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Negotiations between Mother Nature and Man's Most Powerful Creation: The Environmental Crisis and the Corporate Paradigm

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Abstract

I came to the University at Albany intending to study accounting. While here I decided to add communication as a minor and was privileged to enroll in courses beyond the scope of, yet still relatable to, accounting. Such courses include the Theory of Organizational Communication, Studies in Public Persuasion - Communication in Professional Contexts, and Conference and Group Leadership all taught by Dr. Patricia Gettings; another was Environmental Economics taught by Mary Mallia. Throughout my time at the University at Albany, one of my favorite educational experiences has been when I am able to make connections between classes and across disciplines and further relate those connections to the world outside of the classroom. The feeling associated with this motivates me and excites me about the possibilities of where my degree can lead me. As someone who grew up minutes from the beach and who spent every Sunday of my childhood running wild on a potato farm, I have a strong relationship with nature and the environment. The connections I have made between what I have learned in accounting, communication, and my personal interests have inspired my research.

In this research paper I explore how the history of accounting developed into what it is today, how communication plays a role in shifting the paradigm associated with business and the environment and how this shift might save the planet.

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Introduction

In Studies in Public Persuasion - Communication in Professional Contexts taught by Dr. Patricia Gettings, we were prompted to write a book report on anything related to our future profession. I found the book Six Capitals, or Can Accountants Save the Planet: Rethinking Capitalism for the Twenty-First Century, by Jane Gleeson-White, and the connections between accounting, communication, and the environment served as inspiration for my research.

Six Capitals, or Can Accountants Save the Planet?: Rethinking Capitalism for the Twenty-First Century, is a book written to stress the importance of communication between companies and public, and how speaking the right language is imperative for global change. Gleeson-White makes some stirring assertions as to where power lies in the world and how we must attend to those in power if we want to save the planet. The book explains that a big part of the problem of getting corporations to act in more sustainable ways is the communication barrier between nature and business.

The book highlights many advancements in accounting in the evolution of reporting through to Integrated Reporting. It also notes several people and their beliefs about corporations and economics that led to increased concern for sustainability. Gleeson-White informs the readers that we actually have all that is necessary to make change and makes a plea to accountants to break the communication barrier and encourage a paradigm shift relating to the value of nature and the purpose of business.

I made connections between what was discussed in the book and theories of communication. The way organizations develop and the communication involved help explain the corporate paradigm and why it is so difficult to change. Study into the use of language and words in different contexts also helps unearth how and why certain topics become a concern for the public. Reference to the Legitimacy and Agenda Setting theories and the Constitutive and Systems approaches to organizational communication, and comparison of these to accounting practices and corporate values shed light on the evolution of the corporate paradigm and what is necessary to change it to serve our current needs and wants.

The Most Powerful Man-Made Force on Earth

A. The Corporation

Through the seventeenth century, the biggest and most influential bodies were church and government. By 1791, however, we had a separation of church and state, and shortly after, the industrial revolution. This led to the rise of corporations and with that, technological advancements, societal developments, and the expansion of the economy. In 1819, the Supreme Court made a decision that allowed corporations certain rights and created the concept of limited liability (Serafiem, 2013, p. 5). These rights and the limited liability concept are the reason corporations are known as a "legal person." They exist separately from their owners and, like a person, possess certain rights such as the right to sue, be sued, enter contracts, create loans, and more (Kenton, 2014). Limited liability, also known as the "corporate veil," separates shareholders and owners from the entity and enables a business to "take the risks that make growth possible without exposing the shareholders, owners, and directors to personal financial liability outside of their original investments" (Hayes, 2020). This has allowed corporations to grow quickly with less risk. In Grover Cleveland's 1888 State of the Union Address, he warned "'Corporations, which should be carefully restrained creatures of the law and the servants of the people, are fast becoming the people's master's'" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 112).

Today, the corporation is the most common form of business and is arguably the most powerful man-made force on Earth. The degree of power of corporations also stems from the fact that they have so much international control over people and money. In 2010, Robert Eccles - accounting and reporting expert - attested that corporations “[were] now the organizing entities on earth and nations [weren’t]... Globalization has concentrated economic power within a group of large companies who are now able to change the world at a scale historically reserved for nations. They virtually control the global economy” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 172).

