Termites and Champions

Case Comparisons by Metaphor

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This paper explores how inspirational lessons for organisational greening might be drawn at the level of the *individual in context*. Drawing on a sociological theory of mutual causality between action and structure (Giddens's 1984 structuration theory), we examine greening initiatives using Gareth Morgan's (1993) metaphor of how termite mounds both influence and emerge from many individual actions. We use this metaphor to interpret and compare the way in which environmental champion schemes have emerged and been nurtured and sustained in three large organisations, representing our findings diagrammatically. Our findings suggest a tension between formal and informal dimensions of environmental champion systems and roles, and highlight the need for some kind of dynamic balancing act. We explore some of the possibilities raised by Morgan's notion of *strategic termites*, particularly for offering inspiration to would-be environmental change agents working within organisations where there is no organisation-wide commitment to environmental change. Further work is recommended on developing skills to employ 'termite tactics', such as 'image management' and 'environmental politicking', in pursuit of environmental change.

● Environmental champion

● Greening of organisations

● Structuration

● Metaphor

● Strategic termites

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AS ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT RESEARCH BEGINS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT people rather than organisations make environmental improvements (e.g. Post and Altman 1994; Moxen and Strachan 1998; Walley and Stubbs 1999), this paper sets out to explore how inspirational lessons might be drawn at the level of *the individual in context*. Following the work of social theorist Anthony Giddens (1984), we suggest that so-called environmental initiatives cannot be understood solely in terms of the organisational structures that surround them. Nor is it appropriate to focus exclusively on the actions taken by individuals. Rather, we argue that environmental initiatives should be seen in terms of order emerging from the mutually producing relationship between action and organisational/social structure. In other words, structure shapes action and action shapes structure. It is aspects of the emergent order from this self-organising relationship that become recognised as environmental initiatives.

It is difficult to do justice to the circular nature of this mutual causality between structure and action in a written account such as this. In an attempt to counter this, we use a metaphor to frame our contribution so that it invokes something of the self-organising nature of the situated actions of environmental change agents. Our metaphor is Morgan's (1993) 'termite mounds'. As we will make clear, the way termite mounds both influence and emerge from many individual actions seems particularly apt. Working within the frame afforded by this metaphor, we have used the label of 'environmental champion' to provide direction to our research process. In the sections that follow, we review first-hand and published accounts of individuals' actions within environmental initiatives. Using Giddens's (1984) axes of structuration as a checklist, we compare and contrast approaches taken to creating and nurturing roles termed 'environmental champions' in different organisations.

We conclude by reflecting on the merits of our approach for dealing with the emergent nature of environmental initiatives and the special importance of individual actions therein. We also speculate on how Morgan's (1993) metaphor of 'strategic termites' could be further utilised as a source of inspiration to would-be environmental change agents.

Background

Many authors have offered concepts with which to make sense of the rich variety of contributions on organisational change. Contributions have been categorised according to their emphasis on either description or prescription (Mintzberg 1990), and whether outcomes are framed as deliberate or emergent (Whittington 1993). Levels at which analysis is undertaken can vary (Klein *et al.* 1994)—as can the extent to which emphasis is placed on organisation structures as a source of understanding, or the particular actions taken by individuals. Against this backdrop, attempts have been made to categorise responses to the so-called environmental agenda. For instance, Räsänen and colleagues identified five main strands in their 1994 survey of descriptions of 'corporate greening': strategic choice, reform in strategic management, institutional change, organisational change and fundamental change in ethical values or culture. Views of greening as organisational learning have also become popular (Neale 1997; Post and Altman 1994). Much effort has been invested in articulating the structural characteristics of organisations in which greening activities are apparent (see, for instance, stage models of greening—Hass 1996). Also, the maxim that individuals rather than organisations make environmental improvements has generated some interesting contributions, particularly on how individuals' mind-sets can be challenged to promote consideration of more radical options for environmental improve-

ment (e.g. Ballard 1999; Stubbs and Lemon 1997). However, accounts that focus at the level of the individual in context are still in their infancy. Moreover, it seems that Räsänen *et al.*'s 1994 conclusions still have currency. Effort is required to bring together structural and behavioural accounts:

> the bias towards rationalistic and cognitive, top–down conceptions of greening should be complemented with more process oriented and interactive views of greening in which the local institutions and the actors' ability to modify these institutions through learning and skilled social reconstruction is acknowledged (Räsänen *et al.* 1994: 15).

