

Understanding “SustainAbilities”: An Exploration of the Skills and Traits of Ecopreneurs in Sustainable Entrepreneurship.

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Abstract:

Sustainable Entrepreneurship is a hugely diverse concept both in the academic literature and on the ground – in business practice. However much of the research attention to date has focused on the performance, growth and practices of the businesses themselves (see Schaltegger (2002), Linnanen (2002)) and perhaps less has sought to understand, in this wide-ranging drama, the attributes, characteristics and qualities of the protagonist, the ecopreneur. This paper argues that a large part of the validity of our comprehension of Sustainable Entrepreneurship should relate to an understanding of the context and characteristics that drive the ecopreneur forward. Indeed, if we wish to foster the behaviours that generate more sustainable businesses and their appropriate modus operandi, then an appreciation of the ecopreneur is surely fundamental to that impetus.

Whilst much has been written regarding the entrepreneur there is room for further study on the *ecopreneur*. Some insights do exist and this paper draws on the extant literature. Walley et al for example, determine a typology which “*produces four ‘ideal types’ of green entrepreneurs: innovative opportunists, visionary champions, ethical mavericks and ad hoc enviropreneurs*” (Walley et al 2002.) This paper builds on previous work examining Sustainable Entrepreneurship in SMEs (see Rodgers, C. 2010) but takes new focus in exploring and determining ‘SustainAbilities’ – here referred to as those attributes and perhaps idiosyncrasies which delineate and describe the ecopreneur. Necessarily cross-disciplinary, the paper touches on the literatures of management development and learning philosophies to present a more complete understanding of both the context and characteristics of the Ecopreneur. Finally it reflects briefly upon how we might educate or inculcate such characteristics into our future business leaders and makes reference to refining educational contexts in order to take account of the requisite driver of sustainability.

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Introduction:

Sustainable development and entrepreneurship are increasingly regular bedfellows. As more stringent policy drivers and stronger civil and stakeholder pressures drive companies towards better green practices, there is a recognition that both competitive advantage and indeed simply sustained business performance will increasingly rely on best green practice and companies are beginning to take note. There is increasing recognition of both the growth of and the need for, green talent, that is, the so-called ‘green collar’ workers. This phenomena appears equally strong in both employer and employee perspectives. For example, in a 2007 Ipsos Mori survey – “more than 80 per cent of respondents indicated their preference to work for a company with a good reputation for environmental responsibility” (Glen 2009, p54.) And Brokaw comments that, ‘employees are hungry not just for a paycheque and some creativity in their job, but for companies that pay attention to the world and ask them to, too...’ he goes on to say that that ‘increasingly ... translates into wanting companies to pay attention to issues around sustainability.’ (Brokaw 2009, p33.) Definitions of green talent are beginning to appear in the literature. Glen defines “Green talent...[as] employees with the mindsets and skills to drive sustainability,” and goes on to say that these are “the kind of workers who boost the sustainability of companies.” (Glen, J. 2009, P53.) Glen even goes as far as to forecast an “impending boom in green talent...” noting that, “Iberdrola, the Spanish energy company.... has defined green skills as mission-critical.” (Glen, J. 2009, P55.)

However it is not only in the large corporate that green talent is on the rise. Although as Hall notes, “the academic discourse on sustainable development within the mainstream entrepreneurship literature has to date been sparse,” he also says that “entrepreneurship is increasingly being recognized as a significant conduit for bringing about a transformation to sustainable products and processes” (Hall, J.K., et al., 2010, p1.) This paper explores the rise of green talent in a particular entrepreneurial context, that is the ecopreneur, or green entrepreneur, in the small business environment. It builds on previous work (see Rodgers C 2010) which examined the start-up of the small green business looking at a number of case study organisations. The continuing research here seeks to explore and understand the particular skills and traits of the ecopreneur in sustainable entrepreneurship. It both revisits the previous research organisations and examines new ones, attempting to understand those attributes which might delineate

and describe the ecopreneur. Using both interviews and questionnaires and supporting the resulting primary data with secondary data, often direct from the organisation, this paper seeks to build a picture of the characteristics of a successful green entrepreneur.