Research by George Serafeim on *The Role of the Corporation in Society* for the Harvard Business School found that as of the end of 2012, 1,000 corporations, known as the Global 1,000, “made $34 trillion in revenue, directly employed 73 million people, and had a total market cap of $28 trillion” (Serafim, 2013, p. 6). Apple inc., a Global 1,000 company, has a market capitalization of $1.3 trillion dollars as of December 2019. Of the 195 countries recognized by the United Nations, “only fourteen have annual [Gross Domestic Product] figures greater than Apple’s market capitalization” (Kolakowski, 2020). So yes, corporations and business are the most powerful man-made force in the world. There are corporations that employ millions of people and exert more influence than some governments. They have an impact on us all. These huge corporations influence people by way of advertising and costing and thus shape our values. We should leverage our position as consumers of corporation’s goods and services to enact change for the better.

B. The Corporate Paradigm

The longstanding accepted purpose of a corporation is shareholder wealth maximization. Corporations develop their strategy so that they can provide maximum return on financial capital to their shareholders so that they can continue as a going concern.

There are assumptions associated with this paradigm that have enabled corporations to make detrimental impacts on society and the environment. Filip Gregor of the Shift Project claims that "the understanding of shareholder value maximization as an overriding element in corporate purpose is merely a social norm" that has enabled corporations' negative impacts to go unchecked for too long (Gregor, 2014). Corporations, with the intent of maximizing shareholder wealth, "consume vast amounts of natural resources, pollute local and global environment at little or no cost" and the rights possessed by corporations which enable them to exist assumes that governmental legislation will deal with the negative externalities of this corporate practice (Serafim, 2013, p.6). This objective of the corporation and assumption of the government "compels executives to prioritize the interests of their companies and shareholders above all others and [essentially] forbids them from being socially responsible" (Gregor, 2014). This corporate paradigm is locked in a short-termist point of view that has kept corporations from valuing sustainability and has led to massive environmental problems. Gleeson-White refers to "*The Value Reporting Revolution: Moving Beyond the Earnings Game"* by Robert Eccles in which it was argued that the short-termist point of view "compels [managers] to pursue quarterly earnings increases at the expense of all else, including long-term strategy and social and environmental responsibility" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 35).

"Sustainability"

Simon Dresner, author of *Principles of Sustainability* claims "you should not destroy the basis of your own existence" (Dresner, 2009, p. 2). This common-sense declaration captures the entire concept of sustainability. However, the definition of sustainability throughout history has been elusive.

In 1987 the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development published the report *Our Common Future* in which they defined "sustainable development" as "development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs'" (Dresner, 2008, Introduction). Since then, "sustainability" has been a term used internationally by governments and businesses. An issue with the word is one that is associated with terms like "liberty," "freedom," and "justice." These are "contestable concepts" and even though most people support the goals associated with these terms, they tend to disagree on what exactly liberty, freedom, or justice is (Dresner, 2008, p. 2). It seems that the vast array of contexts the word can be applied in impacts the meaning the user ties to it.

"Sustainability" has been heard in political contexts, environmental contexts, economical, and corporate contexts. When strung alongside "strategy" in each of these contexts, the idea that is being discussed changes, no doubt. Robert Eccles and George Serafeim defined sustainability in the corporate context in terms of the relationship between the corporation's strategy and the environment in which that corporation functions. They claim that a sustainable strategy "enables a company to create value for their shareholders, while at the same time contributing to a sustainable society" (Gleeson-White, 2015, pp. 37-38). Confusingly, they also defined sustainable strategy in terms suited for accountants claiming a sustainable strategy is one that seeks to "minimize the negative effects on the environment and local community (or negative externalities) of a company's activities, without 'significant losses in productivity and value creation" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 38). The paper *The Concept of Environmental Sustainability* by Robert Goodland sought to define environmental sustainability apart from social or economic sustainability by highlighting that environmental sustainability "means maintaining environmental assets, or at least not depleting them" (Goodland, 1995, p. 14).

Though all of these definitions - and many more - seem to be saying more or less that we should not destroy the basis of our existence, they use different words that hold more or less significant meaning depending on which context one is in. The definitions proposed by those operating in the corporation's strategy room, used by accountants, or by an environmentalist differ slightly because they are more or less translated into a language that those around them would understand.

