Inclusive storytelling practices towards achieving sustainability development goals

Natalya Sergeeva, the Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, UCL, n.sergeeva@ucl.ac.uk

Stuart D. Green, School of Construction Management & Engineering, University of Reading, s.d.green@reading.ac.uk

Abstract

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) were established by the United Nations in 2015 as a call for actions from individuals, teams, projects, organisations and industries. The UK is at the forefront of delivering the 2030 agenda for sustainable development (HM Government, 2019). The practice of sustainability involves understanding the ways individuals and teams in projects and organisations respond to the sustainability targets set nationally and internationally. There remains little empirical research which explores the ways in which sustainability is enacted and interpreted by sustainability practitioners including those whose job title has direct responsibility (e.g., sustainability consultants, sustainability managers, environmental managers, BREEAM managers etc.). In this study an inclusive storytelling research method is adopted to help to better understand the perspective of sustainability practitioners about the ways they respond to the sustainability agenda. Based on the life-story interviews with 60 sustainability practitioners from across a broad range of business sectors, the study shows that stories, work identities and roles (e.g., champions, activists, facilitators, supporters, motivators, influencers, enforcers, coaches, communicators, promoters, educators, dreamers) emerge in response to the sustainable development goals. Inclusive storytelling highlighted as central to the enactment of responses to the sustainability agenda. In this report we make some practical recommendations for practitioners.

Keywords: inclusive storytelling, praxis, self-identities, sustainability development goals

Introduction

There is a widespread acceptance that climate change constitutes the major social, economic and political challenges of the 21st Century. The need for actions is increasingly prioritized within the accepted sustainability agenda which also embraces the United Nations' sustainable development goals (UN, 2019) and industrial sustainability strategies (HM Government,

2019). The need to respond to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development is an influential 'grand' narrative which shapes the voluntary targets set by different industries and new forms of regulation. But it also challenges our understanding of ourselves as individuals, our practices, and the context of projects and organisations within which we are situated.

In this report, it is shown the ways sustainability practitioners respond to the sustainability agenda through their practices and activities. In this research the focus is on the specific group of specialist sustainability consultants, sustainability managers, environmental managers, and other project professional related roles. As such they are particularly relevant in exploring the ways individual and collective identities are discursively crafted and communicated, and policies and practices are influenced and shaped. The guiding research questions are:

- *How do sustainability practitioners make sense of sustainability and respond to sustainable development goals?*
- *What are stories, work identities and roles emerge in response to the sustainability agenda?*

Inclusive storytelling

Storytelling has a long history within the study of organising (Boje, 1991, 2001; Gabriel, 1995, 2000, 2004). The contribution of "storytelling organization" (Boje, 2008) research is in understanding the sensemaking that takes place in pragmatic ways between storytellers and their audiences. Some stories are concerned with specific events or people, while others take a form of biographies. In this research storytelling is defined as the activity of telling and sharing stories about personal experiences, life events and situations. We distinguish between storytelling and narrating, arguing that the first is more personalised, entertaining, and emotional in nature, whereas the latter is more towards coherence, stability and performative intent (Sergeeva & Green, 2019; Sergeeva & Winch, 2021). Narratives are often characterised by performative intent, i.e. they are mobilised to serve a particular purpose. Performative narratives are often repeated in organisations because repetition serves to stabilise particular meanings (Dailey & Browning, 2014). Stories and storytelling, and a sense of humour, are important means for individuals and teams. They are therefore "fragments" of organizational discourse that craft identities and interests in time and space. In organising, individuals and teams are using storytelling and narratives, and inclusivity is what characterises it.

