or sacred) to make sense of, and add meaning to, their work place. While this can be inferred to reflect a certain level of interest in understanding how business agents relate to faith (in a way that may affect corporate behaviour), there is a shortage of scholarly work that has attempted to explicitly extend this phenomenon to the context of CSR or CS.

This article examines syncretism, an established concept in the study of religious change and faithing processes, in terms of its potential to bring believers back in the study of corporate sustainability phenomena in ways that contribute to a paradigmatic shift towards sustaincentrism. We align with a stream of scholarly contributions advocating for a social constructionist trend in management theory (e.g., Drucker, 2002; Fuller & Loogma, 2009; Hamel & Breen, 2007; McDonald, 2011). The main objective is to articulate how a diverse range of actors in the corporate context relate to their beliefs about capitalism, firms and sustainability. According to Lambropoulos (2001), syncretism is a model of integration that embraces conflicting expectations, allowing for cultural change to be driven by competing faiths. We propose that this ‘model’ can prove relevant and useful in CS fields as an alternative to conventional approaches that rarely seem to rise above a win-win appeal to

logic when tackling the tensions and paradoxes that characterise the links between economic, environmental and social sustainability concerns.

Authors such as Patel (2016); and Bhalla, Henderson, and Watkins (2006) argue that multiple paradigms exist and interact within businesses, shaping their cultures and behaviours, implying that the processes of interaction between paradigms are important for our understanding of some key aspects of change processes that are at work within organizations. In this article, we explore how elements from different paradigms interact in business to form a syncretic field within which diverse processes of adaptation, integration and perhaps disintegration operate.

Unpacking the construct of syncretism

To explore the potential of syncretism to better understand and progress the processes through which greater CS can be achieved, this paper adopts an approach to theorising known as analogical reasoning (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014). It involves constructing analogical relations between phenomena that have no antecedents of theoretically and empirically established correspondences (Wilbers & Duit, 2006).

Analogical reasoning in management studies has provided influential theories in various domains (e.g., Clemente & Roulet, 2015), perhaps most notably in relation to the behavioural theory of the firm by drawing analogies between the human mind and digital computers (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014). In this article, we produce a conceptual representation of the source domain (i.e., 'syncretism'), reviewing its key vocabulary, base assumptions, and causal structure, and transpose it to the target domain (i.e., CS). From the religious and cultural literature, we import the key constructs of syncretism (including its antecedents and outcomes) and create an integrated framework explaining how elements from diverse belief systems can co-exist and interact in the business environment to form a

‘syncretic field’ where a firm’s readiness to engage in sustainability may be understood and influenced.

Syncretism ‘refers to the cultural mixture of diverse beliefs and practices within a specific socio-historical frame; to the congruity of dissent within such a frame, despite differences of opinion, [and] to the forging together of disparate, often incompatible, elements from different systems’ (Lambropoulos, 2001: 225). It has been used across disciplines including anthropology, linguistics, psychology, theology, and political theory (Baron, 1977; Lambropoulos, 2001) and applied to a variety of institutional spheres of cultures in contact, including organizations (Baron, 1977; Lambropoulos, 2001), to provide theoretical foundations for new models of social change and/or benefits of a syncretic approach.

Although most work on syncretism focuses on the fusion of religious forms and beliefs (Lindenfeld, 2005; Wagner, 1975), it re-emerged as a theoretical framework in social theory during the 1990s to explore the dynamics of institutional and cultural transformations relating to globalization, transnational nationalism and diaspora communities (Lindenfeld, 2005; Stewart, 1999). Syncretic theory sees collective social constructions (such as belief systems, religions, cultures and institutions) as porous and ‘composed of an indeterminate number of features which are decomposable and combinable’ (Berk & Galvan, 2009, p. 545). Consequently they are open to intermixture and the borrowing of concepts and symbols whilst interpenetrating, hybridizing or blending with each other (Stewart, 1999).