A Typology:

The entrepreneurship and business literature demonstrates an increasing recognition of green talent and what that might involve. There is for example, recognition that good talent management realises that “current and potential employees are starting to associate a good company with a sustainable company – and people like working for the good guys.” (Glen, J. 2009, P54.) However it is not simply, of course as easy as recruiting the right people and letting them get on with it. Although, as Tim Mohan notes, we need to “...bring on people who want to save the world, [and] give them a little space to be innovative..” (Brokaw, L. 2009, p34.) Brokaw counters that “there are risks to asking people to care, of course. You have to then walk the talk.” (Brokaw, L. 2009, p33.) There is a general recognition that green collar workers are bringing their own value systems to work. And once this has been validated and reinforced by the organisation, it is almost as though the terms and conditions change. Brokaw for example, recognises that “companies that talk about sustainability in coherent ways have the potential to unleash an emotional commitment to them.” This emotional commitment can become an important and significant force and whilst the company may well expect to benefit, there is a quid pro quo: “when you unleash employee passion, expectations change. There are costs to not meeting them.” (Brokaw, L. 2009, p33.)

What this appears to tell is that it's personal, it's about individuals and this easily leads us into the territory of management and professional development. According to Wheatley, “the true professional is one who does not obscure grace with illusions of technical prowess” (Wheatley, 2010.) Wheatley's definition, particularly perhaps in her use of the word ‘grace’ suggests the propensity for a good value system in a ‘true professional.’ It is perhaps an interesting aside for the academic involved in business education as to whether we can in fact ‘train’ or ‘educate in’ such qualities. It is likely that such passion and integrity will only be further reinforced in the green entrepreneurial context and there is some literature which touches on the phenomenon. Walley et al for example, determine a typology which “*produces four ‘ideal types’ of green entrepreneurs: innovative opportunists, visionary champions, ethical mavericks and ad hoc enviropreneurs*” (Walley 2002.)

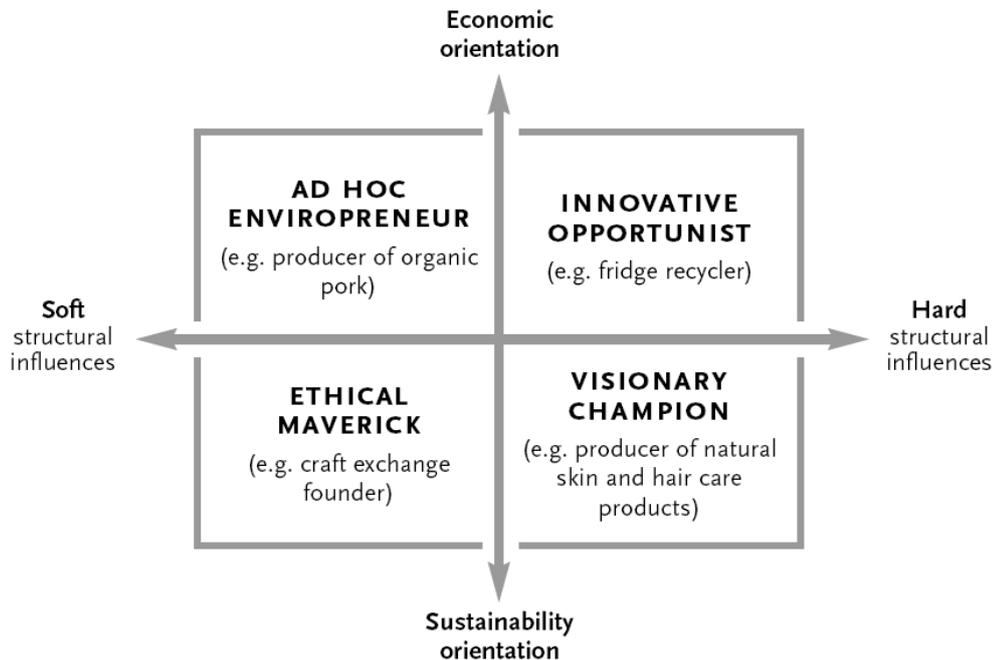


Figure 3: TYPOLOGY OF GREEN ENTREPRENEURS

Walley, E. E. Taylor, D.W. (2002) p40

The authors clearly state, in discussion of their typology, that “the most relevant explanatory variables for characterising different types of green entrepreneurs are the external context and *the entrepreneur’s personal orientation or motivation*” (Walley et al. 2002 p39.) Also of particular interest is that their sustainability orientation includes “green, ethical and social motives” as these are seen as interrelated (Walley et al. 2002 p39.) The emphasis in this matrix, formed by the two axes of ‘motivation’ and ‘influences’ serves to reinforce the significance of the softer skills, traits and characteristics of the green entrepreneur. The *visionary champion* is one who embraces “a transformative sustainability orientation setting out to change the world.” The *ethical maverick* according to this typology, is one most significantly influenced by friends and, networks and past experiences rather than visions of changing the world. The *innovative opportunist* type is one most influenced by the hard structural drivers such as regulation. And finally the *ad hoc enviropreneur* is a kind of “accidental green entrepreneur.” Although it is useful to see such categorisations, it gives us little insight into what might be specific ecopreneurial skills and abilities. It does however reinforce the very personal nature of the drivers for sustainable entrepreneurship.