Structure and action

Prior to the work of social theorist Anthony Giddens, accounts of social phenomena in general and organisational behaviour in particular were broadly divided into two camps. The first concerned itself with how individuals' behaviour was determined by the social structures that surrounded them. Opponents of this view argued that it downplayed the free will of individuals and concerned themselves with how the behaviour of individuals created and sustained more or less solid social structures, such as social class structures, etc. Giddens saw these structural and action-oriented accounts as two parts of the same story and set out to devise a coherent way in which they might be seen as mutually informing, rather than standing as alternatives. His seminal work on the structuration of society (Giddens 1984) set out to collapse the structure–action dualism he saw dividing social research. His arguments replace this with a duality, where each produces the other. To make this reconceptualisation possible, he challenged the idea of structure being manifest in external entities such as organisation charts, which he saw as too narrow and constraining. Instead he offered a 'softer' view of structure, held only in memory traces. Structure from this perspective is seen as rules and resources, apparent only when they are acted upon. As individuals interact, aspects of one person's ways of seeing and doing are interpreted and thereby contribute to the notions of structure held by others. In this way, Giddens's concept of structure is thus more dynamic and much broader than images typically conjured up by an organisational structure chart (see Fig. 1).

As individuals are considered skilled actors, continually engaged in reflexively monitoring their interactions with the world around them, his theory allows for prevailing structures to be either reinforced or changed through the day-to-day behaviour of individuals (Fig. 1). In other words, individuals may reproduce the status quo or choose to act differently. Structures that seem most solid are those habitually reproduced by a large number of individuals—e.g. divisions between weekdays and weekends. For Giddens, routines lend

Figure 1: GIDDENS'S PERSPECTIVE

Source: Giddens 1984

Structure
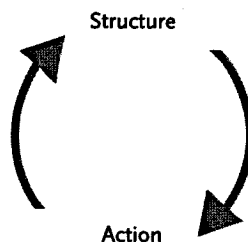
Action

stability to emergent features of social practice, producing and reproducing familiar features in social landscapes which become largely unchallenged and unquestioned by those who negotiate around them on a daily basis. In this way, routinised interactions not only take place, they make place.

This dynamic, emergent view of social order resonates well with Räsänen *et al.*'s comments above. However, the challenge for appreciating 'greening' is to follow Giddens's structure–action ideas beyond specific fleeting instants in which an individual action might either reproduce prevailing structures or perform something new. To appreciate the greening process, one must make the conceptual leap to see how a mutually producing model of structure–action would extend across time and space to account for widespread social phenomena, particularly organisations, and the environmental initiatives that emerge within them. Giddens offers a raft of ideas with which to bridge this micro–macro divide—time–space distanciation, regionalisation of locales, etc.—but it is all too easy to become overwhelmed by the complexity brought into view as the boundary of analysis is widened. In order to keep a handle on our phenomena of interest in the midst of this complexity, we have found it useful to adopt a guiding metaphor. That metaphor is the 'termite mound', brought to our attention by Gareth Morgan (1993).

The 'termite mound' metaphor

Before looking at the termite mound metaphor in detail, it is important to appreciate the potential and pitfalls of metaphor analysis in business situations. Many writers on organisations have noted how attempts to understand and change business practice are shaped by unacknowledged images of organisations (e.g. Morgan 1986; Grant and Oswick 1996). For instance, the language of business process re-engineering is consistent with the view of an organisation as a machine, the components of which are in need of more efficient alignment. Any such image or metaphor would clearly only partially describe what is going on. However, new images might encourage people to see their organisations in new ways. In his 1993 text, Morgan illustrates his 'imaginization' approach to seeing, organising and managing. He shows how novel metaphors can illuminate familiar organisational situations and challenges. As this illumination is selective, he is careful to describe the imagery his metaphors are intended to invoke. With the termite metaphor, rather than conjuring up images of subversive, undermining behaviour that might soon attract the attention of an exterminator, he directs attentions toward what he sees as more positive aspects of termite behaviour. He focuses in particular on termites' accomplishments as nest builders, marvelling at the heights to which their complex mound structures can climb (12 feet in the case of some African nests; the equivalent, on a human scale, of a construction more than a mile high!). While he acknowledges varying theories on the factors at work in the formation of these intricate structures (involving the blind creatures' instincts, habits and communication systems), his attention is drawn to chaos theory explanations. The imagery he seeks to invoke by the termite metaphor is of a 'self-organizing process where order emerges "out of chaos" ' (1993: 44). He describes how distinct piles of earth emerge from apparently random behaviour. These structures somehow attract the attention of other termites and become the focus for sustained building activity, leading to the formation of columns. Columns that form sufficiently close together can be joined by arches as the mound structure gradually grows in complexity. In this self-organising process, the mound structure both emerges from the termites' actions and shapes the way in which those actions are taken (Fig. 2).
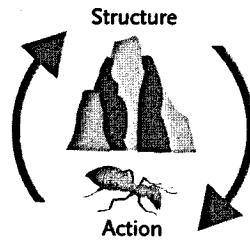
Structure