Sustainability is important. Protecting the Earth is important. This is understood. However, an issue exists that the most powerful man-made force on Earth values certain capitals more than others. This is because of the existing corporate paradigm. Thanks to integrated reporting, the valuation of capitals other than financial capital has increased, yet the valuation of natural capital in comparison to financial capital is too low. This is the issue that needs to be solved if humans are going to save the planet. Sustainability of the corporation in terms of existing on Earth needs to be more of a concern than just the sustainability of the corporation to exist as a going concern. How can we change the corporate paradigm in such a way that natural capital becomes as important as the short-termist objective of maximizing shareholder's financial capital?

Accounting

A. How Sustainability Became a "Thing" in Accounting and the Corporate Sphere

Accounting emerged out of a need for record-keeping. As time revealed new problems, new accounting methods developed. The condition of the world in which business operates has driven what Ananias Littleton, accounting historian, describes as "progress;" which he implies "lies in the ability of accounting to solve-present-day problems" (Napier, 2001, p. 9). In the beginning, double-entry accounting did not exist, the Sarbanes Oxley Act did not exist, and the concept of *Integrated Reporting* did not exist. These important developments in accounting were created to keep corporations - man's most powerful creation - effectively functional and fair. They developed out of a need to solve the problems impacting business and protect the people.

"Going concern" is an accounting term that means that a business has the resources to continue its operations. By all definitions, if something has the resources to continue, it is sustainable. It is the accountant's, more specifically, the auditor's responsibility to obtain evidence that indicates whether or not the company will be able to continue as a going concern. Again, the term sustainability has been uncertain and malleable to the context in which it is applied. First, corporations wanted to be sustainable in that they wanted to be able to operate as a going concern. Over time, as people became more and more concerned with human rights and welfare, social sustainability became a topic. Intellectual and human capital gained ground here. Later, as the health of the planet and the environmental crisis became more pressing, sustainability evolved to relate to the impact of big business. The idea of sustainability in business shifted from "will the company last?" to "will the environment in which the company exists allow it to last?" Now natural capital is a talking point. The concept of sustainability reporting has developed significantly in the past decade.

There are a handful of developments that brought the concept of sustainability into accounting and that led to the thought-evolution that sustainability was more than the company's ability to continue. It became the ability of the environment to allow it to continue. One of the major developments was *The King Reports*. Mervyn King wrote *The King Reports* which had a tremendous impact on accounting for non-financial information. The *First King Report* forced businesses to include social, environmental, and governance considerations into their operations

(The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, 2012, p. 4). The second King Report issued in 2002 required increased consideration of sustainability for people and the planet in addition to profit. People began to demand more from corporations and began to insist they operate as “good corporate citizens” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 146). It is said that King II “broke new ground among corporate governance codes (which were still primarily focused on financial and not sustainability issues) by stressing that although such social, ethical, and environmental issues are referred to as ‘nonfinancial,’ there is no doubt ‘that these so-called non-financial issues have significant financial implications for a company’” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 157). This was a significant point in a past corporate paradigm shift. When King III was issued in 2009, this change in thinking enabled King to insist that integrated reporting be adopted and required by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, 2012, p. 4). King insisted “that governance, strategy and sustainability are inseparable, [and that] companies [had] to integrate them into the… DNA of their business.’” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 159).

In 2004, The Prince of Wales, with Sir Michael Peat (founding partner of Peat Marwick, now KPMG), began The Prince’s Accounting for Sustainability Project which was formed “with the aim of developing an approach to corporate reporting that showed how a company and its traditional financial report connected to society and the environment” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 143). Like King, the Prince wanted to create and encourage the use of better practices and values in day-to-day corporate operations. At the project's inauguration, the Prince said that an objective was to “help ensure that we are not battling to meet 21st-century challenges with… 20th-century decision making and reporting systems” (The Prince's Accounting for Sustainability Project). The King Reports, and the shifting of values that began there, impacted the Prince’s project. This project, along with King, the Global Reporting Initiative, the International Federation of

Accountants, and other organizations led to the establishment of the International Integrated Reporting Council in 2010 and the concept of Integrated Reporting. (The Prince's Accounting for Sustainability Project). “In 2014, a report found that since the adoption of King III, South African companies had experienced ‘a radical shift in thinking, brought about by the introduction of integrated reporting” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 159).