Approach:

This ongoing research seeks to generate what will become longitudinal case studies. The work here draws on excerpts from interviews, the growing body of evidence they generate and more recently questionnaires and renewed discussions with the ecopreneurs themselves. Three organisations are directly represented: Foottrails, EcoCabin and Bread & Bricks – with thanks to all of them for their time

and input. The questionnaire sought to look at the ecopreneur's own impressions of and beliefs with regard to their skills and traits and explored their perceptions of the importance of these characteristics in promoting sustainable entrepreneurship. Offers of anonymity and confidence were of course made, but these organisations are often pleased to be 'publicly' involved. All the research has been undertaken in a general spirit of 'Appreciative Inquiry,' defined as "a collaborative approach that aims to find the best of 'what is' and foster experience of 'what can be'" (Cooperider and Srivastva 1987.) Appreciative Inquiry tends to ask broad and open questions and is based on the principle that a positive attitude seeking to recognise that which is good and works, engenders a better and more open response. Ludema reinforces this point noting that, "deficit views constrain practice engagement and knowledge creation" (Ludema 2001.) The approach can however, be criticised for its potential for excessive optimism and the notion that it avoids dealing with problem areas. However such downsides are balanced by claims of improved cognitive access - people are less afraid to let you in - and thus issues are discovered that may otherwise have been suppressed. In line with this approach, this research also seeks to disseminate its findings in appropriate ways to encourage positive change, and in doing so notes the importance of networks and partnerships in this business arena.

Case Studies:

The case studies evidenced here are drawn from informal and extensive interviews¹ with the ecopreneurs and a follow-up questionnaire aimed specifically at skills self-identification. The first case is Foot Trails² which is described by its ecopreneur, Alison, as "walking trips with creature comforts." The second is Bricks and Bread³ which is described by its entrepreneur, Trudy, as 'ultimately an educational facility.' The third case is Ecocabin⁴ – "a one-off holiday experience in the UK." initiated and run by Kate. What follows is a necessarily brief presy of the case material and data generated for this research. This is then used to reflect upon what may be distinctive skills and traits of ecopreneurs in sustainable entrepreneurship.

¹ The interviews were organised around a semi-structured questionnaire. This qualitative approach is designed to investigate specific scenarios in depth rather than generate any kind of statistically-valid picture.

² www.foottrails.co.uk.

³ www.bricksandbread.com

⁴ www.ecocabin.co.uk

Alison @Foot Trails:

Alison Howells designs “walks for small groups which include beautiful visits and/or energetic challenges” and “a genuine flavour of rural England.” (www.foottrails.co.uk) In short, Foot Trails will design a walk, or week of walks, to suit you, with or without guide, and with or without transport to take your luggage to each overnight stopping point. Alison and husband David, both professionals in large corporates, took time out to walk across France from the Channel to the Mediterranean - exploring as they walked. The idea for the walking business was formed but it was “latent,” Alison says. Change came with the birth of their first child when they wanted to rearrange their family life away from office schedules. “Flexibility became paramount” for Alison who thought “there had to be a better way.” Alongside this was a perennial question - “Why aren’t we doing what we really love?” - and the walking business idea revived.

Trudy @Bricks and Bread:

Bricks and Bread, a newly opened company housed in an industrial warehouse utilises its space for many and varied activities. On entering, one is initially greeted with architectural salvage, rescued fireplaces and light fittings - the results of Trudy’s work as a sustainable building consultant. Also in the space is a public ‘arena’ complete with lectern and church pews and surrounded by blackboards all proclaiming messages of sustainability. Bricks and Bread will undertake a variety of different kinds of work, from the social enterprise of educating the local populace about sustainability to acting as a hub for the building trade. In this latter role the company stocks information and sustainable building products and is in the process of creating a network of both manufacturers and trained suppliers for the building industry.

Kate @ EcoCabin:

Kate describes Ecocabin as “environmentally-responsible self catering in the Shropshire hills⁵.” It is essentially a sophisticated log cabin with the footprint of a mobile home, which is eco in its every aspect. The build was exhaustively researched by Kate who sees the “Ecocabin experience” as an opportunity to “educate” people into living in a more eco-friendly way. Thus the cabin includes a wormery or two, composting sites, very constrained rubbish facilities, an eco-friendly washing machine, solar water power, a state of the art woodchip burning stove, an eco-provisioned honesty shop and even eco décor! Ecocabin is striking as soon as you see it as a thing of natural beauty, an impression which is reinforced as you feel the spiritual sense of peace within.