Action

Figure 2: TERMITE MOUNDS

The image of an evolving, infinitely variable structure, continually being made and remade through the actions of many individual agents, offers a mental frame with which to approach the complexity of individuals' actions in the context of organisations. In particular, the termite metaphor offers some conceptual purchase on ways in which apparent order is emerging and being sustained. What is clear is that organisations, and any features being scrutinised within, are not termite mounds. It is this 'inherent falsity' of metaphor that constitutes one of its key strengths (Morgan 1996). One has no choice but to be circumspect about the insights it affords. It is only by analogy that one views a phenomenon in terms of supporting sub-structures being built upon or joined together to create some larger structure that seems to be guiding and emerging from interesting behaviour. It is in this way that we use the termite mound metaphor. When reading our findings, it is important to remember Morgan's (1986) caution that metaphor is both 'a way of seeing and not seeing'. We will not be claiming immutable truths about the behaviour of individuals in environmental initiatives. Rather, our intention is to draw some inspirational lessons from the first-hand and published accounts of environmental champions we investigated.

Environmental champions

The idea that successful greening is associated with a clearly identifiable individual champion, or range of champions throughout the organisation, has arisen in studies of different organisations. For instance, Post and Altman's (1994) research on the greening of US companies and Walton's (1998) work on the greening of higher education institutions both lend support to the idea. Inspired by calls for further research on appropriate roles and responsibilities for the various organisational actors involved in environmental change, we examined evidence of greening in a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) context, hoping that size would make individual actions and roles readily apparent (Walley and Stubbs 1999). Our study revealed various tactics being employed by an obvious environmental champion—'networking', 'sense of audience', 'agenda translation' and 'greenjacking'—that were central to the SME's greening success story. The analysis confirmed that a focus on environmental champions afforded useful insights. However, it also exposed the need for more work on how such individuals might be operating, initiating and sustaining greening initiatives, in *varied* organisational settings. For the next stage of our work, we used the label of 'environmental champion' to provide direction as we extended our field research process into larger companies. As a starting point, we looked for organisations that made explicit reference to having environmental champions in their public-domain communications. Our aim was to find out what they are, what they do and how

this contributes to environmental improvement. We hoped to draw inspirational lessons at the level of the individual in context.

Case studies

For the initial phase of our fieldwork we chose to focus on three companies that met our sampling criteria: A, B and C. 'Environmental champions' were explicitly mentioned in the environmental reports of each, although we suspected the exact nature of these roles would differ. Each of the companies was large (>500 employees) and operated in different industries. In companies A and B, there was evidence of large numbers of environmental-champion volunteers, occupying varied positions within the companies. In company C, a small number of senior champions had been selected for/designated as the environmental champion role alongside their existing positions.

In the initial phase of our research we examined published documents—environmental reports, newsletters, leaflets, posters, etc., provided by the companies—and engaged in meetings and telephone conversations with headquarters environment department staff in each of the organisations. Our semi-structured interviews with HQ staff focused on the origin and evolution of the environmental champion role, who the champions are, how they apply/are selected, what they do, and how they are supported/recognised/rewarded, etc. Initial findings were captured diagrammatically and fed back to informants for comment on their accuracy and usefulness. The accounts presented below represent the outcome of this validation process. As one would expect, our research revealed similarities and differences across the cases. These are considered later.

As we have explained, our investigation is framed in terms of the termite mound metaphor. We look for emergent structures that are producing, and being reproduced by, action. We are interested in how these structures might be building on and coalescing with one another to constitute overarching phenomena—particularly the structure–action of environmental champions. To sharpen the analytical power of our metaphor we returned to the social structure–action ideas of Anthony Giddens (1984). In his theory of structuration he suggests three interlinked dimensions along which the duality of structure and action plays out (1984: 29). He is careful to clarify that these axes are separated only for analytical gain, and it is in this way that we also use them. We did not find the carefully chosen sociological vocabulary denoting the axes immediately accessible to a general audience, so used them as the basis for a checklist of simple questions to ensure important structure–action linkages were not missed in the course of our analysis. That checklist is reproduced below:

▶ Is there something in the way employees are encouraged to devote their attention that explains how the environmental champion role and actions are produced and maintained?