It is suggested that storytelling is best understood as a dynamic process that is continuously (re)created through the elaboration, contestation and exchange of different stories. Storytelling plays an essential role in the social construction of identities and roles (Alvesson et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Sergeeva and Green, 2019). By telling stories, individuals seek to bolster their identities, both in the eyes of themselves and others (Alvesson et al., 2008; Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Brown, 2015). Stories are inherently social and emotional in the way people may seek empathy and understanding from others when constructing work identities and roles (Caza et al., 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Wright et al. (2012) identified and labelled multiple identity narratives of sustainability managers who presented themselves as such in response to the broader engagement with climate change discourse: "green change agents", "relational manager" and "the committed activities". They argue that identities are dialogical as they are constructed through interaction with others; and situated as they are dependent on available discourses pertaining to specific cultural and social contexts in order to form an understanding of the self. Heizmann and Liu (2018) conducted the multimodal discursive analysis of a sustainability leadership centre in Australia, demonstrating how its identity narratives reproduce individualist ideals of leadership. They found that 'sustainability leaders' are fashioned via a quasi-Buddhist narrative through which they traverse three stages: calling, awakening and transforming. Heizmann and Liu (2018) highlight that little attention has been given to the interplay between the discursive activities of sustainability actors and the broader power/knowledge relations to which these contribute.

It is further argued that collective identities may be formed in the context of agency and sustainability in the built environment. A collective sense of becoming 'sustainable' creates a collective identity that drives and motivates individuals to make changes in their personal work practices and everyday life. Collectively, change towards a more sustainable future becomes increasingly feasible as collective agency builds on individual agency. We can conclude that organisations change constantly, through continuous processes of interaction between organisational strategies, narratives and stories, and individual agency and experiences.

Research process

The rationale for the story-life interview method is that it enables the interviewee to reflect on personal and working experiences, life events and share stories with the interviewers (Easterby-

Smith et al., 2001). The study focuses on sustainability consultants and managers describing their responses to the sustainable development goals. By using life-story interview, the researchers reached areas of socially constructed reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, utilizing other methods. Of particular note is that identity work is often revealed in career stories through which leaders seek to make sense of their career progression and share lessons learned (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Such stories can yield important insights into how leaders relate to individual and work identities, roles and the actions they take. Their inherently retrospective nature helps provide insights into how changing contextual conditions might consolidate leaders' sense of work identity throughout the course of their careers.

The interviewers were listening to stories recited by sustainability practitioners in interview situations. There has been interesting examples and stories shared by the interviewees about the ways they define sustainability, practice sustainability and respond to the sustainability agenda. There is little reason to assume the stories articulated were in any way replicable; a different researcher would inevitably elicit a different set of discourses. The life-story interview questions were deliberately open-ended to encourage practitioners to talk about their own interpretations and personal experiences: Tell me about your view on sustainability? What motivated you to become a sustainability practitioner? How do you practice sustainability? Tell me about yourself and your response to sustainable development goals? What is your vision for the future?

In total 60 life-story interviews have been conducted online with UK sustainability practitioners. The interviews were transcribed in full, thereby aiding subsequent thematic analysis. The analysis method comprised repeated detailed reading of the transcripts, with a focus on identifying points of commonality and points of difference. The themes identified in the analysis are presented below.

The interviews were transcribed in full, thereby aiding subsequent analysis. The analysis method comprised repeated detailed reading of the transcripts, with a focus on identifying points of commonality and points of difference. NVivo 12 software was used for the purposes of coding and data management. Coding involved the distinguishment between different stories and work identities.

Emerging findings

Defining sustainability

The majority of the participants agreed that the sustainability is a very broad term that involves various different aspects. When define sustainability, most of them referred to the three sustainability pillars: environmental, social and economic (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 The three pillars of sustainability

Sustainability has been commonly defined in relation to the three pillars - social, economic and environmental - and with the mind that decisions made today will impact the future generations and creation of a more sustainable World.

The participants highlighted the *impact* associated with sustainability and the need for everyone to become aware of the impact they have and what changes they need to make. This was referred to making improvements, creating value for society through sustainability practices, providing more positive impact rather than just minimise the negative impact (e.g., on the environment, on the society). Some further emphasised that this needs to be more visible in terms of what people know and understand and what their impact is. The impact is seen about the actions and choices we make, the path we want in life and the outcomes we want. At the level of a project, the most impactful phase was recognised by practitioners to be the front-end

- early stages of the project life-cycle – where there is a possibility to provide a significant carbon reduction (e.g., renewable energy use, energy sufficient resources). The sustainability assessment is then maintained throughout a project life-cycle and at post-project evaluation phase. At the level of individual, the impact referred to the personal choices and actions people make: choose whether to drive or take train to minimise pollution, to minimise waste and recycle etc.