A major paradigm shift involved that drove the evolution of accounting during that time was the idea that sustainability is a two-way street. The company wants the environment in which it operates to be able to support it, but the company cannot just take. It must do its part to ensure that it is not extinguishing supplies of natural capital or contributing so much to the degradation of the planet. Integrated reporting forces corporations to report on more than just financial capital. Reporting on the impact of the company serves to hold the company accountable by exposing its impact.

B. Integrated Reporting

In the process of value creation, a company utilizes several forms of capital. These include financial capital, manufactured capital, human capital, social and relationship capital, and natural capital and relate to things such as intangibles, brand value, customer relations, patents, ideas, human capabilities and so much more. An issue faced in accounting and business was the fact that financial capital out-ranked all other forms for a long time. Thus, the other forms of capital were abused, undervalued, and ignored. Past financial reporting enabled this and Integrated reported emerged as a solution. “An integrated report aims to provide insight about the resources and relationships used and affected by an organization… [as well as] explain how the organization interacts with the external environment and the capitals to create value”

(International Integrated Reporting Framework, 2013). An integrated report enables a company to spell out for investors or other users their plan for the company and the intended use of the various forms of capital to carry out that plan. One can then infer the impact of the company on society and the environment. The company's character is revealed and investors are able to make better informed decisions. Integrated reporting also increases transparency which forces companies to do the right thing. As consumer values evolve, the fact that they can see into the operations of the company, drives the company to act in ways that communicate to investors and consumers that they too share those values.

This newer form of reporting has been pivotal in shifting the corporate paradigm from maximizing shareholder value at all costs towards the thinking needed within corporations to prevent further significant degradation of the planet. Part of this has to do with communication. Reports are "written communication used to summarize research or assessment findings and according to the genderlect theory of communication, "report talk" is characterized as lacking detail (Quintanilla, 2020, pp. 110 & 219). Reporting is a monodirectional mode of communication and "many at the forefront of corporate reporting believe that in the future we will not be talking about reporting at all; we will be talking about corporate *communication"* (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 227). Communication is multidirectional and corporate communication as an alternative to reporting would enable consumers and their values to become a more integral part of the corporate strategy.

Integrated reporting, as it is now, is the segway into the next form of accounting and reporting. Integrated reporting will help shift the paradigm of investors and consumers as it draws more attention to the other forms of capital such as human and natural. The values of people today will lead to demands for change. As, Gleeson-White put it: 'the big agreement that the future of accounting is integrated reporting is one thing; finding a way to frame this new accounting in broad principles in quite another" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 173) We need to work on framing and presentation still. We can make a stronger, more important connection between the importance of saving the planet and business through how corporations and consumers communicate. Changing the type of communication and language used, and formally valuing nature could be the solution that takes integrated reporting to the next level.

Shifting the Paradigm

A. Shifting the Paradigm

The Constitutive Approach to Organizational Communication argues that an organization is created through communication - that communication is not bound by the organization but is instead what makes it up (Miller, 2015, p. 83). Structuration Theory as a facet of the Constitutive Approach postulates that "the social world is generated through the agency of active participants" and that there are structures that guide agency (Miller, 2015, p. 84). However, agency does enable a person (or larger group of people) to decide to act against structure, thus changing structure. If we pair this theory of organizational communication with the Systems Approach we can see a framework for a corporate paradigm shift.

Study into the Systems Approach was done to better understand the processes of organizational behavior. A system is composed of parts. An organizational system is composed of people and departments, but hierarchical ordering connects various systems as subsystems and supersystems (Miller, 2015, pp. 61-62). Organizations are part of society as a subsystem. The interdependence component of this approach tells us that each component of a system relies on the other components (Miller, 2015, p. 62). The point here is corporations are a component of society. People and governments, among other subsystems, are components as well. These all interact and influence each other, particularly through communication. Since communication makes up organizations, according to the Constitutive Approach to Organizational Communication, this is an important tool for facilitating change.

There is something that governs people called schemata. There are structures that define beliefs about how organizations work. Disruption of schemata leads to change. Systems analyst Donella Meadows proposed a hierarchy of places to intervene in a system to effect change. She scaled a range of possible intervention points in a system based on their effectiveness. Noting that there are "'leverage points' or places within a complex system (such as a firm, city, economy or ecosystem) where a small shift in one element can bring big changes in the whole system" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 137). Constants, parameters and numbers (think of subsidies and taxes on carbon emissions that have failed to facilitate change) rank lowest on the hierarchy. According to Meadow's hierarchy, the second most effective way of implementing change in a system is "to change the mindset or paradigm it stems from; and at the apex of the hierarchy is 'power to transcend paradigms,' which we can only do by changing our values" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 137).