▶ Is there something in the way valued resources are distributed that explains how the environmental champion role and actions are produced and maintained?

▶ Is there something in the prevailing norms and sanctions that explains how the environmental champion role and actions are produced and maintained?

Following Giddens's emphasis on the importance of routinised interactions for the appearance of particularly solid features within social landscapes, we made sure our investigations did not neglect routine practices (which might otherwise be considered mundane). Having sharpened the termite metaphor in this way, we will now illustrate its use

to represent our initial findings on the approaches taken to nurturing and sustaining the environmental champion role in the companies we studied.

As most readers are unlikely to be familiar with the diagrammatic representation of our findings, we preface our diagrammatic summary of company A's Environmental Champion scheme with a brief textual account. Hopefully, the introduction this provides to our representational form will enable the diagrams for companies B and C to stand alone.

Company A

In company A, our investigations revealed that the foundations for the Environmental Champion initiative had been laid by formal environmental targets established for each geographical location. In response to these formal responsibilities, Environmental Officer posts were established to support the site manager and individuals appointed to fulfil these roles in addition to their existing jobs. After operating the scheme for some time, it became apparent that some individuals' commitments were exceptional, consistently over and above the norm, so the company created a Champions scheme to give these people appropriate recognition. Many environmental officers applied to become champions. While it was apparent that the Champion role built on the formal Environmental Officer role, we were keen to understand what kind of activities sustained the environmental champions in their mission, vision and role. Subsequent investigation suggested that environmental activity weeks played a part. Rolled out from head office to all employees at all locations, these weeks are part of a well-established annual cycle of similar events for quality, safety, customer service, etc. Within them, environmental champions and/or environmental officers introduce the brief and activities to their colleagues. Analysis of exemplar imagery used in environmental champion recruitment materials confirmed that champions are encouraged to inspire colleagues to engage in in-house environmental improvement projects. They are also encouraged to initiate and support local community projects (often in conjunction with Local Agenda 21 activities, such as river clean-ups and school grounds projects). Annual 'away-days' for all the company's environmental champions had recently been introduced as an opportunity to brief, network, share experiences, celebrate successes and discuss possible avenues for improvement. The achievements of champions receive attention in the corporate environmental report and all champions are invited to its launch. Figures 3–5 now summarise these findings in a (hopefully readily accessible) diagrammatic form.

Case comparison

Our initial research revealed some similarities, many differences and some significant issues in the environmental champion schemes we studied. We noted some obvious similarities between the structures and actions that appeared to be nurturing and sustaining the champions in companies A and B. Common features included newsletters, briefings/ meetings, conferences, and exemplar images and stories of environmental champions and/or their projects in corporate environmental reports. However, the schemes were established for different reasons: company A's as a recognition scheme and company B's as a support/dissemination network. The rationale for company C's scheme was different again: to integrate/embed environmental management into line management responsibilities. These differences were manifest in the different perceptions of the champion roles we encountered. The following words represent our initial attempt to capture these:
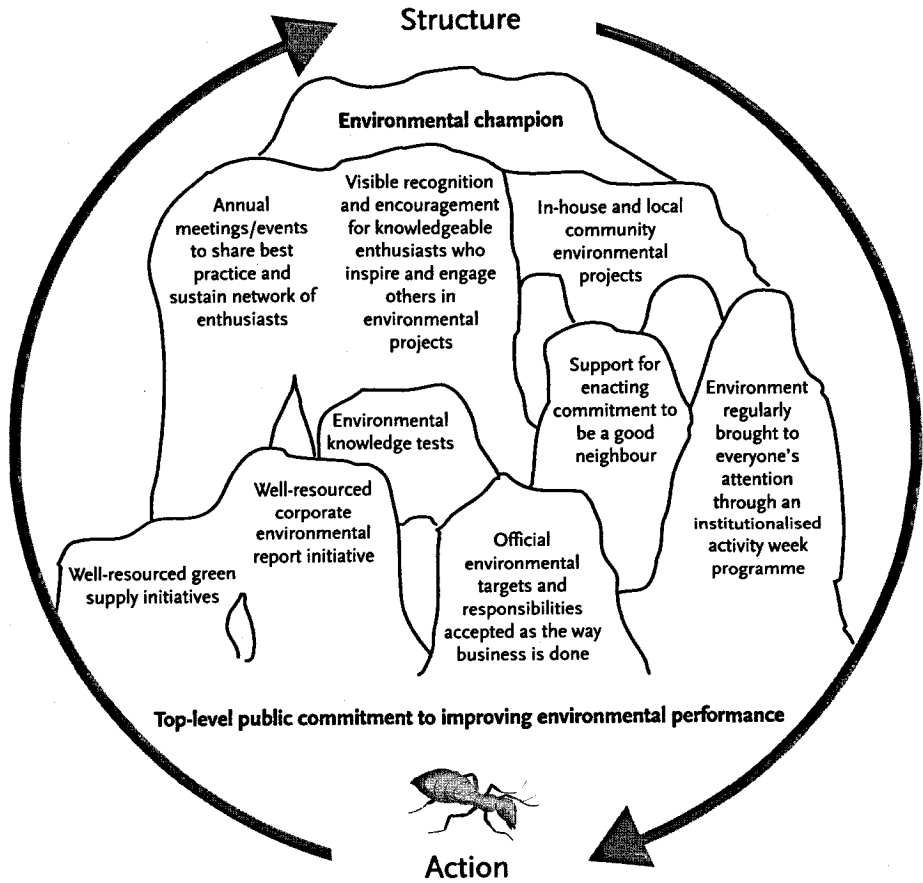
Structure