⁵ All direct quotes are taken from original research carried out by the author between 2007 and 2010.

Findings: SustainAbilities - Skills and Attributes in Sustainable Entrepreneurship

These findings are drawn from both the growing case study material and the questionnaire responses from the participants. As appropriate, some of the comments are presented anonymously. This section is structured broadly around the questionnaire.

Q: What are the particular skills you have that are enabling you to succeed in this field in terms of start-up, continuing business, and maintaining the 'green/sustainable' ethos of the business

Kate's background suggests little to prepare her for entrepreneurship but she does describe herself as being, "quite into eco stuff - I used real nappies" - and she is, by her own admission, not simply the driving force behind ecocabin but the "the only force." Kate's response to this question is simple, graphic and powerful: *"A vision of possibility and the ability to accept that, should it all go seriously wrong, then that's OK. It's better to try and fail than never try at all."* This smacks of the typical entrepreneurial mindset which we might expect. However her continuing response is somewhat different to that which we might expect from an 'archetypal entrepreneur.' *"For myself; I am not greedy. I also believe that what comes around goes around."* The lack of greed and 'reaping what you sow' are ideas much more closely linked to sustainability. The notion of personal integrity follows very closely. Kate's view as to maintaining the 'green/sustainable' ethos of the business is clear: *"This is easy. Just be yourself."*

Trudy comments that she realised "how much I was doing that I wasn't enjoying" and decided to devote her time to "finding a more rewarding and valuable way of living her life." Perhaps her most important skill was to self-educate in the business of building sustainably. She said "it took two years of research before I was confident that I knew enough about sustainable construction." However she is both clear and blunt about her approach to her skills and attitude at start-up: *"Having bloody minded determination combined with the knowledge that 'it is possible' rather than a negative 'follow the herd' attitude."* In terms of maintaining that business, she is equally clear; *"being able to walk the talk, having an ethical approach to running my business rather than being prepared to green wash..or become just profit driven."*

The same ethical foundations and approach resonate in Alison's words. *"A lot of the eco stuff is just normal to us"* comments Alison *"but it is such a challenge for a small start up."* Foot Trails began humbly but *"the eco stuff was taken for granted initially and now this is something we just have to do."* It was clear from the outset that the integrity of Foot Trails lay in its eco-credentials. "It matters that it's ethical, not making money" says Alison. "Money is not the prime issue." Alison began Foot Trails "disillusioned by big business and the way it operates" and the resulting business is one which puts its principles first.

Q: In your opinion, are there specific skills or attitudes required to start up/run a 'sustainable' business?

The responses here reinforce the prevalence of ethics and integrity – at a personal level. The specific attitude required, in Kate's view, is for example *"A strong conviction to 'do the right thing' as a human being."* Trudy reinforces this: it is important, she says, to *"walk the talk, don't be a hypocrite. If you can't do it sustainably don't tell other people to do it."* Her own standards, and those of her business, are very high: the challenges she faced in her remit to build healthy properties included a self-imposed zero landfill policy which it should be noted, she achieved despite the best efforts of some of the construction workers!

Alison is the strategist behind Foot Trails, identifying herself as "the driver, taking the business forward" and she asserts that the *eco-business* was no easy card to play. Alison recognized that "it would give a different flavour" and might build market share but she was keen to "normalize green issues." So despite enduring the extra costs of greening the business – for example printing their first brochure on recycled paper gained them a 40% hike in paper costs – they chose not to wave the green label. Instead Foot Trails "takes it easy" with playing the green card, although not with implementing the green initiatives, and markets a social philosophy, not just an eco one.

Q: Do you see running this business in terms of maintaining a Competitive Advantage or a Lifestyle Choice?

The personal aspect is reinforced again in response to this question and perhaps re-iterates the importance of the entrepreneurial flair – even more emphasised in forging entry into new and sustainable areas of business. Kate comments that Ecocabin *"is a lifestyle choice for me but it gave me a competitive edge when I started the business because it was a new idea."* She does however acknowledge that the market has of course 'caught up' and that *"now, there are many similar businesses' and 'Take up is not as crazy as it was in the first 2 years but it remains steady.'* Significantly she believes that what holds her business secure in the market is her own approach and ideals: *"My USP is me ... and that is the same for anyone."* Kate's comments illustrate her precedence for a "lifestyle" rather than a "business." She asserts "I have an anti-business strategy – and I have the long straw, I live here all the time." However, there is also business acumen - she describes the challenge of "balancing an eco business and marketing it to be appealing."