Furthermore, some participants put more emphasis on environmental, some on social aspects of sustainability. For example:

"It's what construction does to support the environmental issues and part of it is waste management. So it's design, how do we improve the design, how do we improve the constructability, so there were a number of things that we looked at as saving costs but now they are more on a sustainable environment that supports future generations rather than what we do now. So it's more holistic and includes other things like design, like managing the risk of waste, managing the risk of…" (Sustainability Manager, Construction firm)

In the above quotation there is an emphasis on continuous improvement, future vision for becoming a more sustainable environment.

"I suppose right now I'm particularly interested in the social aspects of sustainability because I see there is in many ways, the environmental stuff which is what I've been involved for a long time now for about – well, nearly 30 years since I started at university, I feel that we know what we need to do and it's a case of implementing that, but I think we're just starting to understand the social elements it seems to be the next phase really. And because I worked in commercial property, I strongly believe there is real opportunity for a lot of our clients who are trying to do the right thing and trying to rebuild or to build some trust with the wider public with the wider stakeholders, and I think that's where the social elements of sustainability very much comes into play. And you might have heard terms like social value and the value that development and property investment can actually bring to places." (Sustainability consultant, Construction Management Firm)

In the above quotation the social aspects of sustainability refer to social value. There is also a sense of visioning, future-oriented story about social aspects of sustainability.

The interviewees argued that sustainability has become an important narrative, a clichéd word, over the years. It has become popular, and practitioners in the industry are engaging with this narrative. Sustainability is seen as important and influential, but subject to multiple interpretations, and was often associated with behavioural changes:

"I think sustainability is about changing our behaviour, in all senses of how do we have a concrete that's less carbon intensive? Sustainability's gone from being important to influential stakeholders, certain politicians, certain scientists, it's becoming a popular topic. So, your Sky cycling team has 'save the oceans', it's become a mainstream narrative, not just a technical narrative or a political narrative, so it's risen." (Sustainability Consultant, Infrastructure firm)

Other definitions of sustainability were:

"For me sustainability is wider than what we do outside. So for me sustainability is and making sure that we do not take more out, we put more back in. In terms of the Earth and the World it is more about using our resources more efficiently." (Sustainability Consultancy, Management Consulting).

"A new way of looking at almost anything and saying this is not as good as we thought, it could be changed, or this needs to stop completely because this is negative, or this needs to be encouraged." (International Business Development Professional, Environmental Consultancy)

In summary, a more holistic view on sustainability was encouraged by the participants.

Sustainability practitioners, their work identities roles, and personal experiences

The participants of this study have emphasised their motivation, passion and enthusiasm for sustainability and in responding to the sustainability agenda. Sustainability roles were seen as diverse and multi-disciplinary; and involve self-learning and education in the form of obtaining new knowledge, training and networking. These roles are wide and include the following activities but are not limited to:

- Supporting organisations in their journeys towards net zero carbon emissions
- Breaking down specific sustainability practices in response to the sustainability goals set nationally and internationally
- Forming sustainability strategy(s) for organisations and its ongoing monitoring

- Conducting sustainability audit for organisations
- BREEAM assessment for new and existing stock
- Cost-benefit analysis and simulations
- Any other activities specifically requested by the customers

More and more organisations recognise the need and importance of a sustainability strategy that not only sets the vision and objectives, but also responds to the wider sustainability agenda. A continuous process of monitoring organisational process was increasingly emphasised in relation to the sustainability strategy.

The participants have further pointed out that there are some partnerships and institutions that do provide guidance for sustainability and net zero carbon agenda. IEMA, an international membership committed to global sustainability, was most commonly recognised among participants. The participants also recognised other professional intuitions where there are themes of sustainability, among them are APM, ICE, RICS. Some participants expressed their wish for another more specialised sustainability professional institution.