Corporations are social constructions within which a permanent struggle for meaning takes place between multiple institutional logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014). Marquis and Lounsbury (2007, p. 799) define these institutional logics as the ‘broad cultural beliefs and rules that structure cognition and fundamentally shape decision-making and action in a field’. Such cultural beliefs and rules will include elements that shape a corporation’s commitment to sustainability (e.g., Pache & Santos, 2013; Swanson, 1999). The equivalent to institutional

logics in cultural and religious studies of syncretism is the notion of ‘idea systems’ (e.g., Laibelman, 2004; Stewart, 1999; Wagner, 1975). In this article, we seek to transpose to the field of business what can be understood about the way in which elements of idea systems (used interchangeably with the notion of ‘belief systems’ in this article) interact in a syncretic field to shape pro-sustainability paradigmatic change.

Cultural and religious studies identify that individuals, including religious leaders and worshippers, will vary in the intensity with which they relate to idea systems; may adopt different roles in relation to the key ideas; and may actively accept and/or contest encountered ‘foreign’ elements (e.g., Hesselgrave, 2006; Hiebert, 2006; McGavran, 1990; Meyer, 1992, 1994; Sanneh, 1989; Van Rheenen, 2006). To understand these phenomena, a useful distinction in the syncretism literature exists between the roles of ‘missionaries’ who preach a faith, and the role of ‘believers’ who are preached to.

The role of missionaries

Hesselgrave (2006) emphasises that ‘missionaries’ are mainly concerned with the active diffusion of their faith in ways that either transcend cultural barriers or integrate with local idea systems. In the transcending function, missionaries are conservative, dedicating their lives to proselytizing and/or performing religious functions and duties to persuade individuals to join their ‘cult’ (McGavran, 1990). They view their beliefs as the unique truth that must be preserved and taught. Elements that are external to this cult are alienated, ignored or rejected, resulting in a tendency to impose a single idea system while neglecting other (less powerful) idea systems. For example, critical African intellectuals observe how the influence of ‘Western’ missionaries on certain local churches created tensions with local communities perceived as overly submissive to Western cultural imperialism (Meyer, 1994). When

missionaries act as purely conservative agents of faith, they may be led to underestimate the importance of local social and cultural contexts, limiting their success.

An alternative approach is to preach the faith in more explorative ways that demonstrate respect for local customary beliefs and practices, allowing for constructive dialogue (Hiebert, 2006) and allowing existing relations of dominance – such as that of ‘Western cultural imperialism’ – to be moderated (Sanneh, 1989). The practice of exploration notably helped some Christian missionaries accommodate and innovate by moving beyond literal Bible translations and adapting key ideas to the reality and power of local cultural systems (including their languages and other sign systems, patterns of behaviour, rituals, myths, beliefs and worldviews) (Hiebert, 2006). Explorative Christian missionaries are inclined to value local converts for their particular cultural agency, whereas conservative missionaries perceive them as cultural clients of elements of a dominant idea system such as those rooted in Western cultural traditions (Sanneh, 1989).

Consistent with the idea of Wray-Bliss (2018) that corporations are governed through the values and beliefs of their leaders, we propose that the business environment is also constituted in terms of conservative and explorative missionaries that potentially influence a firm’s sustainability performance. We would view exploratory ‘missionary’ characteristics as compatible with the development of a stakeholder-oriented management culture that engages business and social actors in relationships of mutual sympathy and empowerment and facilitates inter-cultural exchange. Missionary exploration can however be impeded by the tendency of missionaries to over-emphasise the outer layers of culture (i.e. the behaviours, institutions, beliefs and values that are most apparent and immediate), rather than the inner core comprising a worldview, cosmology, ideology and basic belief system (Hesselgrave, 2006). A missionary’s target group can therefore attempt to reassert its ‘culture core’ and seek separation from the idea system promoted by the missionary.

Resistance to the CS message can in turn explain some of the tensions that can arise between the firm and its stakeholders, and between the firm and CS, such as when manager missionaries are viewed internally as too close to external stakeholder interests (Carollo and Guerri, 2017). Wheeler, Fabig, and Boele (2002) report instances of firms failing both to replicate their corporate stakeholder-responsiveness at the local level, and to develop managerial capabilities at a sufficiently deep level throughout the firm (across business units) to yield benefits for both stakeholders and the business. This can be explained by a lack of explorative potential by business missionaries, and perhaps even by those (scholars and practitioners) who ‘preach in favour’ of a ‘beyond profits’ approach and stakeholder-oriented culture, but in practice are not able to establish a deeply rooted and far-reaching CS culture within their firms. We add that the potential for compatibility or incompatibility between ‘competing’ idea systems in business, and the syncretic dynamics that are at play, do not only depend on missionaries’ intentions and actions. The literature on religious syncretism also emphasises the role of ‘believers’ (e.g., Hiebert, 2006; Meyer, 1994; Sanneh, 1989).