Alison reinforces the lifestyle choice: "Success is not about making money per se, it is much more about sustenance. Success," she says is about "doing her own thing and the flexibility of family." In short, it's "a way of life." Foot Trails already has policies which restrict business growth – for example, there cannot be too many people walking the same trails on the same day because of the environmental degradation that

might ensue. Alison recognizes this business restraint as a “big challenge to her entrepreneurial spirit” and talks of becoming a “serial entrepreneur” to compensate. Trudy, the ecopreneur behind Bricks and Bread had something of an epiphany in order to start this business. Following a career in the motor industry which ended with a serious accident, she re-evaluated her life and chose a very different route. In short, it seems ‘lifestyle’ was the initial driver and remains paramount; the business is a means to that end but has to remain consistent with the lifestyle choice. In short, she says, *“My business is just an extension of the way I live my life.”* She also comments on how the lifestyle drives the business development: *“Having hands-on experience of eco building and living a self sufficient lifestyle has helped me survive and have the skills to operate this business.”*

Q: There is the old adage about ‘its who you know...’ To what extent have partnerships and/or collaborations been important in the development of your business?

The response here is emphatic and establishes the central role of partnerships and the importance of shared ideals comes across very strongly. Kate comments that partnerships and collaborations are: *“Absolutely vital. I have met SO MANY likeminded people through building the cabin which makes future business ideas far easier ... and less lonely. The possibilities created by these partnerships are endless.”* Kate also rates herself in terms of being able to develop and utilise collaborations noting that she is, *“Good – I talk a lot ... to anyone.”* Trudy is similarly emphatic: *I run a collaborative business so even my competitors are my customers.”* Her business was also “fuelled by friends and their referrals” and she is happy to pass on this collaborative spirit: *“If someone started a company like mine and they succeeded in getting it off the ground, if they can help people adapt/adopt a sustainable lifestyle then I would be delighted, as I am doing this business to solve the obstacles I faced in living, working and building sustainably.”* Not all factors however were in her favour and Trudy refers to a situation in an industry which “fought against me all time.” She recognises that networking is *“vital – but it is more important ‘who knows you’ – a good reputation and people being confident that they can recommend/refer other people to me, has done more to grow my business.”* But she also has caution to offer, *“be careful that people don’t waste your time with meetings that don’t achieve anything – and don’t do it to them either.”*

It seems the most useful tools in helping to develop such partnerships vary. One response for example, draws an interesting distinction between local and more distant mechanisms. The former having prevalence perhaps for facilitating more concrete achievements: *“The internet is invaluable because the contacts are stretched worldwide. Although you might not be able to work on a day-to-day basis with these acquaintances, their influence on your ideas cannot be underestimated. Local organisations offer fantastic networking opportunities which often lead to other groups/individuals and new ideas. The advantage of these local contacts is that an idea can very often snowball into a realised goal.”*

Q: Which of your capabilities /skills do you see as imperative to your business survival?

Trudy is clear that experience is vital: "there is no manual for this business only my experience." Having already gone close to bankruptcy, surviving debt and yet making new, significant investments - it is obvious that here is a shrewd entrepreneur who understands business. She states that: "*I know how to set up a business from scratch and earn money, I have been an entrepreneur all my working life.*" Confidence and creative thinking - "to think outside the box has been incredibly useful" - are cited often as imperative skills as is the ability to 'keep on going.' Trudy reiterates these points: "*There is always a solution to problems and it usually requires you to believe that you can solve it yourself before anyone else will help you.*" Reference is also made to skills we might expect to see such as organisation and good planning and also to a key entrepreneurial one - the ability to both fail and recover from failure. One of Trudy's mantras is that, "*People who are successful have failed many, many times before they get it right.*" However she is clear that what "*has done more to move this business forward than anything else [is] collaborating, networking and getting on with people. Perhaps understandably she also cites these as her "best skills."*

Kate reiterates the personal experiential feel recognising that "My business only has to work for me ... it is a success to me, but others may not consider it so." However, she's quick to recognise what she sees as capabilities imperative to the survival of our business noting that, "*I have inextinguishable creative energy and optimism, a preference to think illogically and believe life is potentially too short to spend it doing something that doesn't make you happy.*" Significantly, and despite continued excellent success in the venture, Kate has no desire to grow the business. Her business goals are low-key: "a network of people coming back – a loyal set of customers - and further development of the eco – perhaps wind – turbine/PV power." Business growth, per se, does not figure. In similar vein, although today Foot Trails is an award-winning company, Alison already recognizes that in order to "stay true to her green and personal aspirations," Foot Trails will not be allowed to grow beyond a certain size. "Too much growth would breach the things that matter to us – it becomes unethical."

Q: When recruiting employees what skills would be most important for your business?