In talking about sustainability practices and work activities in response to the sustainability goals, participants presented themselves with work identities. The interviews demonstrate that work identities and roles emerge in response to the sustainable development goals including: champions, activists, facilitators, supporters, motivators, influencers, enforcers, coaches, communicators, promoters, educators, dreamers. These work identities pertained informal roles that were adopted and for particular audiences. Some selected work identities are demonstrated below.

Activists of sustainability

Many interviewees saw themselves as 'activists' of sustainability, as individuals who are proactively driving the sustainability agenda among colleagues, responding to the sustainability goals. One example is shared by the sustainability consultant from a construction management firm who is proud of his achievement and shared his vision for the future:

"One of the reasons that I've enjoyed my career in construction has been because I can show people, my family, friends, whatever, as we go around the place I can point out things and say, "Well I did that," or, "I was involved in that," or, "I know the people that did that," or, "My

business did that bridge or that building." Because I think those things are impressive. So that's where I came from. We've played our part in getting on top of the climate change challenge. So we've continued to provide all of the infrastructure, whether that's housing or roads, or transport, whatever it is that society needs we continue to provide that, but we're doing it in a way that is sustainable. So we've got our heads around what the problem is, recognising we've got a big part to play in helping to solve it and we've done that. So that's what we are doing, and we won't do it in my working lifetime but we'll know whether we're making progress or not in my working lifetime. So that's my vision for the future, to see how we are playing our part in solving that problem." (Consultant, Construction Management Firm)

Many interviewees were keen to talk about visioning future-oriented sustainability story. Activists of sustainability thought to practice sustainability both within their organisations and outside of work by engaging in sustainability events and networks.

Facilitators of sustainability

One of the work identities presented by the participants was that of the 'facilitator' of sustainability, an individual who guides and ensures the team works effectively towards meeting the sustainability goals in an organisation and through professional networks. Participants emphasised their commitment to meeting the carbon agenda in the construction industry and their life at home. The Environmental Manager from a large owner and operator infrastructure firm saw himself as a facilitator of sustainability who is aiming to embed a low carbon efficient approach into project work. He described his role of working together with the project team towards common objectives and achieving sustainability development goals:

"So this is where my role as a facilitator comes in, I need to work with that project team and I deliberately say the project team because I'm including the project manager, the cost manager, the engineers and designers, the construction manager, the procurement people, they all have a role to play. So I'm working with all of those to try and say, right, resource efficiency, low carbon etc."

Underpinning the work identity and informal role of the 'facilitator' of sustainability, interviewees provided examples of the activities they undertook as sustainability and environmental managers and consultants. They emphasise the need to speak the language of

the various professionals with whom they work and engage to achieve shared understanding towards achieving common sustainability goals.

One participant saw herself as somewhere between two roles:

"I would be between a sustainability champion and facilitator. Probably more work as a champion but outside as a facilitator. What drove me to sustainability was challenge that it was not really widespread in where I am from. I believe so much in what I do that I think I need to get outdoors of the office and make something to my community and that is why I think I am facilitator because I am helping community." (Senior Sustainability Consultant, Engineering and Architecture Consultancy).

Of further note is that the role of champions of sustainability was also seen to include encouraging people to change behaviours and mindsets.

Supporters of sustainability

Many interviewees saw themselves 'supporters' of sustainability, as individuals who support the sustainability agenda and provide guidance to other stakeholders and employees for implementing sustainability practices. Some examples include below:

"I guess I am a proponent, and I will do whatever is in my power. But I also understand the limitations on what you cannot do overnight." (Sustainability Consultant, Sustainability Construction Consultancy).

"I connect, support and challenge people. Ask them a question what do their children think and hope you are doing at work tomorrow." (Director, Association of Sustainability)

Coachers and educators of sustainability

Several interviewees saw themselves as 'coachers' or 'educators' of sustainability who support, provide guidance and educate people on how to become more sustainable:

"I am a life coach. I am trying to coach people on how to be more sustainable in their jobs and their workplaces. I am trying to take everybody on that journey." (Head of Sustainability & Environment, Architectural Practice)

This role comes naturally with the nature of sustainability consultants' professional role. There has also been agreement among them about the importance of understanding of *psychology* of people.