Environmental champion

Annual meetings/events to share best practice and sustain network of enthusiasts

Visible recognition and encouragement for knowledgeable enthusiasts who inspire and engage others in environmental projects

In-house and local community environmental projects

Environmental knowledge tests

Support for enacting commitment to be a good neighbour

Environment regularly brought to everyone's attention through an institutionalised activity week programme

Well-resourced corporate environmental report initiative

Official environmental targets and responsibilities accepted as the way business is done

Well-resourced green supply initiatives

Top-level public commitment to improving environmental performance

Action

Figure 3: ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS IN COMPANY A

▶ In A, the champions are thought of as 'enthusiasts', 'inspirers', 'action–oriented' and (to some extent) 'experts'.

▶ In B, they are 'enthusiasts', 'volunteers' and 'communicators/networkers'.

▶ In C, where the role is tightly defined and senior, they are seen as 'strategic shapers', 'figureheads', 'unblockers' and perhaps also 'catalysts'.

One of the most interesting and potentially significant issues to arise from the research was the tension between formal and informal environmental systems/roles. This was most apparent in company B where they are in a dilemma about what to do about their environmental champion role. A network of environmental champions was established as a way of supporting the environmental manager when he was first appointed to the job some years ago. Now, six years later, company B has become more formal about environmental management within the organisation and is putting environmental responsibilities into line management functions. The problem (in some cases) with the existing environmental champions is that they are enthusiasts but not necessarily experts in the subject matter of the department where they work, e.g. non–engineers in an engi-
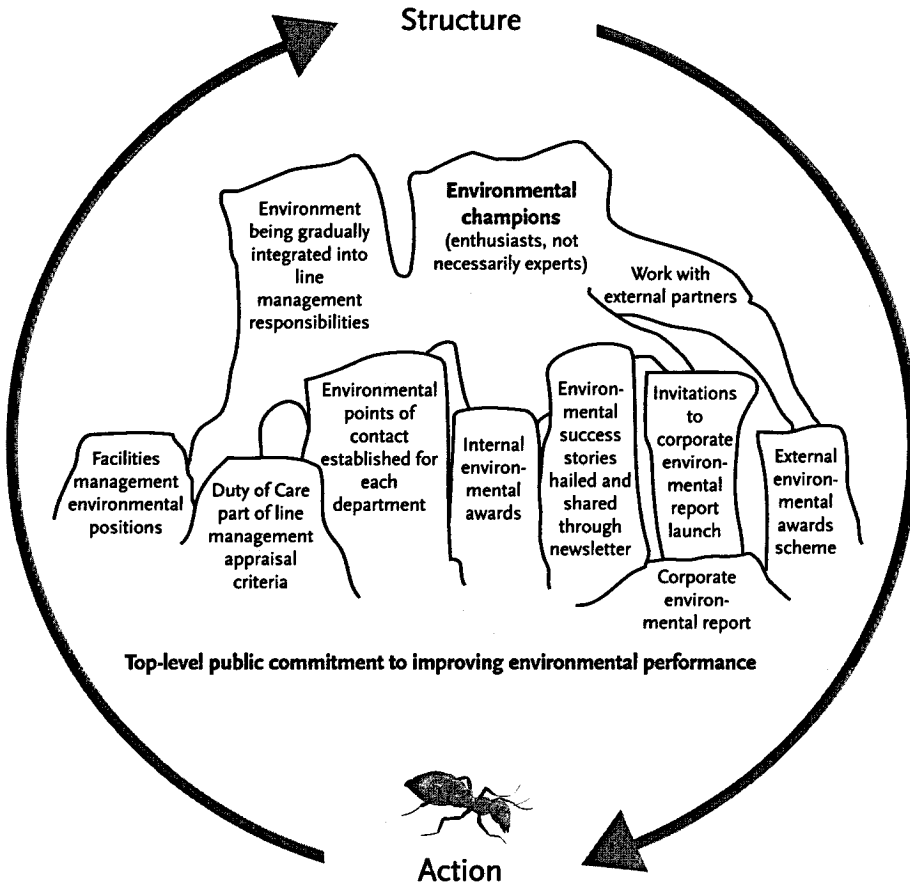
Figure 4: ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS IN COMPANY B