A short and sweet answer here from Kate - "lovely, kind people." However it is one that speaks volumes in terms of recruitment policy! Trudy looks for more specifying: "*The ability to think for themselves, to take responsibility for their actions; to be practical and capable, rather than qualified with an impressive CV" and finally "to be open minded, creative and positive in their outlook."*

Analysis: SustainAbilities - Skills and Attributes in Sustainable Entrepreneurship

A number of common factors emerge from the case material and we can identify some of the primary skills and attributes of the ecopreneurs including characteristics such as 'a high level of personal integrity' demonstrating, as one might imagine, both ideals and a strong value system with respect to the

development of sustainable options and solutions. This appears fundamental in all of the ecopreneurs involved in this research. In addition 'lifestyle drivers,' the 'importance of the family' and 'time' are further priorities. The ability and propensity to develop partnerships and collaborations and to understand their significance also comes across as a key. This is supported both by a determined self-belief and a belief in others, although perhaps necessarily like-minded others!

When analysed in more detail, a more coherent picture perhaps begins to emerge. The skills and attributes identified seem to coalesce into three main groupings: those to do with *personal ethics*; those to do with *business acumen*; and finally those to do with *business development* and what might be termed *future scoping*. The graphic below illustrates these three areas and suggests an inter-relation between them, perhaps one which progresses alongside the development of the business.

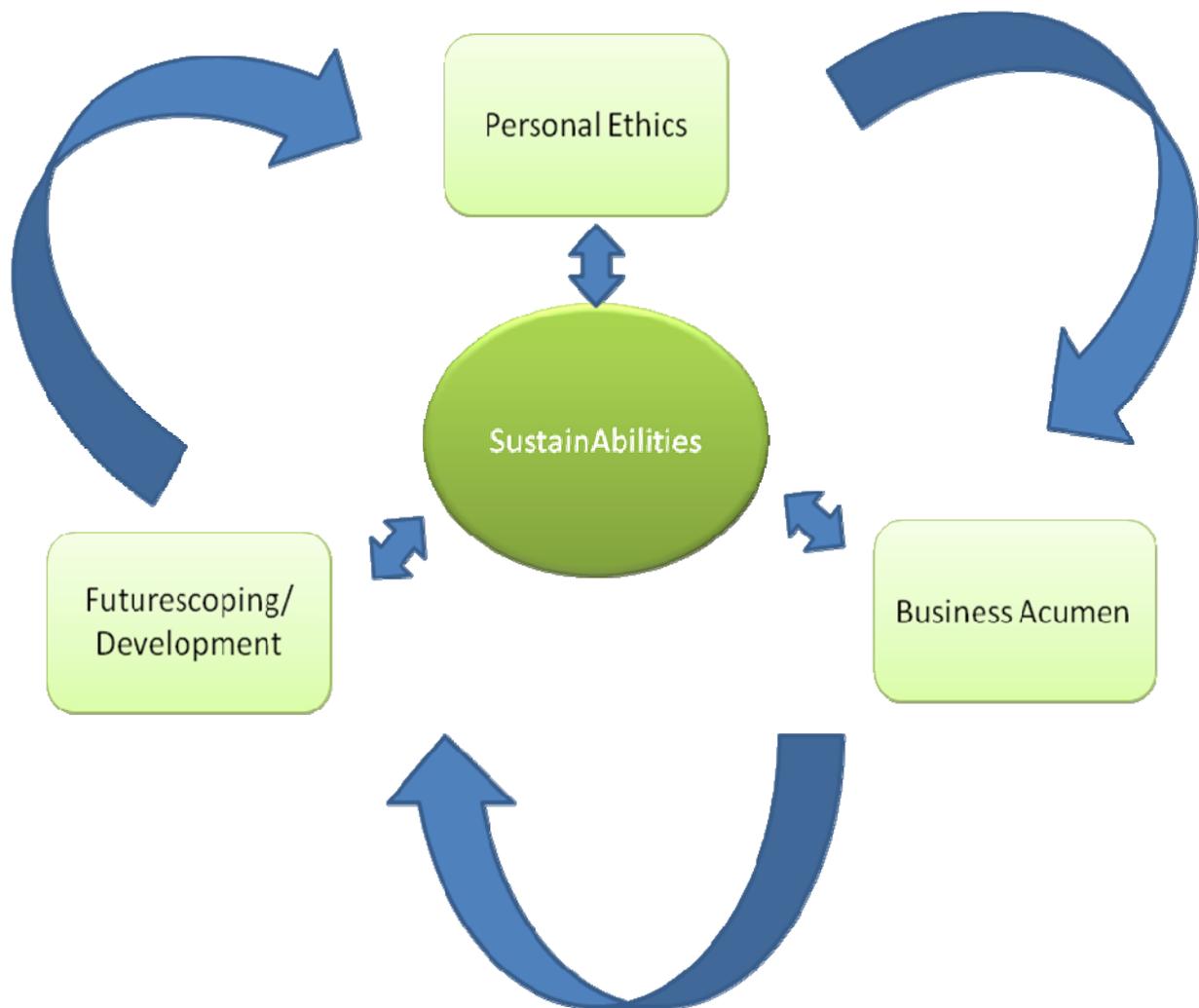


Fig 2: Three Areas of SustainAbilities

Each of these three areas, personal ethics, business acumen, and future scoping, present a variety of different ecopreneurial attributes and skills. Some of these are shown below in figure 3.