There was further evidence that sustainability professionals are not only responding to the sustainability agenda and goals through their work roles, but also in their day-to-day life experiences. Here are some examples of it:

"We bought a new build house two or three years ago and I wanted my house to be as sustainable as possible. My house has one solar panel…" (Sustainability Consultancy, Management Consulting).

"I have an electric car and I do try to cycle…I obviously try to live a sustainable life by eating organic food. And trying not to use too much plastic." "I've been volunteering with the community energy organisation." (Sustainability Consultant, Sustainability Construction Consultancy)

"On a personal level I have just put together like a reading list which I feel sort of keep up to date with all the new developments that are relevant. Friends and colleagues who are interested in that staff help." (Sustainability & Physics Engineer, Construction Engineering Consultancy)

"I keep in touch with previous colleagues which are also working as sustainability consultants in the real estate world so that's quite useful to see what they are doing and what their companies are offering." (Sustainability Consultant, Real Estate Company)

"I do attend the live webinars. Actually, it's quite easy at the moment. You can just sign up and then it plays in the background, while I'm watching on something else." (Head of Sustainability & Environment, Architectural Practice)

Collective identity of becoming more sustainable

The empirical data from individual life-story interviews have demonstrated a strong sense of a collective identity ('we') - a sense of shared understanding of sustainability and its goals and shared values for society. They very often talked about shared mindsets and common values. Here are examples that show a strong sense of a collective identity:

"The Paris agreement, for instance, is a great example of how all countries can work towards the same goals." (Sustainability Consultant, Real Estate Company)

"I think if you went to some industry event about sustainability in a particular topic I think in general sustainability practitioners, as in the people that are trying to improve the sustainability of their projects and their organisations, I think you could almost put together like a collective output or collective outlook rather so I think everyone is... so massively generalise, I'd say on the whole people are always trying to learn more, always happy to share what they've done and are on the whole, where they can, happy to engage with industry initiatives to try and make things better. If you put all that together it then becomes a, we, as the industry." (Environmental Manager, Owner and Operator Infrastructure Firm)

The above quotation places emphasis on a culture of continuous improvement and learning in the construction sector and people's willingness to share and engage with sustainability development goals. Other examples of a need to act collectively in response to the sustainability agenda are:

"We are all towards the same goals in the future. Sustainability consultants are sort of pulling it all together." (Sustainability Consultancy, Management Consulting)

"The whole thing about sustainability is that everyone knowns we can't do it alone, so the collectiveness is important." (Sustainability Consultant, Construction Firm)

"I use 17 sustainability goals with career for students. I just asked students to pick one and say why they picked this one. These students are resonating with a goal and it's helping them to understand who they are and what they are passionate about". But what it's also showing is that all of the goals are important." (Director, Association of Sustainability)

"Globally, by governments, businesses, individuals, universities etc. we have to work together to resolve this." (Director, Association of Sustainability)

It is further emphasised that through employee engagement with the sustainability agenda and goals that people, their mindset and behaviour will respond and act upon. The sustainability strategy acts as a vision and a reminder for employees to comply with the sustainability goals and agenda.

Futur

e vision for achieving sustainable goals

In this study there was an interest in finding out the sustainability practitioners' vision for the future in terms of achieving sustainability goals, the profession of sustainability and general vision of the extent to which sustainability will be practiced in the future. There was a general agreement among the participants about the importance of sustainability in the future. There was generally a positive vision for the future:

"Sustainability is becoming more and more important to companies, and I think it will become more and more important in the future. We've already started seeing companies that include sustainability in their high-level senior meetings, on the board meetings."