neering department. There is apparently still a keen interest among employees to become or continue as champions, but head office is now struggling to find a role for them. In the case of company A, evolution of the champion scheme appears to have worked differently. Formal environmental officer roles evolved into and were complemented by the (less formal) champion role. In company C, champions only exist in a formal and senior role.

In all cases, a further (perhaps inevitable) tension was apparent between environmental activities and other job responsibilities. Head office contact with company A, for instance, revealed accounts of champions being 'too enthusiastic', leading to reminders that environmental activities were expected to take up only 2–3 hours a week. In contrast, company C commented on examples of main job responsibilities 'crowding out' environmental responsibilities. The need for some kind of dynamic balancing act was thus a common theme in our findings. At this point it is interesting to note that a number of authors would counsel against trying to resolve such tensions. Proponents of 'creative tension' regard the conflict that ensues as an energising factor for self-organising systems (see, for instance, the arguments of Richard Pascale [1990]). We will return to these matters in our thoughts for further work.
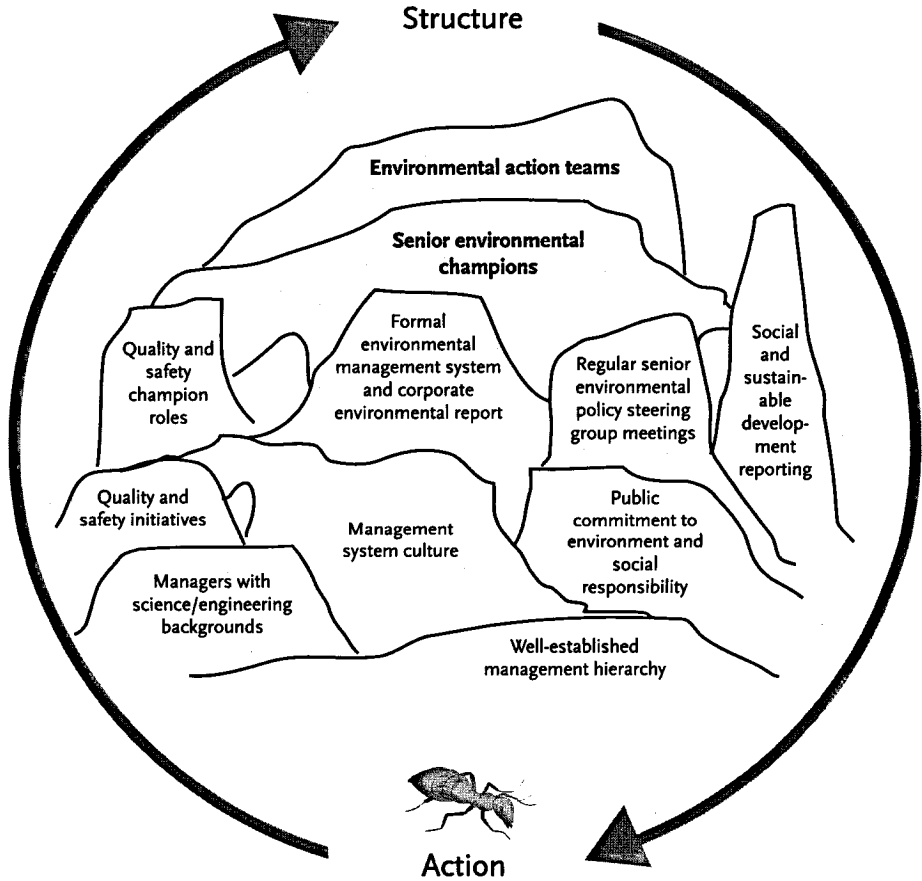
Structure