The role of believers

Believers are mainly concerned about developing their own relations to faith in ways that either preserve aspects of their cultural identities, or translate into obedience under a dominant idea system. Meyer (1994, p. 43) discusses the role of ‘active agents’ of faith, or in Sanneh’s (1989) words ‘local converts’, as a group of critical believers who strive to freely engage with elements from their own idea systems and from others. These believers may attempt to mould an idea system that threatens to dominate, infusing it with elements from their own idea system(s), so that it becomes integrated with their cultural identities. This explains the rise of African Christianity, as described by Meyer (1994). A number of African intellectuals and ‘believers’ strove to interpret the contents of the ‘Christian message’ through the prism of

their own cultural viewpoints, resulting in a local expression and application of Christian faith (Van Rheenen, 2006).

In parallel to the existence of active agents of faith (or critical believers), diverse social and institutional logics governing the world of faith exist to promote obedience to dominant idea systems. One logic can be found in the representation of faith as ‘revealed truth’, one that is not framed by culture and is therefore inflexible and impervious to the infusion of elements from (foreign) cultural systems (Sanneh, 1989). Another logic stems from positioning missionaries as authoritative agents of faith whose teachings and ideas must be adhered to and reproduced. Believers who accept these logics and embrace the dominant idea system as legitimate truth, may then come to critically evaluate beliefs, decisions and practices drawn from their own cultural contexts (Hiebert, 2006). They can be referred to as client believers who are likely to accept the precepts of a dominant idea system as unique truth.

The role of believers in business has received little scholarly attention beyond ideas of using spirituality to ‘improve’ relations between people in the work place and developing a more sustainability-oriented worldview (Cavanagh, 1999). What seems to have been insufficiently scrutinised is the role played by ‘disciples’ of technocentrism in shaping the cultural systems of business organisations. Francis (1993, p. 322) discusses the existence of ‘Cornucopian’ believers amongst technocentrists who continue to support unsustainable levels of growth and resource exploitation because they believe that human will and ingenuity, combined with increasing technological expertise, can overcome future socio-ecological problems. A more moderate form of technocentrism, discussed by Turner (1993), promotes resource conservationism and managerialism. The suggested existence of two distinct forms of technocentrism reflects the assumption that the level of commitment to technocentric faith may vary from person to person. The dominance of technocentric faith in

the corporate world (Gladwin et al., 1995) means that this variability should not be neglected since it may determine the likelihood of technocentric believers acting either as critical agents of faith, or as clients of faith. We anticipate that critical technocentric believers are more likely to explore solutions to sustainability problems outside their own idea systems.

Examining the roles played by business missionaries (i.e., conservative or explorative) and business believers (i.e., critical or client) will likely add nuance to the interpretations made about a firm's capacity to shift from technocentrism towards sustaincentrism. In particular, the interactions between diverse agents of faith, with their own socially held expectations and ethical values (Pullen & Rhodes, 2015), may reveal the nature of the transcultural dynamics (Hiebert, 1994) that shape the process of syncretism in business contexts. Novel combinations of elements from divergent idea systems can be produced as individuals attempt to identify common themes and correspondences between alternative paths, assess what elements among idea systems are compatible or incompatible, and in the latter case either select between alternative paths or creatively explore how divergences can be resolved (Laibelman, 2004; Shaw & Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1999). Berk and Galvan corroborate the idea that actors in any institutional contexts are likely to engage in syncretism by drawing 'on a wide variety of cultural and institutional resources to create novel combinations' (2009, p. 544). Arguably, creativity is more likely to be found within explorative missionaries and critical believers who hold pluralist truth claims and redemptive relations to power. Others, with exclusivist truth claims and hierarchical relations to power, are inclined to perpetuate the status quo. The existence of divergent idea systems in the corporate context, combined with the varying capacity of missionaries and believers to engage with these systems (as synthesised in Table 1), provides for a certain level of complexity regarding the predictability of syncretic outcomes.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Implications for theory and research

The application of a syncretic perspective to the challenge of developing more pro-sustainability organizational environments has implications for future theorizing and research, particular in relation to the management of paradoxes and institutional logics.