"The great work has started and we are not there yet, but at least we have made the first step towards a more sustainable world. This is something positive to see." (Sustainability Consultant, Real Estate Company)

Some interviewees argued that the role of sustainability consultant may not exist in the future, as all practitioners would respond to the sustainability agenda. They further suggested that in the future there is likely a need for a wider sustainability coordinator role who would oversee and coordinate sustainability consultants and have a more strategic view:

"I do not think the role of sustainability consultant should exist in the future. I think all disciplines should all be sustainable…But I do not think there is a wider coordinator role and I think that is probably what sustainability consultants are working towards as there is a lot of information and there is not one coordinator, at least a few that kind of really understand the whole essence and able to piece it together." (Senior Sustainability Consultant, Engineering and Architecture Consultancy).

A number of interviewees highlight the need for investment in sustainability, especially from Government:

"Maybe we need more investments from different sources, Government and I think it is just more about proving to people that on a long term it saves a lot of money to build a building

sustainably with energy savings and things like that." (Sustainability Consultant, Sustainability Construction Consultancy).

Of further interest is the importance of inspiring stories, case study examples and creation of spaces for individuals for practicing sustainability:

"We need evidence to justify and to manifest what the vision is, but you don't use data to create the vision, you use inspiring stories and create spaces to do that. And the vision is extraordinary positive, despite all I know."

"I do believe we will get to the point where we have much greater equality and equity around the world. I do think we will learn very quickly to live in balance and harmony with nature." (Director, Association of Sustainability)

Practical recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, there are several practical recommendations that have been made for education, policy and practice:

A holistic approach to sustainability
Most practitioners agreed that a more holistic approach to sustainability should be adopted actioned: for example, in practical terms this involves systemic air purification, greening the planet, systemic water purification, changing people's behaviours and mindsets etc. Some examples from interviewees are:
"It needs to be a very holistic system in achieving sustainable development goals." (Sustainability Consultant, Built Environment Consulting Firm)
"For example, if we give a recommendation to a project, it wouldn't be just because if you don't do that you won't get your points into a sustainability matrix; it's more holistic and considering what would add value to the project." (Senior Sustainability Consultant, Engineering and Architecture Consultancy)
"Certain frame of mind just stays as problem solving, so we have got this problem that we keen designing building in ways that are not sustainable, healthy or equitable, we need a whole change and approach. My job in the business with my colleagues to unlock that process, change the way people behaving." (Head of Sustainability, Architecture and Design Practice)

Some practitioners highlight that multi-level approach to sustainability should be encouraged: global, industrial, organisational, project, team and individual. Here are some examples: "Investors in most cases are very keen for sustainability, there is a big drive within the team, so it comes from top to bottom rather than bottom-up or holistic approach. I've been on projects where there has been scrutiny from the top on why certain level is not achieved that, and I think it is probably a better way to deal with things and to engage design team rather than just leaving sustainability at the back end and this makes our jobs as consultants difficult." (Sustainability Consultant, Engineering and Architecture Consultancy)

Greater focus on the impact of sustainability-related practices on the planet and society

As has been discussed in section 4.1 practitioners highlight the need for a greater focus on impact of sustainability-related practices on environment and society based on the choices, decisions and actions we make throughout our lives. The emphasis was on creating positive impact (e.g., using more sustainable materials for future construction, greener and more sustainable places for people to work and live, demonstrating achievement of sustainable goals) rather than just minimising negative impact (e.g., reducing waste, reducing carbon emission). Individual and collective behaviours and actions are required for achieving sustainable development goals.

There has been an agreement among practitioners that sustainability-related values (environmental, social and economic) should be included in the education programs of schools, universities, companies throughout people's lives.

There has also been a suggestion that organisations should provide time and space for self-learning on sustainability-related issues for employees: attendance of webinars, participating and organizing events, free days for self-learning and inspiration.

Practitioners agreed that individuals and organisations should learn from global experiences and best practices and implementing them locally. Truly best practices on sustainability should be demonstrated through case studies and social media channels sharing.

Sustainability strategy(s)

There has been an emphasis among the participants on the need and importance of sustainability strategies as a vision and reminder to act upon in achieving sustainable goals. One of the sustainability consultants' role is to help organisations in forming sustainability strategy, helping them in realizing the strategy, and supporting them through continuous

monitoring towards achieving the strategy; the strategy should be reviewed and revised through time.