Environmental action teams

Senior environmental champions

Quality and safety champion roles

Formal environmental management system and corporate environmental report

Regular senior environmental policy steering group meetings

Social and sustainable development reporting

Quality and safety initiatives

Management system culture

Public commitment to environment and social responsibility

Managers with science/engineering backgrounds

Well-established management hierarchy

Action

Figure 5: ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS IN COMPANY C

While our research is still at an early stage, it is possible to make some tentative observations about factors that appear to nurture and sustain environmental champions in their work. Mechanisms for sharing ideas and achievements seem particularly important—as do small but significant rewards, such as invitations to focal environmental events, such as environmental report launches and awards ceremonies. Exemplar imagery employed in materials used to draw attention to the work of champions also seems relevant.

Reflection

It has been apparent for some time in literature on organisations that ways must be found for dealing with the complexity raised when actors are viewed as reflexive agents, able to monitor and create, as well as respond to, the circumstances and structures in which they find themselves. Rising to this challenge seems a particularly pressing project for those trying to help individuals who champion environmental improvement within organisations. However, it is important to recognise that approaching the complexity of self-

organising, emergent structure–action phenomena is far from straightforward. While Giddens's meta-theory of structuration has promise, we have found it difficult to opera-tionalise all the subtle and sophisticated concepts on offer. Like Walsham (1993), we have been selective, drawing heavily on only the structure–action duality and the axes of struc-turation to inform our analysis of organisational practice. What sets our work apart is our attempt to utilise these ideas within the frame of (what we believe to be) an apt meta-phor. We see a cyclical structure–action relationship at the heart of both the chaos theory of termite mound formation and Giddens's structuration theory. For us, the image of the termite mound makes the micro–macro shift in Giddens's work easier to follow; and Giddens's axes connecting social structure and action sharpen the illuminatory power of the metaphor. Nonetheless, metaphors can conjure up different ideas in different people. The power of metaphor in practice depends on its familiarity, and, although many people might have heard of a termite mound, they might not have sufficient knowledge of its formation for our metaphor to have the same meaning for them as it does for us. Indeed, we suspect that one of our respondents was concerned about the subversive connota-tions of describing the work of their environmental champions in terms of termites who might be undermining existing structures.

Perhaps what is most interesting is that the analytical tools with which we have experi-mented are equally applicable at varying levels of analysis. It is easy to see, for instance, how emergent mounds representing the structure–action of environmental champions could join up (or *be* joined up—see below) with other emergent mounds (such as stake-holder dialogue programmes). This could provide the foundations for larger structures that (re)produce the totality of the structure–action of organisational greening. More-over, the termite metaphor is not only useful for description. The idea of encouraging the formation of larger structures from smaller ones offers inspiration for those struggling to make a positive difference in organisations. If we follow McCourt's (1997) analysis of the model of change underlying Morgan's (1993) work, we see:

metaphoric thinking ⇒ new understanding ⇒ creative action

With this in mind, Morgan's image of '*strategic* termites' appears to have special signifi-cance for would-be environmental change agents.

The 'strategic termite' metaphor

Against the 'order from chaos' backdrop of the formation of termite mounds, Morgan imagines how a 'strategic termite' might operate, suggesting that this could open up new horizons for those who have been struggling without success to mobilise action across their organisations. He contrasts attempts to impose whole-scale strategic change with managers' incremental efforts to work with the self-organising, emergent nature of situa-tions. He sees the latter as 'strategic' in the sense that, 'while their activity is open to the influence of random opportunity, decisions and actions are always informed and guided by a strong sense of what they are ultimately trying to achieve' (1993: 45). In other words, they know where they want to go, but don't always know the route by which they are going to get there. Case studies of shrewd, opportunistic managers are used to illustrate how a 'strategic termite' might look to create, foster and nurture 'mounds' of activity consistent with the direction in which they hoped things might evolve. They would do what they could to encourage others to recognise these mounds as worth building upon. At appropriate times they might encourage arches to be built, uniting and strengthening those mounds that seemed to be developing in the right direction. 'In this way, small

changes can result in large changes as the process develops the "critical mass" and momentum needed to produce a significant transformation' (1993: 61).

For us, the inspiration this metaphor affords would-be environmental change agents—especially those working in organisations where there is no obvious top-level commitment to environmental change—is extremely interesting.