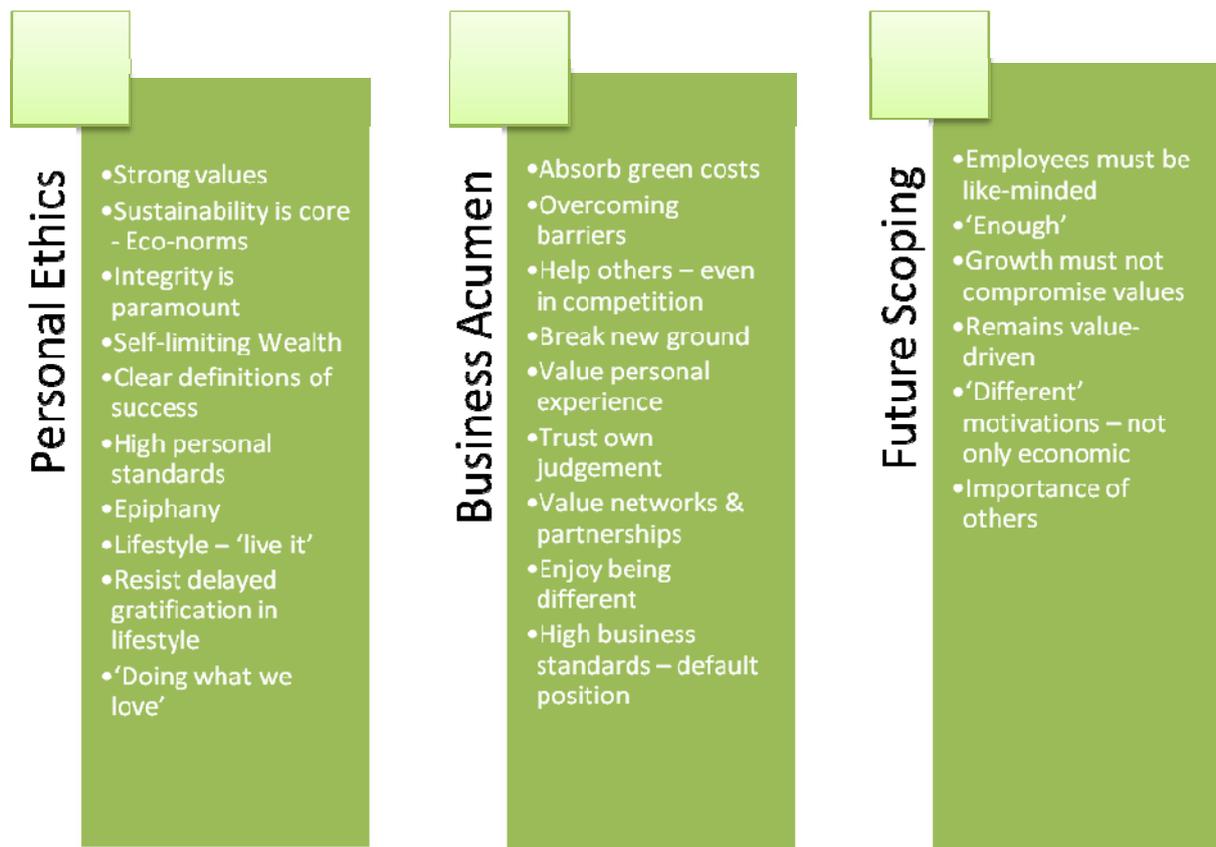


Fig 3: Skills and Traits in Sustainable Entrepreneurship

There is in this research, as one might expect, a significant crossover with characteristics already recognised as ‘entrepreneurial.’ So for example, *clear definitions of success*, *trusting one’s own judgement* and perhaps *recruiting like-minded employees* are values we would easily recognise and expect to discover. However there is also significant additional information. For example under personal ethics, there is the notion of self-limiting wealth: the idea expressed by more than one ecopreneur that money is not an end in itself, and more than that, the notion that there are compromises which are unacceptable in the pursuit of wealth and/or business growth: for example, see Alison’s comments in the Foot Trails case, about limiting the number of walkers at any one time to prevent environmental damage. This criterion is obviously also a business-limiting one and is an attribute we would probably not expect to find in the average capitalist entrepreneur! Whilst *‘doing what we love’* maybe an easily recognised value, (perhaps the basis of much entrepreneurial activity) the notion of *resisting delayed gratification*, we would normally expect to be applied to wealth. However, here it is about lifestyle. These ecopreneurs are not prepared to ‘put off’ the things that makes life us good for them. They’re taking the benefits now, but those benefits are in terms of time, well-being and sustainability. Indeed the compromise, although they may not