There has also been emphasis on how sustainability strategy is communicated externally:

"We moved our sustainability paper report online, so we created a sustainability microsite. I was assisting our marketing and communications teams in that transfer and content for that in terms of case studies, but also how our strategy is communicated externally." (Sustainability Advisor, Construction Firm)

Case studies and stories are seen as important part of promoting sustainability in organisations and motivating employees to come up with innovative sustainable solution:

"If we do not capture the story we never move forward. It will take forever the next one to pick up an idea and try it again, instead of us all reading about it and then using that experience. And it is important, even if we have negative case study that is also very positive thing, we can then understand how not to do things. Stories are also good for inspiring people to make a change. These people need to be rewarded and recognised." (International Business Development Professional, Environmental Consultancy)

Sustainability assessments and their improvement

Practitioners pointed towards some difficulties associated with green building standards, including:

- They can be box-ticking exercise – it can be easy to meet some criteria without doing much out of the ordinary or thinking of the bigger picture;
- They are slow-moving in terms of updating the content – the knowledge and capability of fast-paced sectors move much faster than the standards;
- None of the existing systems really cover embodies carbon.

Based on these challenges identified there has been recommendations made to address wider perspective on sustainability (e.g., sustainable development goals), to continuously renew of the content of sustainability assessments (BREEAM), focus more on embodied carbon and create new improved standards.

All participants agreed that there is a need for a continuous process of audit and monitoring of sustainability-related effectiveness of organisations.

Sustainability Coordinator or/and Sustainability Chief Officer roles

As has been outlines in the previous section, practitioners have pointed out about a need for a new professional role - Sustainability Coordinator or/and Sustainability Chief Officer who will

oversee sustainability consultants and focus on global sustainability goals, challenges and opportunities. As there is an increase of Sustainability Consultants, there is a need for someone who will coordinate them and have a wider perspective on achieving sustainable development goals. Some examples from the practitioners:

"Raising awareness is going to become less needed, I would say. It is probably just going to be more into setting targets and coordinating those targets, and monitoring performance." (Senior Sustainability Consultant, Engineering and Architecture Consultancy)

Funding and initiatives for sustainability

Organisations should attract funding from a variety of sources (e.g., green funding initiatives) for practising sustainability and respond to sustainable development goals. Government should continue providing opportunities for funding available for organisations to apply for practising sustainability and improving their practices.

Conclusion

The UN sustainability goals provide a foundation for industries and firms to achieve these goals. Sustainability becomes a norm and important part of every practitioner regardless of his or her professional role. There is a strong sense of individual and collective responsibility for achieving SDGs. The motivation, enthusiasm and belief in sustainable future by sustainability practitioners should motivate other practitioners to engage and respond to the sustainable development goals. The personal stories shared by participants of this study are valuable for sharing experiences and learning from each other.

The construction industry plays an important role in achieving the global sustainability goals. Sustainability professionals more generally are seen as agents of change and agency can lead to the modification of structural rules. Personal commitment and values, and self-identity more generally, can contribute to and shape self-identities and collective identities which inform social sensemaking and sense giving. The past can be reconstructed and can influence present agency, and so stories, narratives and discourses may operate as processes for transformation. Based on life-story interviews with sustainability professionals, we observe that different stories (performative stories, stories about everyday experiences, future-oriented stories, stories about self-identities) and self-identities (facilitators, activists) emerge in response to the sustainable development goals.

In this report it is demonstrated that understanding sustainability as inclusive storytelling to which individuals and firms respond by their practices and actions opens opportunity for better understanding of the meaning and enactment of sustainability by professionals. It also has important implications for constructing individual and collective identities.

Future research directions may include the following:

- Interaction between sustainability and digital transformation agendas
- Inclusiveness of sustainability: narratives, stories, case studies, practices
- Circular economy thinking on sustainability: implications of it for the future
- Narratives of health and wellbeing and new emergent themes

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