Making a difference

One of the biggest challenges in organisational greening is to motivate and inspire individuals that it is worthwhile to act individually when faced with the enormous scale and complexity of the environmental agenda, particularly when no senior action or commitment is in sight with which to address it. Walton, in her survey of (Talloires Declaration Signatory) higher-education institutions (1998), quotes examples of a general culture of apathy, cynicism and scepticism prevailing in many of the survey institutions, particularly those where directorates are seen to be doing little. She finds this one of the most commonly cited barriers and sees this culture of apathy being compounded by practical barriers concerning lack of resources, time, knowledge, budgets and policies. However, her survey also indicated informal systems of greening at work in many of the institutions surveyed, with enthusiastic individuals seen as the main mechanism to achieve progress. It is here that issues of 'critical mass' and shared beliefs about the value of individual action resonate strongly with Morgan's image.

The issue of a prevailing culture of apathy is addressed from a different angle by Ballard (1999). He sees cultural blockages surrounding the 'stuck' nature of environmental issues at three different levels: patterns of behaviour, mind-sets and emotional ground. For example, in terms of patterns of behaviour, he notes tendencies towards adopting 'wait and see' policies with actions predominantly oriented toward the short term. At the 'mindset' level, he notes how people tend to assume, when a problem becomes apparent, that there is little they can do: 'it's not our fault that the system is behaving the way that it is, and there's nothing we can do to make things better' (1999: 46). At the emotional ground or feelings level, he observed strong feelings of powerlessness, with people often going to considerable lengths to remain so. For instance, when action is suggested, individuals tend to supply lots of reasons why they should not act, offering elaborate reasons why others—usually more senior groups—should act instead. He notes that these feelings are strong but rarely surfaced.

Where such cultures prevail, it is particularly exciting to introduce some metaphorical thinking that could create new understandings and lead to creative action. The image of structures rising from the actions of individuals is underpinned by the simple model in which every action can either strengthen the old or be the beginnings of something new (Fig. 1). The idea that astute, opportunistic actions of 'strategic termites' can encourage structures to emerge and evolve that are in line with their vision for something better raises interesting possibilities for would-be environmental change agents. As Morgan (1993) argues, new ways of seeing can empower individuals who could be trapped in outmoded images of their roles and potential.

Suggestions for further work

If the 'strategic termite' metaphor is considered inspirational and appropriate, the next step seems to be to explore ways in which it might be operationalised as tactics for indi-

viduals championing improved environmental performance within their organisations. If the general tenor of the tactics of 'strategic termites' is recapped, particular areas of interest become clear—specifically how:

▶ Opportunities could be sought to create 'mounds' of activity consistent with a broad overall direction

▶ Such 'mounds' might be drawn to the attention of others to provide a focus for further development

▶ Individuals could be encouraged and supported to build promising 'mounds' on their own

▶ Any opportunities could be identified and exploited to nudge, push or otherwise catalyse activities that would lend support to change in the desired direction

It is important to note Morgan's observation that the aspirations of a strategic termite will evolve and change in response to the dynamic nature of the challenges being faced. In other words, although they will always be driven by a broad sense of vision, they must be careful not to get trapped by the vision. For him, 'they are opportunistic, open to learning and innovation, and guided by a strong political sensibility as to what may or may not be smart or feasible' (1993: 60).

Bridges to new literatures become apparent when the challenge of organisational greening is seen in these terms. For instance, if one considers how an individual might develop the skills necessary to employ tactics such as those highlighted earlier, literature on inter-personal skills training becomes relevant, particular that related to politicking—framing arguments in terms of established structures, managing the way things are viewed by others, etc. (Robbins 1989; Guirdham 1990). In short, phrases such as 'termite tactics', 'environmental politicking' and 'image management' raise interesting avenues for further work. Also, notions of dynamic balance and creative tension that accompany models of self-organising systems (e.g. Pascale 1990) offer new insights on apparent conflicts within organisations between the relative emphasis placed on environmental improvement and other business priorities.

Our intention in future work is to explore in greater depth the usefulness of the imagery and the metaphor analysis technique with which we have experimented. Our validation process urges cautions regarding the negative connotations of termite imagery—undermining subversives who might warrant the attention of an exterminator—which might dominate in some organisational cultures. We are conscious that our self-organising structure–action model allows for structures to fall as well as grow. If mounds of activity grow apart in their evolution, arches uniting them may collapse, compromising the balance and structural integrity of the whole. Our initial investigations have suggested that developments towards formalisation might sit uneasily with the foundations of enthusiasm, but the prospect of losing either could throw the process of greening out of balance. To approach the complexity inherent in these issues will not be easy, but we hope that the termite metaphors highlighted in this paper will provide an appropriate conceptual frame with which to approach it.

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