recognise it as such, may be in wealth accumulation. It is to be expected that both personal and business integrity would be paramount in this context and the ecopreneurs all noted these values as fundamental. Green sustainability and both the opportunities and constraints that represents are, of course, primary. They are compromised neither in the personal arena nor in the business one. All the organisations here have for example, absorbed additional business costs in order to stay true to their green principles. These skills and traits may coincide with the highly personal motivators of Walley's four types, but they are more than just motivations. Here are sound business skills, both hard and soft, being moderated to greater or lesser extent by the demands of a sustainable approach to business – and indeed to living.

Conclusions:

What emerges from this continuing study is essentially twofold. Firstly that these ecopreneurs tend to conform to many of the entrepreneurial characteristics we would recognise. Necessarily perhaps they possess and exhibit many of those skills and attributes we would recognise in those wanting to start up and run their own businesses. Secondly and more significantly is that they also differ from the 'recognised' entrepreneur and exhibit additional skills and attributes pertaining to operating in the field of Sustainability. This leads us into interesting territories viz educational systems, professional development, and learning styles and philosophies. It is significant for example, even in this small sample that all of the ecopreneurs are self-educated in their field and to a large part in their business acumen and knowledge. Interestingly Brokaw's comments with respect to larger companies perhaps resonate here: "The biggest challenge within organisations to addressing sustainability issues is outdated mental models and perspectives..." (Brokaw, L. 2009, p34.) These ecopreneurs have developed their own from a standing start. A thorough exploration of the educational implications are for future research rather than this paper, but it is pertinent perhaps to make reference to a new educational style and programme being developed off-track at the University of Portsmouth, UK which seeks to conjoin Leadership Development and the training of nascent social entrepreneurs. *The Accelerator Programme* is very much about action learning and focuses on developing social entrepreneurs by teaming them, in a sort of triangulation process, with high-profile future leaders, themselves in a related management development course. The philosophy – currently still under test – is to take the best of management training and ideas and charge it with developing the typically very value-laden social enterprises – a marriage made in heaven? Perhaps not. But perhaps we may succeed in facilitating the change agent role which may, in turn, be instrumental in driving forward sustainability in our society. The way forward may as yet be unclear; as Hall notes "we have little understanding of how entrepreneurs will discover and develop those opportunities that lie beyond the pull of existing markets. Thus, while the case for entrepreneurship as a panacea for transitioning towards a more sustainable society is alluring, there remain major gaps in our knowledge of whether and how this process will actually unfold." (Hall, J.K., et al., 2010, p1) But that notwithstanding, it

is apparent that such developments can no longer simply be left, as perhaps they have been to date as “*difficult questions which lie in the twilight of the future*” (Woolf 1928: 78.)

It is inspiring to work with and talk to these entrepreneurial, value-driven people. A comment from Trudy resonates: “*It is vitally important that we all make a difference to the environment as we depend upon it for our future and so do future generations.*” Wheatley echoes this view, commenting for example that - “*...I love...the realization that around the world, we share a common human desire to live together more humanely and more harmoniously.*” (Wheatley, M. 2010) In similar vein, John Sterman, a Professor at MIT notes that, “People are hungry for the opportunity to work professionally in a way that is consistent with building a sustainable world instead of one that undermines it” (Brokaw, 2009, p34.) And whilst “the challenge for executives is to define, discover, develop and deploy the green talent they need to achieve competitive advantage in an age when sustainability is transforming business,” (Glen, J. 2009, P56) the challenge for ecopreneurs in attempting to merge multiple social economic and environmental goals is perhaps greater still. Choi and Gray found that in their sample of sustainability-oriented entrepreneurs a majority had “unorthodox human resource practices and funding sources” (quoted Hall 2010.) It is then perhaps the focus on the individual and the idiosyncrasies therein, fuelled by strong and determined value systems, that creates the particular ecopreneur and their sustainable business. The lesson to be taken away might then be that “*It is much more important to be one's self than anything else.*” (Woolf 1928: 109)

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