

Normalising New Behaviour:

**Networks and the uptake of environmental practices
amongst small businesses in Australia**

Kristine Peters

Diploma of Teaching, Masters of Business Administration

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of the Environment

Faculty of Science and Engineering

Flinders University

November 2011

Table of Contents

Thesis Abstract

Declaration

Acknowledgements

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the Thesis.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The research.....	6
The thesis.....	8
Environmental practices and small business.....	9
Social capital.....	12
Learning and sharing knowledge.....	16
Significance of the research.....	21
CHAPTER 2: Social Capital Literature Review	27
Introduction.....	27
Social capital in context.....	29
Networks.....	36
Voluntary groups.....	39
Group development and organisational forms.....	41
Norms and values.....	43

Proximity and groups	46
Knowledge as a glue to hold groups together	48
Innovation	50
Behaviour setting and influence.....	52
Environmental change	59
Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 3: Knowledge Literature Review	65
Introduction.....	65
Epistemology: the knowledge of knowledge.....	66
Individual and social learning.....	73
Tacit and codified knowledge.....	76
Learning to learn	80
The ontology of knowledge	83
Economic influence on social behaviour	88
Conclusion	91
CHAPTER 4: Methodology.....	93
Introduction.....	93
Rationale for the critical realist paradigm.....	94
The research design.....	97
Qualitative methods	98
Interview methods.....	100
Rigour	105
Scope and limitations	108
The research process	109
Participant selection.....	110
Research ethics.....	114

The survey instruments	117
Data management.....	120
Assumptions.....	121
Analysis.....	124
Conclusion	126
CHAPTER 5: Social Capital Findings and Discussion.....	129
Introduction.....	129
Context.....	130
Social capital at Hackham and Lonsdale	132
Membership	134
Associations and connectivity.....	137
Learning through social capital connections.....	143
Tacit learning and social capital	146
Influence and behaviour change	156
Conclusion	168
CHAPTER 6: Knowledge Findings and Discussion.....	171
Introduction.....	171
Valuing learning.....	172
Tacit learning	177
Dissonance and friction.....	186
Knowledge and environmental behaviour	190
Information and behaviour.....	201
Innovation and environmental management	205
Conclusion	209
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion	211
Introduction.....	211

Methodology.....	212
The research questions.....	214
The importance of learning as a behaviour change tool.....	215
Socialisation and enculturation to reinforce norms of behaviour.....	222
Seeding and embedding challenging topics.....	225
Theoretical contribution.....	227
Practical contribution.....	233
Concluding thoughts.....	235
Appendix: Interview schedules.....	237
Bibliography.....	249

Thesis Abstract

Climate change has created an imperative to modify human behaviour from its historical use of the earth as a resource and sink to new practices that are environmentally sustainable. Governments have attempted to influence voluntary behaviour change through social marketing, but their success with the small business sector, which makes a sizable contribution to the pollution load, has been largely unsuccessful. Small business owners are isolated, time poor, and focused inwardly on their businesses, making the process of large-scale contact and engagement extremely challenging.

The primary objective of this thesis is to identify a strategy for engagement of communities in the adoption of reluctant behaviours. The secondary objectives were to determine the role of social capital in creating norms of new behaviour, and to establish the process by which learning can underpin the transition from 'just knowing' to active participation in new practices.

Referencing the social capital, learning and environmental behaviour change literature, research was undertaken with three groups of small business owners to provide a comparison of the effects of social capital on learning. The results of this research demonstrate that creating sustainable change in reluctant behaviours can be achieved through an overt focus on learning and group norms.

The findings of the research have relevance to behaviour and attitudinal change beyond the environmental sustainability field.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Peters', written over a horizontal line.

Kristine Peters

PhD Candidate

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors, Andrew Beer and Alaric Maude, my thanks for their deft guidance.

To the businesses and coordinators who participated in the interviews, my appreciation for their time and thoughtfulness.

To my family, for their support and encouragement.

To my friends and colleagues, for asking the right questions at the right time.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Kollmuss & Agyeman, pro-environmental behaviour.....	61
Figure 2: Factors associated with membership	135
Figure 3: Use of connections to gain knowledge	138
Figure 4: Use of network to discuss business challenges.....	141
Figure 5: Value of learning from specific business types	150
Figure 6: Comparison value of learning from business types	151
Figure 7: Influence on environmental practices in respondent businesses	162
Figure 8: Value of learning types	182
Figure 9: Learning new concepts	183
Figure 10: Compliance with environmental standards.....	193

List of Tables

Table 1: Businesses interviewed	112
Table 2: Industry sectors represented	112
Table 3: Number of employees by sector.....	132
Table 4: Reasons for joining local business association	133
Table 5: Usefulness of learning from specific businesses by business size	148
Table 6: Value placed by the association on the environment	158
Table 7: Greatest influence on environmental practice.....	165
Table 8: Members' perception of value of learning	174
Table 9: Members' categorisation of knowledge sharing sessions	178
Table 10: Comments regarding trust and friction in learning	187
Table 11: Comments regarding triggers of learning	189
Table 12: Importance of good business environmental practices	194
Table 13: Environmental management as cost or benefit	197
Table 14: Usefulness for environmental knowledge	202
Table 15: Nature of innovation identified in comments.....	206
Table 16: Influences on innovation	207
Table 17: Innovation and environmental practice	208