What will cause corporations to change from valuing, above all else, shareholder wealth maximization to valuing other things such as environmental preservation? Legitimacy Theory "posits that organizations continually seek to ensure that they operate within the bounds and norms of their respective societies" and the Agenda Setting Theory of communication posits that increased media attention on certain issues increases community concern for certain issues (Brown & Deegan, 1998, pp. 22 & 25). One aspect of Agenda Setting Theory is that of the issues covered by the media, the public then influences the media as a result of their level of interest in those certain topics the media chose to focus on. There is a cycle of influence that is comparable to the ability of corporations to influence the public based on their actions and reports and the public to influence corporations based on their reactions. Corporations disclose information in an integrated report and focus on certain issues that highlight how they are maximizing shareholder value. Time and influence have led corporations to shed more light on their involvement and use of other forms of capital because it was deemed important by the public. This influence of the public on corporations exemplifies the points of the Legitimacy and Agenda Setting theories. The values of the corporation can change as a result of this cycle of influence. When corporations recognize the importance of their concern for issues that those they serve care about, then they incorporate them into their operations. There is a snowball effect. Consumers want a greener world and greener products, businesses want to profit, to maximize shareholder value, and to continue as a going concern, so they must adopt these same values of their consumers. The company’s new demands then encourage its suppliers and other components of the system to be more sustainable. This is because, in order for the corporation to reach its consumer-influenced goals, they may need to change suppliers or seek alternatives that enable them to do so.

There is one remaining issue. As much as people care about helping the environment, wealth maximization is still the epicenter of the corporate paradigm. Human’s perception of “wealth” and “standard of living” must change. Corporations and the public still majorly view wealth as a determinant of one's standard of living as opposed to the quality of the environment in which one lives. The paradigm must shift to accept a different determinant standard of living for radical positive change to occur.

Based on the theories of communication and what we know about corporation's power, accounting, and reporting, it only makes sense that in order to change the way wealth and value is considered, accounting and reporting should be used to do so.

B. Speaking the Right Language

"Why has the idea of sustainability become so important in recent years? One reason is because it is much more powerful rhetorically than an idea such as being 'environmentally friendly.' Not caring about the environment has a long history and is still regarded as acceptable in some circles, but publically saying that you don't care that what you are doing is unsustainable sounds tantamount to admitting that you are intellectually incoherent" (Dresner, 2008, Introduction).

This excerpt from *The Principles of Sustainability* makes a monumental point about language. The use of certain words can have an impact on perception - of importance, of relevance, of relatability, and so on. *Six Capitals* makes a point that "in the quantitative realm of modern finance, business and economics, things only exist when they can be measured" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 225). For environmental issues to become a more central part of the corporate paradigm they must be communicated in a way that makes the importance of natural capital understood by those making decisions informed by the standing corporate paradigm. Accounting is an important facilitator because it can do the translating - but only if the language exists. The reporting of environmental, social and governance information has mostly been communicated through "the vocabulary of sustainability, climate change, social justice, and other *qualitative* modes," but "it has not yet developed its own *quantitative* language" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 225). In the corporate arena, this means that environmental, social and governance issues are disadvantaged because of the effective way of communicating this information.

Integrated reporting has been a great starting point because it can direct the conversation and will reflect what is considered important. Also, because of the Agenda Setting aspect of influence between corporations and the public. The language of certain topics must be further developed so that the importance of issues can be understood by those with the most influential power - corporations.

What Can We Do?

A. The Valuation of Nature

"Dealing with nonfinancial value is the key accounting problem of the new age." 44 Smart investors will assess all forms of capital, but they are valued differently. As noted, things only exist in the corporate realm when they can be measured. There are many arguments against the valuation of nature. One being that putting a price on nature says that it possesses no value on its own and that we only find it valuable when it can provide us with a means of generating more capital. However, a point must be made that "it is economists, not environmentalists, who have misunderstood the real [value of nature], and the only way to get [through] to economists is by speaking their own language" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 91). Furthermore, it has been argued that the failure to value natural capital is a market failure that has enabled corporations to abuse nature. "Providing these 'unpriced' resources with quantitative parameters that would enable their incorporation into market mechanisms [and] such mechanisms could then appropriately 'regulate' the consumption of those resources" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 225).