Our perspective supports and expands growing theoretical and empirical literature exploring the role of agency in organizational logic multiplicity; in particular research in social welfare and multiple agency (e.g., Mitchell, Weaver, Agle, Bailey, & Carlson, 2016), origins of hybridization (e.g., Busco, Giovannoni, & Riccaboni, 2017; Mangen & Brivot, 2015) and embedded agency in paradoxes and institutional complexity (e.g., Delbridge & Edwards, 2013; Schildt & Perkmann, 2017). These streams of literature bring actors and their values to the fore and challenge the dominant single-objective logic of management theory with its emphasis on identification of trade-offs and criteria for prioritizing logics. A shared finding of these papers and our framework is that most, if not all, organizations routinely and durably accommodate multiple logics (Schildt & Perkmann, 2017; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015) and to some extent, all managers have a dual identity balancing private and public interest (Rivera- Santos, Rufin, & Wassmer, 2017).

A recurrent theme that resonates with our propositions is that organizational actors are strongly reluctant to engage in trade-offs between logics (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2016; Schildt & Perkmann, 2017). Instead, they creatively deploy multi-objective reasoning that focuses on the design of ‘truces’ accommodating seemingly irreconcilable logics (Mitchell et al., 2016). Current research has only started to investigate the processes of negotiation between actors and mediation of logics leading to such truces (Bishop & Waring, 2016). Such negotiations aim to preserve the distinction between logics while also exploiting the benefits of their

interdependence (Smets et al., 2015). Truces can combine, mediate or bridge elements of different logics (Busco et al., 2017; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013) or preserve distinct logics (Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016). However, extant literature observes that more research is needed to understand why and when one or another type of truce is negotiated (Schildt & Perkmann, 2017) and to what extent the type of truce is decided by actors or dictated by structural factors (Delbridge & Edwards, 2013). Our framework adds granularity to the analysis of the role of actors in multi-stakeholders' agency, explaining how differences between conservative and explorative missionaries and between critical and client believers result in different types of settlements between logics (that are framed as syncretic forms in this study).

The syncretic perspective complements in this sense research applying paradox perspectives to understand how managers seek to reconcile conflicting pressures associated with the pursuit of sustainability in relation to their own individual roles, social structures and psycho-social traits. For example, Carollo and Guerci (2017) find that managers accept and maintain sustainability-related tensions and paradoxes but the faithing processes underlying these phenomena have remained obscure. We add that current research in hybrids and institutional logics has not yet fully explained in what conditions multiple logics and paradoxes persist without resulting in an organization that has a continuous sense of competing goals or conflicting identities (Schildt & Perkmann, 2017), particularly when seeking to address sustainability challenges (Jay, 2013). It constitutes yet another stream of studies that have largely ignored the syncretic 'faithing' processes that are at play in business environments, despite their potential to substantiate explanations of the blending processes discussed by several authors in this field, including Rao and Kenney (2008); Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012); and York, Hargrave, and Pacheco (2016). For example, York et al. (2016) focus on how actors respond to logic incompatibility (economising versus

ecologising) by discussing three mechanisms: elaboration, assimilation and hybridisation. They note: ‘contrary to prior work on compromise and logic assimilation, we find that attempts by less powerful actors to gain voice did not resolve incompatibility, but rather motivated eventual contestation’. We introduce the critical role of actors as missionaries and believers in shaping the way in which incompatible logics are dealt with. Our propositions suggest that actors can not only tolerate divergences between idea systems but also actively negotiate adoption of syncretic forms that preserve logic multiplicity. Therefore, our framework highlights the distinctive role of missionaries and believers, leading us to contribute insights on agentic processes of conciliation and mediation between multiple logics – and complementing thereby the works of, e.g., York et al. (2016), and Carollo and Guerci (2017).

Conclusion

In this article, we used analogical reasoning to explore syncretism as the combination of elements from two or more idea systems in the corporate context through transposition, assimilation and / or hybridisation. We articulated the core elements of a theory of syncretism for CS including its underlying construct antecedents (syncretic roles: missionaries and believers) and assumptions (see Table 1).

Syncretic engagement from business missionaries and believers who are exposed to a diversity of idea systems will hopefully help research to raise some of the difficult issues of organisational transformation for sustainable development in business communities. Wright and Nyberg vehemently warn that our society will meet self-destruction if business continues its current practice of converting grand environmental challenges into ‘the more familiar and less threatening discourses of profit maximization and shareholder value’ (2017, p. 1657). In this effect, the syncretic framework developed in this article will contribute as a useful

conceptual resource for advancing the sustainability agenda by legitimising, and perhaps reinforcing, the determination of 'extraordinary individual innovators and entrepreneurs' (Elkington, Hartigan, & Litovsky, 2010, p. 83) to develop and adhere to ideas of sustainable entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship.

Critics of the syncretic approach advocated here may stress that management practice and scholarship is an essentially secular field, limiting the value of an understanding of faithing and religious processes. For them, perspectives based on paradoxes (as reviewed by Hahn et al., 2018) or ideologies (as reviewed by Haase & Raufflet, 2017) may seem sufficient to understand the cultural processes involved in firms developing their CSR towards CS (Maon et al., 2010). However, as Frederick (1998, p. 52) explores, the religious impulse that seeks for meaning in life is inherent in all humans. It manifests itself in corporate life, even if for some the sought meaning is to be found in 'the daily worship of corporate power and glory' amongst 'managers who disregard the planetary damage of their reckless ecological decisions, or who uncaringly cut off at midcareer the productive lives of down-sized employees.' He concludes that 'it is time to rip the mask of religious furtiveness off the corporate face. Personal religious philosophies of all kinds abound in the workplace.' One only has to examine the ongoing public debate about man-made climate change, and the persistence of climate change denial in the face of over-whelming scientific evidence and consensus, to realise the extent to which key sustainability debates play out in a world of faiths rather than facts.

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Table 1. Syncretic roles, truth claims, relation to power and management implications

Explanatory Variables Roles	TRUTH CLAIM		RELATION TO POWER	
	Exclusivist	Pluralist	Hierarchical	Redemptive
MISSIONARY 'Representative of dominant idea system(s)'	<u>Religion / culture</u> Preservation and diffusion of elements of a dominant idea system	<u>Religion / culture</u> Exploration based on an effort to contextualise faith and become familiar with a diversity of cultural constructs.	<u>Religion / culture</u> Inflexible conformity and exclusive superiority of one culture against another; and perpetual control, occupation, relocation and reorganisation of social context.	<u>Religion / culture</u> Capacity to deviate from path dependencies and participate in intercultural and interpersonal exchange, as the recognition that whatever and however we are doing now, we can do differently and, under certain circumstances, we must do differently in order to live ethically as neighbours.
	<u>Management</u> Conservative devotion to the idea that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.	<u>Management</u> Explorative quest for a stakeholder-oriented business culture.	<u>Management</u> Preserve integrity of technocentric faith, preach for the alignment of sustainability response with what makes business sense.	<u>Management</u> Challenge technocentric faith; preach for the adaptation of sustainability response to local contingencies.
BELIEVER 'Representative of target idea system(s)'	<u>Religion / culture</u> Believer as client: Truth is found within a dominant idea system, leading to a critical evaluation of elements of target idea systems (i.e., enduring customs, beliefs and practices pertaining to a specific social and cultural context).	<u>Religion / culture</u> Believer as critical agent of faith: Exploration based on the adaptation of a 'dominant' idea system that may be infused with elements of target idea system(s), so that faith becomes integrated with the cultural identities of believers	<u>Religion / culture</u> Need to relate to an external source of power for personal and spiritual advancement. No authentic niche beyond the reach of hegemonic power.	<u>Religion / culture</u> Capacity to resist hegemonic power and enact one's own cultural agency.
	<u>Management</u> Obedience to technocentrism as the only legitimate way of running a business	<u>Management</u> Recognition that traditional ways of doing business are unsustainable; it follows that the economic paradigm that dominates the corporate world must be changed, and infused with pro-sustainability ideas.	<u>Management</u> Preserve integrity of technocentric faith; sustain dependence on dominant institutional logics that guide business activities.	<u>Management</u> Challenge technocentric faith; seek no compromise with moral values such as those held by CSR and sustainability believers.