Another issue with the valuation of nature is the fact that water in one part of the world is not as valuable as water in another part of the world for a plethora of reasons. This is a massive challenge faced by accountants. What if a gallon of water here is not as easily accessible as a gallon of water there, or what if it has been polluted by *this* or serves as a habitat for *that?* There are implications for the valuation of things thought to have inherent value unrelated to human use, but the implications of not valuing nature are worse. *Natural Capitalism* argues that "while there may be no "right" way to value a forest or a river, there is a wrong way, which is to give it no value at all" (Hawken, 2017).

B. Rights for Nature

Christopher Stone published *Should Trees Have Standing?: Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects* in 1972. Forty-eight years ago he argued that GDP was an unsatisfactory and unacceptable way to define our values and proposed affording nature legal rights comparable to those afforded to corporations. He acknowledged that granting nature legal rights would "reduce our standard of living as measured in terms of our present values," but also made the true point that "the crises of the earth … demand that we change our ways radically" (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 258). This literature was drafted forty-eight years ago. We have the ability to enact change, we have had these ideas circulating for quite some time. It is time to take nature into account.

Corporations were granted each of its rights as a result of the human need or want for something. David Boyd, author of *The Rights of Nature* said that as humans who make laws, "we have the capacity to recognize the rights of whomever and whatever we want. It's just a matter of determining what's important to us" (Morgensen, 2019). People cared about certain issues so much that corporations were granted certain rights. These all back the corporation's ability and prerogative to maximize shareholder wealth. Now as the corporate paradigm shifts to encompass a greater concern for the corporation's environmental impact, shouldn't we implement rights for nature?

The thing about granting rights for nature is that it is more than just a change in values. It is a governmental issue. Demands are made of the government to address the environmental crisis and the impact of big business on it. Part of this problem is that what the government proposes has to be approved and accepted. Do we put a price on carbon emissions? Do we sell or trade carbon allowances? Do we grant nature legal rights? These among other attempts have to be agreed upon by those who will be required to implement them. Without a corporate paradigm shift these ideas will not be successful.

Conclusion

Through the study of accounting and communication, it can be seen how important vocabulary is in the corporate world. From the elusiveness of sustainability to the phrasing of issues in ways that expose their significance. Understanding the history of the corporate paradigm and how to influence the change of a paradigm is important for the future. Since corporations are the most powerful man-made force on Earth, operate to serve the public, yet do so much damage to the planet, it is imperative that change occurs. We should leverage our position as consumers of corporation’s goods and services to enact change for the better. These proposed solutions are steps in the right direction but we need to do more than toss the ideas around. If they were to be implemented, however shoddy they are now, we know they will be altered again and again to fit the needs and wants of the people. History has shown that accountants will find solutions to our problems. As our values evolve for the better of the world, these solutions will become more effective, but we need to start somewhere. Humans are the most powerful force on the planet and for human life to continue, it needs an unending supply of resources - nature. This is the importance of sustainability.

Gleeson-White assured us that we have all we need to enact change for the better. Research has found a correlation between the disclosure of environmental performance in annual reports and the public's concern for environmental issues (Brown, N., & Deegan, C., 1998). The increasing popularity and usage of sustainability and integrated reporting indicates the growing acknowledgment that corporations should be held accountable for their impact on the planet. (Serafeim, 2013, p. 11). Furthermore, there is little evidence indicating that a focus on sustainability can deter corporate profitability (Serafeim, 2013, p. 11). Rather, it can actually help corporate profitability as corporations focus more on sustainability and the issues their consumers care about.

Economist, Mervyn King, believed that “the future of the planet is in the hands of accountants” because “corporations are the most powerful entities on earth… and who does the business person turn to first for advice? his or her accountant” …“and if the accountant’s mindset has been changed… then he or she will advise that business person to consider not just profit, but also the impacts of how the company makes its money and its products on society and the environment” (Gleeson-White, 2015, p. 172). This “mindset” King refers to is the new corporate paradigm believed necessary for corporations to become champions of people, society, and the environment. It is evident that consumers are more and more concerned with the state of the planet, but if we are to really combat the environmental crisis and save the planet, more must be done in terms of holding the most powerful, and detrimental force on Earth accountable. This is not impossible and it is happening. I am eager to see how things develop.

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